

Citrus Park

Lake Armistead

Gant Lake

Lake Grace

Hixon Lake

Lake Maurine

Rocky Creek

4 pgs

The following is an excerpt from:

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY HISTORIC RESOURCES SURVEY REPORT

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Bureau of Historic Preservation**

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Prepared by:

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* These excerpts have been taken from the Historic Resources Survey Report with permission given by the Hillsborough County Historic Resources Review Board on December 15, 2003. The intention is to help provide targeted historical information on the water bodies in Hillsborough County.

Citrus Park

Citrus Park is located in the northwest corner of Hillsborough County, six miles south of the Pasco County line. Citrus farmers and/or cattle raisers have lived in the Citrus Park area from the mid-19th century, including such family names as Gant, Lynn, McCarty, Mobley, Moody, and Spivey. William L. Mobley, along with his family and slaves, moved from North Carolina to the Florida Gulf Coast in 1860. Fearing the possible escape of his slaves, Mobley resettled in the Citrus Park area shortly thereafter. Pioneer families like Mobley were sparsely settled in northeast Hillsborough County throughout the 1880s.ⁱ

Things changed, however, when W.P. Lutz, a railroad engineer and an Odessa sawmill owner, engineered the Tampa Gulf Coast Railway (a.k.a., the Peavine) which connected Odessa to the Tampa Northern Railroad in 1909. Sawmills began laying narrow-gauge tracks throughout the region in 1910 to have access to virgin timber lands. By 1915, the Tampa Gulf Coast Railway scheduled three daily round trips between Tarpon Junction, located at present day Wilsky Boulevard and Linebaugh Avenue, and Tarpon Springs. Residents continued to hear train whistles until the 1960s when tracks and routes were abandoned. Coupled with the railroads, in 1924 the county paved 15 miles of John T. Gunn Highway from Waters Avenue north to the county line. Yet, for years most of the rural roads were little more than tire tracks in sand.ⁱⁱ

Partly because of the train, enough families lived in the area to establish Gant School on July 14, 1893. N.M. Moody served as supervisor. The following year F.H. Lynn became supervisor. Key Stone Park School was another early school in existence by 1883. While located in another community, Key Stone Park School may have drawn upon children in the Citrus Park area before the creation of Gant School. Citrus Park received another school in 1911 at 7700 South Gunn Highway, located west of the present day Ehrlich Road/Gunn Highway interchange. A few years later, Key Stone Park School was closed and many of the students were transferred to Citrus Park School. The school became a focal point for the community, where local residents joined the PTA, held dinners and bake sales, and learned how to can vegetables.ⁱⁱⁱ

Sawmills and turpentine stills dominated northwest Hillsborough County and southwest Pasco County at the turn of the century. Gulf Pine Lumber Company bought 50,000 acres in 1907 only to sell it two years later to Dowling Lumber Company. Dowling and the Lyon Lumber Company erected sawmills, both in Pasco County near Odessa, employing several hundred men to cut trees and operate the mills. To ensure access to trees, the mills constructed narrow-gauge rail lines throughout the region. Not only supplying jobs to recent immigrants and pioneer families, the sawmills also provided lumber for the new homes, schools, and business being erected. The lumber industry prospered until the 1920s by which time they had over-exploited the area's forest resources. In 1925, both mills burned to the ground, foreshadowing the bust of the Florida land boom and the Great Depression.^{iv}

Trains, sawmills, and turpentine opened up the Citrus Park region for investment.

However, not until the birth of the 20th century did businesses move into the territory. C.E. Thomas, D.P. Robertson, and F. Ben Davis -- all Chicago, Illinois, residents -- incorporated the North Tampa Land Company on September 9, 1911, with its main office in Tampa. The company platted Citrus Park on September 30, 1913, with the Tampa & Gulf Coast Railroad running through the heart of the plat. The area surrounding the new plat consisted of lakes, railroad tracks, a lone store that doubled as a rail stop, turpentine stills, and lumber yards. Charles H. Brown, a T&GC Railroad official, George Broadhurst, and E.T. Young, filed for incorporation of the Citrus Park Mercantile Company on July 12, 1916. Two years later residents could buy supplies at the Citrus Park Mercantile Company's general store and purchase their groceries at M. Bruton's store. By 1925 Citrus Park had at least one telephone and several businesses. E.B. Gould, E.A. Mack, E.J. Spivey, and Citrus Park Mercantile Company each operated general stores. James I. Mobley served as the community's notary, and E.J. Spivey, the postmaster, also sold real estate and operated as a live stock breeder.^v

Citrus Park's 617 residents in 1930 consisted of 363 males and 254 females. The majority of Citrus Park's 488 Whites were U.S. born, with only 49 foreign born. Compared to other rural sections of the county, Citrus Park had a large African American population, consisting of 129 individuals. This may in part be explained by the fact that nearly 75% of the timber industry's workers were Black. Additionally, William Mobley donated a sizeable amount of property just north of Citrus Park to his emancipated slaves shortly after the Civil War. With the death of the timber industry and the onslaught of the Great Depression, northwest Hillsborough County's population dwindled as people looked elsewhere for greener pastures. Many of the businesses patronized by Citrus Park's population fell upon hard times during the 1930s and closed their doors forever. Citrus Park weathered the economic drought and began to prosper in the 1950s with the addition of churches, businesses, boy and girl scout troops, and little league teams. Since World War II, the area has increasingly become a bedroom community to Tampa. Today's Citrus Park is undergoing an intense transformation as suburbanites from Tampa move farther north in Hillsborough County, building gated communities and shopping centers, expanding roads, and constructing schools, yet the area is still rural in many sections.^{vi}

i. Henry J. Binder, ed., *History of Keystone, Odessa, and Citrus Park* (USA, Keystone, Odessa, and Citrus Park Historical Society, 1979), 5,23-25; Florida Land & Improvement Company, *Map of Hillsborough County, Florida, 1882* (USF Special Collections).

ii. Binder, *History of Keystone, Odessa, and Citrus Park*, 20; Robinson, *History of Hillsborough County, Florida*, 123.

iii. Binder, *History of Keystone, Odessa, and Citrus Park*, 26-30; *When History was in the Making*, 5,21.

iv. Binder, *History of Keystone, Odessa, and Citrus Park*, 14-16.

v. Articles of Incorporation, Book 6, pages 551-558, 592, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Hillsborough County; Articles of Incorporation, Book 10, pages 121-124, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Hillsborough County; Binder, *History of Keystone, Odessa, and Citrus Park*, 9,23-25; *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1918*, 108; *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1925*, 140; Plat Book 1,

page 13-1, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Hillsborough County.

vi. Binder, *History of Keystone, Odessa, and Citrus Park*, 9, 23-25, 31-62; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Population Bulletin, Second Series, Florida Composition and Characteristics of the Population*, 51.