

Good Day to all! Thank you volunteers, sponsors, attendees, and participants for helping make last weekend's Hibiscus Festival a success. Looking forward to next year!

This column is in memory of Randy Spence, de facto "mayor" of El Jobean. Did you know Charlotte County's Myakka River community, El Jobean, was originally known as Southland? In the late 1880's, New York City residents Daniel and Jane MacPherson bought land on the river's east bank from a group of British investors. They then hired Albert Gilchrist, a Punta Gorda surveyor and real estate speculator, to lay out the town of Southland. Gilchrist also agreed to market the town's lots for a 25% commission. However, with no railroad or road access, the town languished.

The MacPhersons died within just a few years of Southland's creation and the property was left to their housekeeper, Susie Howard. Having little interest in the land, she failed to pay the 1906 property taxes amounting to \$7.64. A Tampa investor purchased the delinquent tax certificate and then sold the land to the Charlotte Harbor and Northern Railroad (C H & N) even though he did not hold title. The C H & N was laying track to Boca Grande's deep-water port to transport phosphate from mining operations in the Peace River valley. Once news of the railroad's coming reached her, Mrs. Howard paid the delinquent taxes, reclaimed her property and promptly sold it for \$500 to a Maryland investor. The railroad retained its right of way.

After owning the Southland property for several years, Harry Roe was approached by investors interested in establishing a turpentine operation due to the large stand of pine trees. He subsequently sold his interest for \$4,000 in December 1920. Just a few days later, the land sold again for \$7,000 and turpentine production began. It sold one more time before Florida's 1920's land boom hit full stride.

Joel Bean was a successful Massachusetts land developer when he and a group of investors set their sights on sunny Florida. They formed the Boston-Florida Realty Trust, which purchased Southland's remaining unsold property in December 1923 for just over \$62,000. A city of six hexagonal communities interconnected by wide boulevards was envisioned. Initially it was to be named South Boston. However, Bean, obviously a pretty good salesman, persuaded his partners to rename the future city using an exotic sounding anagram of his name, El Jobe-an. The city's plat was filed in July 1924. The hyphen, not a mistake, was eventually dropped.

With the land boom in full swing, northern customers could not wait to buy lots sight unseen. Bean himself built a cottage on the river and moved to town, and the railroad changed its station name from Southland to El Jobe-an. The future was bright and it was not long before the Trust was able to pay off its mortgage.

Soon, a combination store and post office was built and a small hotel expanded. Both buildings are on the National Historic Register and the post office building at 4370 Garden Road is still in use. To promote his dream, Bean invited movie crews to town with accompanying animals to film Tarzan serials in the area. It really looked like El Jobe-an would "take off" when a new bridge was completed across the river in 1928.

Unfortunately though, the Florida real estate bubble burst soon thereafter and the trust went under. However, Joel Bean stayed on, a disheartened man. His health deteriorating, Bean remained in his cottage on the Myakka shore and died in November 1942. Penniless, community residents took up a collection to pay for his monument and interment at Indian Springs Cemetery.

You can view photographs of Joel Bean by visiting Charlotte County Libraries and History “on-line”. Click on “Physical Items”, then “Archive Search” and enter the subject of your search on the “Search” line. You can also view Joel Bean related photographs at the Punta Gorda History Center’s website. Select “Online Collection”, then “Keyword Search” and enter the subject of your search.

Check out History Services’ yearlong project, “Telling Your Stories: History in the Parks”. It began in January 2021 with placement of the first interpretive sign “Charlotte Harbor Spa” at South County Regional Park. The last was dedicated December 15, 2021 at Centennial Park featuring Florida postcards. All dedicated signs can be viewed at online library resources. Select “Programs and Services”, then “History Services” and “Virtual Programs”. Visit the same site and select “History Exhibits” to find out what history related programs and videos are available.

“Did You Know” appears, typically, every other Wednesday, courtesy of this newspaper and the Charlotte County Historical Society. The Society’s mission is to advocate and support local history through education, initiatives, and projects in Charlotte County. We are also always looking for volunteers and interested individuals to serve as board members. If you believe our area’s history is as important as we do, please visit Charlotte County Historical Center Society on-line, or call (941) 769-1270 for more information.

May 10 column