



Bonita Springs History

Bonita Springs had its beginnings when, some time in the 1870's, government surveyors in a remote part of Southwest Florida pitched camp near a medicinal spring which the local Indians believed could heal the sick. After the crew left, the site became known as Survey and the stream running from it, Surveyor's Creek.

During the next decade only a few homesteaders moved in, but in the late 1880's the population of the area more than doubled when Braxton B. Comer bought 6000 acres of land around Survey and imported 50 families from Alabama with mules and equipment to work a large plantation growing pineapples, bananas, and coconuts.

Within a few years, Survey developed from a scattering of homesteaders into a community; in 1887 a small, thatched-roof, log-walled public school was built, and by 1910 the two story, frame Eagle Hotel was in business catering to visitors attracted to the unspoiled area's bounty of hunting and fishing.

In 1912, a Tennessean named Ragsdale purchased 2400 acres around Survey. He and his associate, Dan Farnsworth, surveyed the area and laid out a small town with streets and avenues named for potential buyers. There was no church, but, in 1915, a Naples minister held the community's first non-denominational service in the school house. The developers decided that the name, Survey, lacked sales appeal, so the town was renamed Bonita Springs; Indian Spring Branch became Oak River; and Surveyor's Creek was upgraded to Imperial River.

By the early 1920's, Barron Collier, in his thrust to expand his empire, had extended his Fort Myers-Southern Railroad to include Bonita Springs which, with his new Tamiami Trail, brought another land boom to the area. And one more old place name disappeared when Fiddler-Ville, so called for its millions of tiny fiddler crabs became Bonita Beach.

As the years passed the U.S.41 Bypass and I-75 corridors opened up more access that brought shopping malls, modern office facilities, and outstanding golf courses into the area. Today, Bonita Springs is an attractive area with beautiful beaches, fine restaurants, and excellent recreational facilities and has become another flourishing Southwest Florida township. It is hard to realize that, a little more than three generations ago, the roots of this thriving community were a scattering of homesteaders' shacks by a creek in the back of nowhere - a place called Survey.