

Delaney Creek



Aerial view (ca. 1976), SR 60 in the foreground, Hillsboro Memorial Gardens in center and Graves's Dairy and Carey's Cattle Operations are to the right. This is looking towards Delaney Creek, now the location of the Westfield Shopping Center. (Moseley Collection)



Looking east off Providence Road, about 3/10 of a mile south of the traffic light on Providence and Lumsden Roads. Picture taken in the 1940s. (Moseley Collection)



View from the southeast side of Providence Road in the 1940s. There is water covering the land and the fenceposts are "disappearing" in the foreground. (Moseley Collection)

The following narrative is based on an interview with Brandon resident Julia Moseley in her home on August 31, 2004. Julia shares with us her concerns for the area and the many changes she has seen to the environment surrounding Delaney Creek.

Personal History

Julia Moseley has been a member of the Brandon community most of her life, but her family has lived in the Limona area of Brandon since 1882. Julia currently lives in her historic family home, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The home sits near many of the area's water resources, including Delaney Creek.

Delaney Creek was not a well-known feature of the landscape until big time development began and it was recognized as part of the prime location for the proposed Brandon Town Center, now known as Westfield Shopping Center Brandon. Nearby other intensive land development, beginning in the 1980's and earlier, included US homes' Heather Lakes, Florida Corporate Center, and General Homes. It was at this time that Julia and many of her friends took an active interest in how the environment would be impacted by these proposed changes. As part of their activism, Julia and her friends did some reconnaissance work by taking photographs and slides of the environment to illustrate its natural tendencies. The impact on the natural flow of the watershed into Delaney Creek with possible impact to other watersheds of Buckhorn and Archie Creeks made the area of proposed development far from desirable in Julia's eyes.

History/Information

Delaney Creek is about ten miles in length, starting in the Brandon area northeast of Lumsden Road and Pauls Drive. It is made up of a number of discrete segments, its tributaries interconnected by channelized canals and underground tile that wind through Hillsborough County on its way out to the bay. It traverses an area which geologically is an old bay bottom risen up millennia ago when land mass movements formed the Florida peninsular, shaping this area like a saucer slightly tilted to the southwest. It is a flood prone area.

The most significant change to Delaney Creek in recent years has been the intense development of the surrounding area. In the last twenty years housing developments, interstates, highways, and a large mall have all been built on the land directly surrounding the creek. It was at the very beginning of this change in development that Julia and her friends became active in understanding how these changes would affect their community. Julia explains:

"[We were interested in what was being decided]..., particularly in the southern part of State Road 60, between



Farmland that existed before the Brandon Town Center was built. (Moseley Collection)



West side of Providence Road in 1983 with standing water. (Moseley Collection)



The shell road that became State Road 60 in the 1920s. (Moseley Collection)



Barn on the edge of the flat woods prior to World War I. (Moseley Collection)

State Road 60 and Bloomingdale, and going from Pauls Drive to [US Highway] 301, that was going to be an area of a great deal of development. That's where the Brandon Town center is, US Homes, General Homes, all that. We were watching this, and as a result we were taking these pictures because the land was not very well understood. It looks flat, and it looked as if it were ready for development, but it was an old bay bottom that came up during geologic times, therefore it had a clay layer; therefore it was not going to drain, and it was a low elevation that was shaped like a saucer and there was no way that you could really make this thing work. But that was not perceived at that particular time. These pictures were an attempt to show this. Now, what we are looking at here is an old bayhead, actually this is a cypress head. We're looking straight across and this is standing water; this is not going to be gone in 24 hours. This is going to stay here."

State Road 60 sits just to the north of Delaney Creek. For nearly a century, changes to this road have impacted the environment and water bodies nearby. Julia explains:

"This is back in the '20s. This is what we now call State Road 60, which was a shell road in those days and this is Sand Pond. It didn't go through this pond like it does now. It went around on the south side. The pond was, of course, bigger, and it was very deep, because it's a sink hole. Everybody who grew up here knew this. I grew up hearing there was no bottom to this pond. Well, one time I dove down there and, I can't say that I hit the middle of the bottom, but I hit some part of the bottom."

Development

The intensity of the development in this area of Brandon over the last twenty years has significantly changed the environment. Roads have been raised, areas have been built up, banks of Delaney have been flattened, and water drainage rerouted. Areas that would have typically been wet for part of the year are now dotted with housing developments. Julia explains:

"Now, this is what we call the flatwoods. If you were born in Florida you knew what the flatwoods meant and you didn't go down there to live! You left it alone, you ran your cattle down there and you made use of it, but you didn't go down there to live because it went under water. And sometimes it stayed under water for 8 to 10 months out of the year, and that's hard for people to realize."

The land that is now Brandon Town Center was once agricultural land and pastures for cattle grazing. Julia comments:



The bayheads and cattle farms in 1983 on the land that became Westfield Shopping Center. (Moseley Collection)

"This is 1982 or 1983, and there's this buzz about what's going to happen with the land. We're looking at what is now the Brandon Town Center. At one time Carey's Dairy was off to one side there, off to the west. Graves Dairy was the big thing that Brandon Town Center was going to acquire. And when you start losing your dairies is when you are really getting into urban development. On each side we have bay heads and you're looking down into the flatwoods. There was a mixture of agriculture, tomatoes, sod farming, not just cattle, that was being converted to urban."

The Brandon Town Center is not the only major change that came to the area. In the early 1980's Interstate 75 was cut through this area as well and the Crosstown Expressway Corridor was shaping up. Crews constructing the interstate ran into problems due to the lower environment surrounding Delaney Creek. Julia remembers:



One of the I-75 pilings when the interstate was being built. This piling was leaning. (Moseley Collection)

"This is I-75 going through at Palm River Road and State Road 60. They had a little trouble in there because it was lower. This was one piling [referring to picture]. We noted what was going on. This was a picture of it tipping. They would drive it down and it would lean over. It took at least a week, if not more, of continuous work to get this piling down, which is symptomatic of what they had to face down there."

Delaney Creek is at a lower elevation than the lake systems to its north. The natural water drainage in the area is from the northeast to the southwest, leading into Delaney Creek. The lakes and creeks to the north of Delaney form a chain that flows naturally southward into the creek and out to Hillsborough Bay. Julia explains the elevation changes:



Looking towards the east from Providence Road, Delaney Creek Area. (Moseley Collection)

"If you look at SWFWMD (Southwest Florida Water Management District) maps where we're sitting is at elevation 46. The road is little bit higher, that's State Road 60, but if you go down to Providence Road, about a quarter of a mile, you are going to drop down to 32. This shows you the elevation is really going down, and the elevation is going to stay down in this coastal plain."

The land surrounding Delaney Creek is wetter for more of the year due to the elevation drop near the creek and the fact that the whole area and the creek does not drain well. In order to better utilize the land for agricultural purposes, ditches were cut into the landscape. Julia explains a photograph of one of these ditches:



View of one of the canals into Delaney Creek. (Moseley Collection)

"This is a north-south ditch that is pulling water from land south of State Road 60 to a ditch east-west on the north side of Lumsden. That would have been created for agricultural purposes to drain the land so they could use it for pasture, vegetables, and of course, the sod farming. There were similar ditches on the south side of Lumsden."

Recent large scale development has taken a lesson from these earlier ditches and expanded them to include a canalized drainage system. Julia explains:

"Well, it's been canalized from way back for agricultural purposes, but the big thing has been the urban development. That includes the transportation. I think that the transportation has been done pretty well on SR 60 as far as storm water run off is concerned. They actually have a drain in the middle of SR 60 near Gornto Lake Road, where the median is, there is a drain there for the storm water. You keep hearing two phrases, that it is "volume sensitive" and "peak sensitive". That basically means that Delaney Creek is never going to handle a large volume. They keep working on it, and the county continues to work to improve the drainage. They acquired an area downstream for water storage and wetlands use. Land is very expensive to acquire but in many spots along the creek they have been able to put in wetland plants, revegetating, restoring, contributing to some filtering of both surface water and flood water runoff. That's been really good. And, they've kept things cleared out, widening the creek downstream, doing over the bridges. To help with drainage control the county recently was able to do over Maydell Bridge and do a good deal of bank work there along with work on other bridges. In some places they have been able to create slopes or shelves along the banks, again for revegetation and wild life habitat."

The Future

Julia's fears for the impact of intense development on the coastal plain that Delaney crosses have not been erased. The area though modified still is hard pressed to carry all the storm water runoff in times of wet weather, The extreme intensity of the changes has undoubtedly had a significant impact on the natural environment and the water resources it supports, but the attempt by some of the developers in creating a more environmentally sensitive plan has helped to alleviate some of the impact.

"Brandon Town Center, when they went in, was going to be a crucial player in this [the environment]. I think they did an interesting mix of mall and environment. They have gone under Interstate 75 with that canal system. They coordinated with the I-75 construction to relocate and widen Delaney. They planted a copious cover of trees and shrubs which today has grown to be aesthetically pleasing and give some relief from the more typical glare of huge parking lots. If you look at their retention ponds they're large, they're beautifully vegetated, and we have sandhill cranes nesting down there along with least bittern, occasional wading birds feeding and over flights of white ibis, woodstorks, and other species. While the land has been recontoured and reshaped, it has produced a different but eye pleasing environment that keeps some of the original habitat intact. "

Hopefully as development and urban sprawl continue in the Brandon area more will take a lesson from the past and work with their environment, not against it. Brandon Town Center is but one example of the struggle to place development in the flatwoods coastal plain of Delaney creek, a plain sitting on top of an old geological bay bottom with limited outflow to the bay, posing unique ever present storm water and flood risks. Even as the complexities, challenges, and limitations of the location have resulted in some visible benefits here, such as the extensive landscaped areas, the spacious look and viability of larger retention ponds and conservation areas coupled with ongoing efforts to improve Delaney downstream, miles of what was once labeled Indian prairie have practically vanished with surrounding development.

Old timers can reach back in their memories and relate how the land used to look, describe the vistas of five miles or more they could look across, and give us some idea of the diversity of plants, birds and animals. One of Julia's friends, Bruce Barrow, whose family lived close to the Moseley's in the 1920's recalls his hunting and fishing days growing up close to Delaney and the flatwoods: miles of open land you could look across, the grassy ponds, the long leaf pines and wire grass, flag ponds, palmetto clumps and rush, cypress domes, and bayheads on the upper slopes, the plants, birds and mammals found in this kind of environment. His picture gives us a distinct view.

Written By: Alexis Broadbent Sykes and Julia Moseley

The Flat Woods

Written By: Bruce Barrow in 2005

The term flat woods, as the area was referred to by the locals, is a misnomer as there were no extensive woods. It had been logged over in the 1880's. It was in fact flat, but had a very limited amount of trees. As I recall, all the trees that existed were of the long leaf pine variety. Also, as flat woods it was not then drained with many ditches, other than Delaney Creek, which moved slowly to the west.

This acreage was used by the dairymen as pasture. There were areas of myrtle bushes and they were clumped together but offered very little, if any, shade for the dairy cows. Their cows benefited from the natural ground cover which we referred to as carpet grass. There were many "flag ponds", and they are also referred to as wet weather ponds. To my knowledge, there were no fish in these ponds as the water fowl frequented them regularly for survival. These birds were referred to as "waders" and a small fish did not stand a chance due to the shallow depth of these ponds.

DEER:

Mr. Claude Moseley hunted for deer and birds in this area at the turn of the century. He referred to it as the meadow. He was an excellent hunter and fisherman. This is the area where deer were harvested as a means of subsistence for the early settlers. I have never seen signs of deer in this specific area. This does not mean there were no deer. As late as the 1940's, there were deer in the wooded area east of Bell Shoals Road at Bloomingdale. This is only a few miles east of the flat woods. The property belonged to International Chemical Company for many years. At that time, this wooded area extended westward from the IMC property to Buckhorn Springs and points further west toward Riverview. This was the era prior to the heavily developed housing and commercial businesses that have been built and are now presently along Bloomingdale Road. There were deer and wild turkeys at my Hillsborough River pasture where I lived and had some of my cows. The wildlife was observed by me as recently as 1972.

Also, I recently went to a social at Tampa Palms and the homeowner stated they have deer in their backyard on a daily basis. Occasionally they see turkeys. One of the guests overheard our conversation about deer and stated he and his wife saw a deer on the way to the party. His wife affirmed his comment. (Circa 2005)

ALLIGATORS:

There were no gators in the flat woods as there was insufficient "cover" for their security. This was not their type of habitat. However, to the northwest of what is now the Providence Road-Lumsden Road Intersection was a lake on the Woods parcel. It had the type of growth that was suitable for gators as was the pond to the north of the Woods Lake. That pond is still somewhat evident. It is the remaining area of undeveloped land adjacent, or just east of the entrance to Buddy Freddie's. Until development occurred, this was a substantial pond with heavy growth of lilies, myrtle and a few cypress trees. I am sure that the widening of S.R. 60 throughout the years, contributed to the diminishment of this pond. Gators rarely crossed the Hopewell Road (a/k/a S.R.60 & W. Brandon Boulevard) to the north into Ten Mile Pond. This was another misnomer as it is not a pond. It is one of the largest lakes and better lakes in the immediate area. A substantial portion had a white sand bottom. Around the end of the war, it was renamed for the niece of a judge and is now on the maps as Lake Kathy.

To my knowledge there were no gators in that lake or in Lakes Gornito, Whittington, (Chapman) nor Sand Pond. However, there was quite a growth of flag lilies, water lilies and other native growth at the Wyly's (Collins Pond). I fished that lake too, and it was one to beware of the gators. Laura Mead's Lake (Timberpond Subdivision) was maybe one of the worst for us as young fishermen. However, the above is not to say there were "never" gators in all of these lakes. Gators will move from place to place, especially during the mating season. Bottom line: There were none in the flat woods. It should be noted the tails and legs are table fare and some of the locals took advantage of that fact.

FOX:

There were a number of fox in the area. Almost everyone had chickens during the depression and during the war (hard times). Many of the neighbors had traps including Mr. Claude Moseley and my Dad. Mr. Elmer Steele had traps and he sold pelts and tails. Fox tails were quite the rage at the time. During the Great Depression, the families did many things in order to survive. Fox or abandoned wild dogs were considered a scourge and their intrusion into the henhouse placed them on "The Most Wanted List". Steel traps were the answer and it was not uncommon to see several traps hanging on the door of the barn for ready access, when needed. Bottom line: Fox are not edible.

GOPHER TORTOISE:

The majority of the flat woods were too damp for the gopher tortoise. However, they were quite evident in the orange groves and dry land adjacent to the flat woods. When we rode the woods on horseback working the cattle, those gopher holes were extremely dangerous. If a horse stepped in one while the rider was chasing cattle, it could break the horse's leg and throw the rider to the ground. It would be necessary to "destroy" the horse under those circumstances. At any time I was thrown off of a horse, I usually "felt like I had been destroyed". The worst single accident I ever had from such a fall was a broken collar bone and dislocated shoulder.

Gopher tortoises were quite plentiful in other areas. They were considered a delicacy and were also considered an aphrodisiac. During the "hard times," it was not uncommon to see these critters penned, fed and water provided to them for future consumption. This may sound strange today but hard times for people were "hard times." These animals were made into a purlieu consisting of sautéed onions, green or red bell peppers, black pepper with salt and with white rice, made a very tasty dish. Today they are a protected animal.

TURTLES:

They too, are edible and can be dusted with flour and fried or made into a rice purlieu as above described. They were abundant around Delaney Creek and they could also be found in the wet weather ponds in the flat woods. Of course, the lakes had an abundance of turtles.

RABBITS:

Wild cottontail rabbits were very plentiful. They were regular table fare during the hard times. During the war, rabbits were harvested, "dressed" and delivered to the meat markets in Tampa. This was a means of income for teenage boys and it "contributed to the war effort" by providing meat to the city people. Meat was rationed during the war, specifically beef and pork. At that time on Central Avenue near Buffalo Avenue (MLK), there was a meat market that sold horse meat for human consumption.

SNAKES:

There were a number of different species of reptiles in the flat woods. There were many moccasins and several varieties of this species. Also, there were rattlesnakes, coach whips, Indigo, rat snakes and blacksnakes.

DOVES:

The surrounding orange groves were the roosting place for the doves. At dusk, they came in droves to roost. Needless to say, they were excellent table fare.

QUAIL:

These birds were more adapted to the uplands. However, it was not uncommon to see them in the western portion of the flat woods as there were scrub palmettos in that area.

DUCKS:

There were wood ducks year-round. In the winter time, the mallards would migrate south and it was quite a sport to try slipping up to these flat ponds to get a shot at the ducks before they were "spooked".

OTHER CRITTERS:

Occasionally, a bald eagle would soar above but to my knowledge never nested in this area at this time. They did have nests further west toward Tampa Bay, particularly along US 41, and in the late 1970's there was a nest east of Providence and south of Lumsden. However, the ospreys using woods for their security, did nest in the bay heads adjacent to the flat woods.

From time to time we would see an occasional fox squirrel, which is a larger variety than the gray squirrel. They would nest in the highest pine trees and some of their forage for food consisted of the seeds from the long leaf pine.