

# **Magdalene**

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**Lake Magdalene**

**Lake Albright**

**Lake Carroll**

**Platt Lake**

**West Lake**

**Lake Wilford**

4 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.

### *Magdalene (Lake Magdalene)*

The area is possibly named for Magdalena, a Native American woman who interpreted for an 1549 Spanish expedition into Florida. Magdalene is located on the border of north Tampa and unincorporated Hillsborough County. During the 1880s, Caroline Bond, John Lennert and Enoch Metcalf all settled in Township 28 South, Range 18 East, Section 2, on the eastern shore of Lake Magdalene. Enough people resided in the area for a post office to be created on July 17, 1888. Because of its rural setting, several schools were sprinkled across the greater Lake Magdalene landscape during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including Oak Grove School and Pepper Pot school. The community petitioned to create another school, and on August 4, 1888, the county established Hazen school at the south end of Lake Magdalene. Five years later, Magdalene's population totaled 70 with George A. Morris serving as postmaster.<sup>i</sup>

This was the setting when Rev. Isaac W. Bearss, from Trenton, Missouri, visited Magdalene in 1894, looking for a new home. Searching for a more hospitable climate for health reasons, Rev. Bearss found 600 acres of suitable property on the northwest shore of Lake Magdalene. Back in Missouri to move his family to their new home, Rev. Bearss convinced eleven church members to make the 11-week covered wagon trip to Florida. Consisting of 20 horses, 20 mules, and six wagons, it took only eight weeks to reach the Florida border, but an additional three weeks to reach Lake Magdalene. Surviving the perilous journey, they arrived on December 20, 1894. Hoping to establish a United Brethren Church in the community, the newly arrived immigrants planned to survive economically off the area's orange laden trees. However, the group arrived on the eve of two freezes that would wipe out most of the state's orange production.<sup>ii</sup> Amanda Jeffries Bearss, Rev. Bearss' wife, described the area shortly after the freezes:

I shall never forget my first impression of this country, with not a green leaf on the orange trees and everything brown and bare, everybody blue, no farms opened up as people did not farm....It surely looked bad to me, and I dared not say much...It took me a long time to be reconciled to Florida. It did look as if it would never be better, but in a few years things came out, orange trees put on new life, and we began to learn the ways of the south and we were getting away from our first impressions, all of which helped.<sup>iii</sup>

Not deterred, Rev. Bearss and eight followers founded a church in May 1895. The church held services in a building then known as the Lake Carroll school house. A year later, the church relocated to Gant School, near present day Citrus Park. By 1897, the congregation grew to 21, and in response, nine members began to build a church with Rev. Bearss serving as foreman. Completed in February 1898, the new 36-by-24 foot building could hold 200 people. Eight years after its dedication, the 42 member congregation voted to move the church back to the Magdalene community. Taking several weeks to move by rolling the entire structure on wood logs, the church was relocated to the intersection of present day Lake Magdalene Boulevard and Paddock Street, on land donated by B.E. Stall, Rev. Bearss' son-in-law.<sup>iv</sup>

By 1900, Magdalene's population reached 459. Six years later the county created a school in Lake Magdalene which absorbed Hazen's School and Pepper Pot School, naming the educational institution Horse-Pond School after Horseshoe Pond (today's Lake Carroll). The school board placed the school in a 14-by-18 foot building formerly utilized as a church and community meeting hall. In 1907 the school was moved to the corner of Lake Magdalene Boulevard and Ehrlich Road and renamed Lake Magdalene School. Despite such a large population, the post office was closed on July 31, 1908, with mail being delivered from Tampa. In 1910 the community totaled 343 residents. Other changes occurred in Lake Magdalene, including the erection of a two-story frame school building in 1912. In response to the area's growth, the United Brethren Church replaced its wood building with a \$20,000 two-story, brick building in 1924. Following in the footsteps of the church, the school board replaced the frame building with a three room, stuccoed, gabled roof school on Pine Lake Drive near Lake Carroll in 1926. This school was a blessing for in 1930 Lake Magdalene's population climbed to 1269, consisting of 662 males and 607 females, 1258 Whites and 11 African Americans. On March 27, 1930, the community's school burned to the ground. The present school was finished in September of the same year.<sup>v</sup>

Despite such a "large" population, the area remained quite rural up through the early 1960s. During the 1930s, Magdalene was described as "a small farm community nestled on the shores of a large lake of the same name. This locality has long been popular with fishermen and bathers." As a matter of fact, anyone within a two-mile radius would be considered a neighbor because homes were so few and far between. Women and children only went to Tampa on rare occasions to buy shoes or clothes or to go to the doctor. Many of the men went twice a week to sell their farm produce such as eggs, butter, or charcoal made from the large stands of pine trees surrounding their properties. Cattle, razorback hogs, deer, turkeys, and alligators roamed the area forests and lakes, providing sources of food. Families could fish in the area lakes, pick guavas which grew everywhere, or tap pine trees for turpentine, then cut the trees down for either lumber or charcoal. For a small vacation lasting several days many families would load up their wagon and travel to Rocky Point, where present-day Tampa International Airport is located. The families would swim, fish, and catch hard-shell crabs.<sup>vi</sup>

Magdalene's rural character would not remain forever. Like its Citrus Park neighbor, Magdalene has undergone rapid growth since the early 1960s. As Tampa expanded northward very few orange groves remained in the area, being replaced by homes and apartment complexes. By 1990, 15,973 people lived in the Lake Magdalene region.<sup>vii</sup>

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i. "A Century of Excellence in Education': Lake Magdalene Elementary" (Hillsborough County #9 file, Hampton Dunn Collection, USF Special Collections, 1992); Bradbury and Hallock, *A Chronology of Florida Post Offices*, 50; Clarke, *The Gate-to-the-Gulf (Tampa) City Directory, and Hillsboro County Guide, 1893*, 208; Morris, *Florida Place Names*, 142; U.S. Department of the Interior, "General Land Office, Automated Records Project, Pre-1908 Homestead and Cash Entry Patents;" *When History was in the Making*, 4,5,22,23.

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ii. Leland Hawes, "Church Hits Century Mark," *Tampa Tribune* May 21, 1995, 10-Baylife; Leland Hawes, "Diarist Left Account of Covered-Wagon Trip," *Tampa Tribune* May 21, 1995, 10-Baylife; "Historic Methodist Site Chosen," *Tampa Tribune* April 15, 1979; Laura Whiteside, "86-Year Legacy," *Tampa Tribune* December 18, 1980, 1NW.

iii. Reprinted in Whiteside, "86-Year Legacy," 1NW.

iv. Hawes, "Church Hits Century Mark," 10-Baylife; "Historic Methodist Site Chosen," Whiteside, "86-Year Legacy," 1NW.

v. "A Century of Excellence in Education;" Bradbury and Hallock, *A Chronology of Florida Post Offices*, 50; "Historic Methodist Site Chosen," Whiteside, "86-Year Legacy," 1NW; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census Reports, Volume I, Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900, Population, Part I*, 93; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910, Abstract of the Census*, 575; 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.

vi. Federal Writers' Project, *Seeing Tampa*, 149-150; Hawes, "Church Hits Century Mark," 10-Baylife; Whiteside, "86-Year Legacy," 1NW.

vii. Hawes, "Church Hits Century Mark," 10-Baylife; Whiteside, "86-Year Legacy," 4NW; The Planning Commission, *1990 Census Population and Housing by Place*, 2.