

Lithia

Alafia River Little Fish Hawk Creek

5 pgs

The following is an excerpt from:
**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY
HISTORIC RESOURCES SURVEY REPORT**

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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.

Lithia (Freeman and Pelot)

When James and Roxanna Alderman forded the Alafia River in 1847, they became Lithia's first White settlers. A North Carolina native, James Alderman migrated from Georgia and filed for a homestead of 80 acres in Township 30 South, Range 21 East, Section 13. Other homesteaders followed in Aldermans' footsteps, including Grant Whitney, Andrew Lastinger, and William Jameson. Around 1865, Mr. Alderman's fourteen-year-old son, David, passed away. As was common in this era, Mr. Alderman buried David on a section of his property. Mrs. Alderman passed away on March 6, 1868, because of heart disease, and Mr. Alderman buried next to her son. This property eventually became known as Pelot Cemetery.ⁱ

Sometime between 1860s and 1880, residents named the area Pelot after Rev. John Pelot, a Methodist circuit-riding preacher. In 1880, a group of worshipers erected a small log structure several miles away from Alderman's cemetery. Known as Pelot Chapel, this is where Rev. Pelot preached the word of God to his congregation. Some years later, the log structure was converted into a private residence. Consequently, the congregation built a Methodist church next to the cemetery where a Baptist church and a school were also located. Supposedly, the one-room school existed as early as 1870 where a Professor Simmons taught area children. This was the setting when Frank Bryant moved to Pelot in 1880. A few years later Mr. Bryant would become a county commissioner. With the influx of new settlers, Cornelius V. Simmons started a post office in Pelot on January 15, 1887. Three years later Pelot's 180 residence were able to utilize a bridge built by Mr. Bryant across the Alafia River in the vicinity of Marvinia, two miles north of Pelot. For rail transportation, Pelot's residences had to travel to Marvinia to catch the Florida Central and Peninsula Railway.ⁱⁱ

Two important events occurred in Pelot during the 1890s. The first was the creation of a school. Located at Pelot cemetery, the Pelot School was first mentioned in county school records on July 3, 1894. It is unknown if this is the same school taught by Professor Simmons. The school had no running water, and children had to bring their own cups to get water out of the school's well. The teacher and students cleaned the school and made their own sports equipment out of string. Some children walked to school from as faraway as four miles. School lasted from July to December when the children were let out to pick strawberries, sweet potatoes, squash, peas, beans, and other crops. The second important event was when the community reacquired its post office. On October 16, 1893, Pelot's first post office closed with mail delivered from Marvinia. Pelot received its post office back when the Freeman post office changed its name to Pelot on July 25, 1896.ⁱⁱⁱ

Pelot experienced several important changes during the first decade of the 20th century. One-hundred-thirty-three people called Pelot home in 1900, and three years later the Seaboard Air Line Railroad laid tracks near Pelot on its way to Oneco in Manatee County. During this time, a Rev. Charles Kingsley moved from Bloomingdale to Pelot, buying property with a spring on it. Deciding that the water tasted funny, Kingsley sent the water off to be tested. The results came back, showing a high concentration of the

mineral lithium, an alkaline white powder used in ceramics and glass. Shortly after the discovery, the Pelot post office changed its name to Lithia on June 18, 1904. The post office was relocated to the west side of the intersection of the newly constructed railroad and a dirt road that ran to the Marvinia bridge and to Brandon (present day Lithia-Pinecrest Road). Not only being responsible for the naming of Lithia, Rev. Kingsley also operated a sawmill and grist mill, both run by steam.^{iv}

Lithia was farm country, as is evident by the community's strawberry school. Area farmers grew citrus, sugar cane, corn, cassava, potatoes, beans, strawberries, and peas. Prior to the railroad, farmers had to transport their produce to Tampa, a two-day wagon trip, or to Plant City to sell. The railroad greatly increased the marketability of farmers' goods. Additionally, farmers raised cattle and hogs. When the cows were ready for market, 100 head would be gathered from Lithia's open ranges. It took six men two days to drive the cattle to the Lykes Brothers' packing plant on Six Mile Creek near Orient Park. The general conception of a farmer is that of a male. In Lithia, as in most other farm families, women did much of the farm work alongside their male family members, including the milking of cows and the feeding of chickens and hogs. Women also did much of the sewing and embroidering. The average day for a rural woman started at 4 a.m. and continued past sunset.^v

Sawmills and turpentine were big business for several of Lithia's 301 residence in 1910. Mr. R.G. Wood owned and operated the Lithia Lumber Company. A large two-story building housed the sawmill's steam engines and 80-horsepower steam boiler. Mr. David H. Bryant oversaw the construction of the sawmill and was a sawyer at the mill for several years. After the mill was built, Mr. Wood erected another building that served as a grocery store, feed store, and post office. Additionally, he built nice houses for his mill workers that contrasted sharply with those built by Norman Smith, a naval stores operator in Lithia. According to Elam Bryant, David Bryant's son and lifelong resident of Lithia, "Norman Smith put up shacks for the negroes to live in and worked them awfully hard at his turpentine company." Many of the area's buildings, including homes and churches, were constructed of lumber produced at local mills. Mr. Bryant built his two-story home from his mill in 1895. In the 1920s, Mr. O.L. Briant, a sawmill owner, donated all the lumber so that the Church of God could be built by parishioners.^{vi}

Envisioning a profitable return on real estate, the North Tampa Land Company began selling 10-acre tracts of land in Lithia, following the same pattern they had established in Lutz, causing a population boom in 1914. Despite the farms and sawmills, the newcomers could not make a living off the land, so most quickly left. Two years later, the North Tampa Land Company had mostly pulled out of the area. The largest land owners in Lithia at that time included the American Phosphate Mining Company, Lithia Lumber Company, Norman Smith, and Davis & Thorpe. By 1918, Lithia's population dwindled to 25. Orange growing and stock raising were primary pursuits of area farmers. Mr. O.L. Briant operated a saw mill and general store while his wife served as Lithia's postmaster. Frank Carter and Company owned a naval stores operation, and Norman Smith continued running his naval stores company. These two companies competed against one another until the mid-1920s when Mr. Carter bought out Mr. Smith, operating

the business for another five years or so.^{vii}

Lithia experienced other changes during the 1920s. Present-day Lithia-Pinecrest Road was finally paved in 1923, making the trip to Brandon much easier. That same year, a cold snap wiped out much of the area's orange trees. By 1925 Lithia's population rose to 250. The town had three churches, a Baptist, a Methodist, and a Holiness church. Mr. Briant still operated the general store and a sawmill while Mrs. Briant remained as postmaster.^{viii}

When the stock market crashed in 1929, profiteers bought up much of Lithia's property for the prices of taxes owed. Lithia witnessed another minor population boom, but it was short lived for the population dipped in 1935 to 150 people. The Jackson Lumber Company, owned by J.H. Jackson, was Lithia's largest business, manufacturing approximately 10,000 board-feet of dressed pine lumber a year. Mr. Jackson received some competition in 1936 when Mr. and Mrs. John Longdon moved from Michigan to Lithia. They opened up a barbecue lunch room where people could purchase snacks and cold drinks. Additionally they also operated a sawmill. During this era, the Federal Writers' Project stated that Lithia was located around the intersection of Lithia and Boyette roads, consisting of a store and filling station. Lithia continued to be a flag stop on the Seaboard Air Line Railway.^{ix}

From the 1930s through the 1980s, Lithia remained an agrarian community, consisting of large farms where oranges were grown and cattle and milk cows were raised. As Brandon and then Bloomingdale began to grow in the 1960s, Lithia residents knew that their agricultural days were limited. Presently, the community still retains its rural character, but Lithia-Pinecrest Road acts as a lure, drawing developers farther and farther south, building neighborhoods and gated communities for Tampa commuters.^x

i. Elam J. Bryant, *Early History of Lithia, Hillsborough County* (self published, Hillsborough County # 6 file, Hampton Dunn Collection, USF Special Collections, 1981), 1; Carol Neef, "Roster of County Pioneers Carved on Pelot Headstones," *Tampa Tribune* August 8, 1970; "Old Pelot Cemetery Tells History of South Hillsborough," *Plant City Courier*, 75th Anniversary Edition, February 27, 1959, 6C; Kathie Pratt, "That Funny-tasting Water put Lithia on the Map," *Tampa Times* September 21, 1973, 1B; U.S. Department of the Interior, "General Land Office, Automated Records Project, Pre-1908 Homestead and Cash Entry Patents."

ii. Bailey, "A Study of Hillsborough County's History, Legend, and Folk Lore, with Implications for the Curriculum," 264; Bradbury and Hallock, *A Chronology of Florida Post Offices*, 65; Dinnis, *Flickering Flames Along the Alafia, circa 1850-1900*, 16; Leland Hawes, "Lithia Struggles to Retain Past," *Tampa Tribune* August 14, 1994, 4-Baylife; Neef, "Roster of County Pioneers Carved on Pelot Headstones;" Pratt, "That Funny-tasting Water put Lithia on the Map," 1-B; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Compendium of the Eleventh Census, 1890, Part I-Population*, 88.

iii. Bradbury and Hallock, *A Chronology of Florida Post Offices*, 48,65; Bryant, *Early History of Lithia, Hillsborough County*, 8; Clarke, *The Gate-to-the-Gulf (Tampa) City Directory, and Hillsboro County Guide, 1893*, 208; Donna Crothers, "Few Know Where it is; All Know Where it's Going," *Tampa Tribune* August 20, 1986, 3EH; Kathie Pratt, "That Funny-tasting Water put Lithia on the Map," *Tampa Times* September 21, 1973, 2-B; *When History was in the Making*, 7.

iv. Bradbury and Hallock, *A Chronology of Florida Post Offices*, 48; Bryant, *Early History of Lithia, Hillsborough County*, 2; Morris, *Florida Place Names*, 149; Pratt, "That Funny-tasting Water put Lithia on the Map," 2-B.

v. Bryant, *Early History of Lithia, Hillsborough County*, 3-5; Crothers, "Few Know Where it is," 3EH; Hawes, "Lithia Struggles to Retain Past," 4-Baylife; HTHCPB, *The Cultural Resources of the Unincorporated Portions of Hillsborough County*, 37; *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1918*, 347; Pratt, "That Funny-tasting Water put Lithia on the Map," 2-B.

vi. Bryant, *Early History of Lithia, Hillsborough County*, 2-3,9; *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1911-1912*, 274; Hawes, "Lithia Struggles to Retain Past," 4-Baylife.

vii. Atlas of Hillsborough County, 58; Bryant, *Early History of Lithia, Hillsborough County*, 2; *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1918*, 347; Pratt, "That Funny-tasting Water put Lithia on the Map," 2-B).

viii. Richard Dodge, "Lithia Woodsman Loves Trees," *Tampa Times* March 21, 1975, 1D; *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1925*, 510; Pratt, "That Funny-tasting Water put Lithia on the Map," 2-B.

ix. Bryant, *Early History of Lithia, Hillsborough County*, 6; Federal Writers' Project, *Seeing Tampa*, 127; Florida State Chamber of Commerce and Florida Emergency Relief Administration, comp., *Industrial Directory of Florida, 1935-36*, 150; Pratt, "That Funny-tasting Water put Lithia on the Map," 2-B.

x. Crothers, "Few Know Where it is," 3EH; HTHCPB, *The Cultural Resources of the Unincorporated Portions of Hillsborough County*, 37.