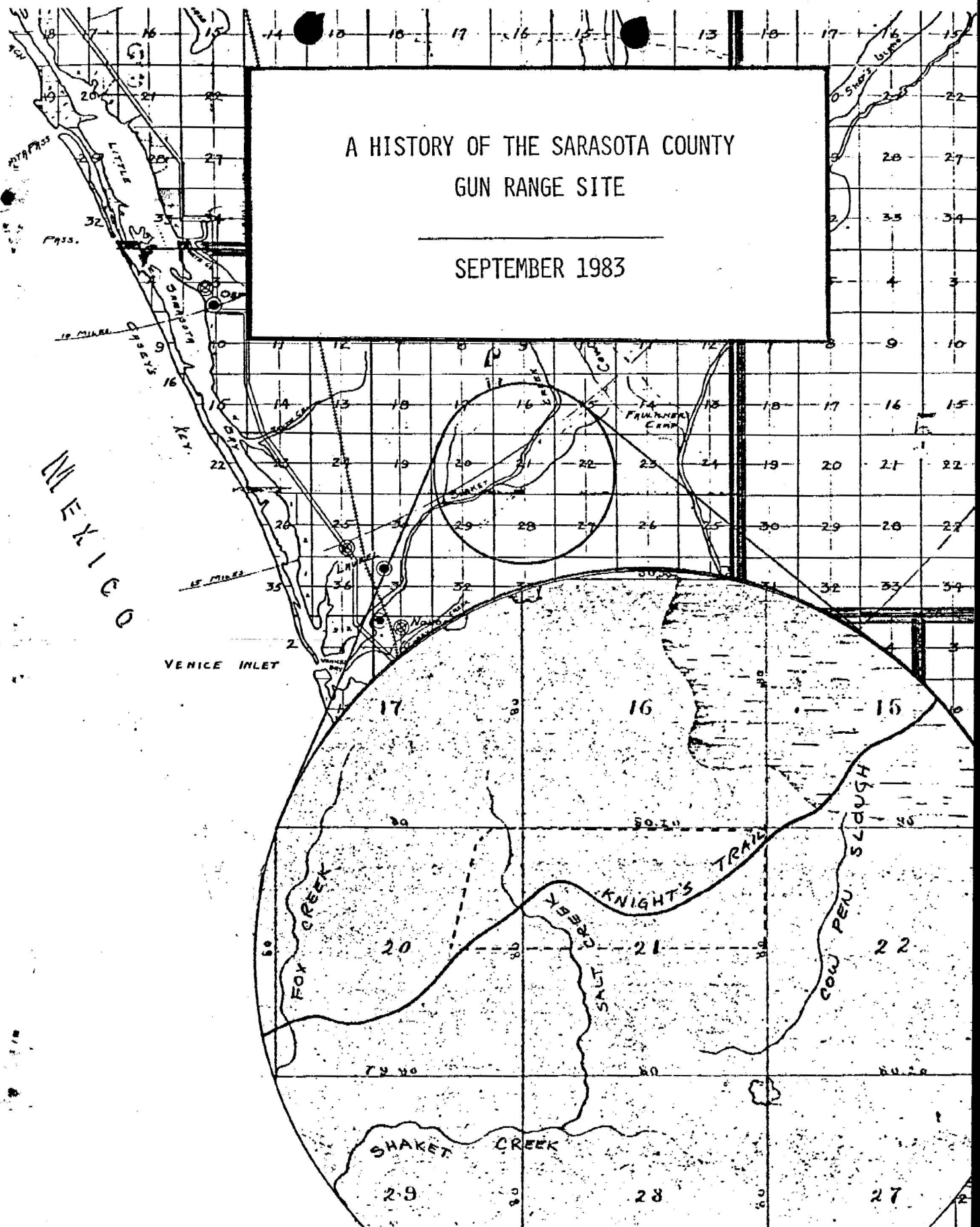


SEPTEMBER 1983



A HISTORY OF THE SARASOTA COUNTY
GUN RANGE SITE

CONTAINING A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SHAKET CREEK REGION

PREPARED BY SARASOTA COUNTY HISTORICAL
ARCHIVES STAFF

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SEPTEMBER 1983

COVER: HISTORIC PLACE NAMES AND GUN
RANGE SITE OVERLAID ON 1847 SURVEY PLAT
OF SECTIONS 20 AND 21. SURVEY PLAT
PROJECTED ON 1921 MAP OF SARASOTA COUNTY.

GUN RANGE SITE CHRONOLOGY

- 1843 U.S. Deputy Surveyor Sam Reid surveys township lines throughout what is now Sarasota County.
- 1843 Florida created a state.
- 1847 U.S. Deputy Surveyor A.H. Jones surveys section corners throughout area.
- 1840's Asternal River renamed Myakka River.
- 1855 Manatee County created containing what is now Sarasota County.
- 1868 Jesse Knight and caravan arrives at Horse & Chaise.
- 1868 Shaket Creek named.
- 1869-70 Knight fence built from Shaket Creek to the Myakka River.
- 1872 "Ras" Roberts arrives at Horse & Chaise.
- 1881 Disston Land Purchase is negotiated.
- 1883 Hamilton Disston gains title to 1/5 of Gun Range Site.
- 1883 Sir Edward Reed gains title to 4/5 of Gun Range Site.
- 1885 Eyry post office established at Horse & Chaise.
- 1888 Venice post office replaces Eyry office.
- 1890 James M. Schumacher gains title to 4/5 of Gun Range Site.
- 1890 Florida Land & Mortgage Company gains title to 4/5 of Gun Range Site.
- 1890 Myakka River (Florida) Land Company gains title to 4/5 of Gun Range Site.
- 1891 Peck, Lord & Webber gains title to 1/5 of Gun Range Site.
- 1902 Henry L. Horton gains title to 4/5 of Gun Range Site.
- 1903 Southern Investment Company gains title to 4/5 of Gun Range Site.
- 1910 Potter Palmer Jr. gains title to 4/5 of Gun Range Site.
- 1911 Seaboard Air Line establishes line to Venice from Fruitville.

- 1917 Venice post office changed to Nokomis.
- 1921 Sarasota County created.
- 1926 Jacob Ruppert gains title to 4/5 of Gun Range Site.
- 1933 Jacob Ruppert gains title to 1/5 of Gun Range Site.
- 1941 Fred House gains title to entire Gun Range Site.
- 1945 E.J.Ewing and C.A. Stukins gain title to Gun Range Site.
- 1948 C.A. Stukins sells 1/2 interest in property to Ewing.
- 1958 Mission Valley Estates developed by Ewing west of Gun Range Site.
- 1963 Sarasota West Coast Watershed Project begun.
- 1968 Merl C. Kelce gains title to Gun Range Site.
- 1968 Karl H. Schewe gains title to Gun Range Site.
- 1971 Cody Fowler gains title to Gun Range Site.
- 1970's Fowler sells Gun Range Site to partnership.
- 1983 Sarasota County plans to create Gun Range on site.

Geographically, the Gun Range Site is located within the Cowpen Slough drainage basin, lying just north of the mingling of the slough and Shakett Creek, the Gun Range Site is situated four miles east of the Gulf of Mexico, and three miles west of the Myakka River. Charlotte Harbor lies twenty miles to the south. The Sarasota County Courthouse lies fifteen miles to the northwest.

Although no fossil bone material has been uncovered at the Gun Range Site, the area was likely occupied by many species of pleistocene mammals thousands of years ago. Mammoths, mastodons, sabre tooth cats, giant sloths, tapirs, horses, camels and dire wolves are some of the animals that inhabited this area of Florida until approximately ten thousand years ago.

Evidence from the exploration of Warm Mineral Springs, located twelve miles southeast of the site, suggests that early man was settling this area as early as ten thousand years ago. Paleoman, Archaic, and later Aborigines would pursue their hunting and gathering economy on the plains lying east and west of the Myakka River.

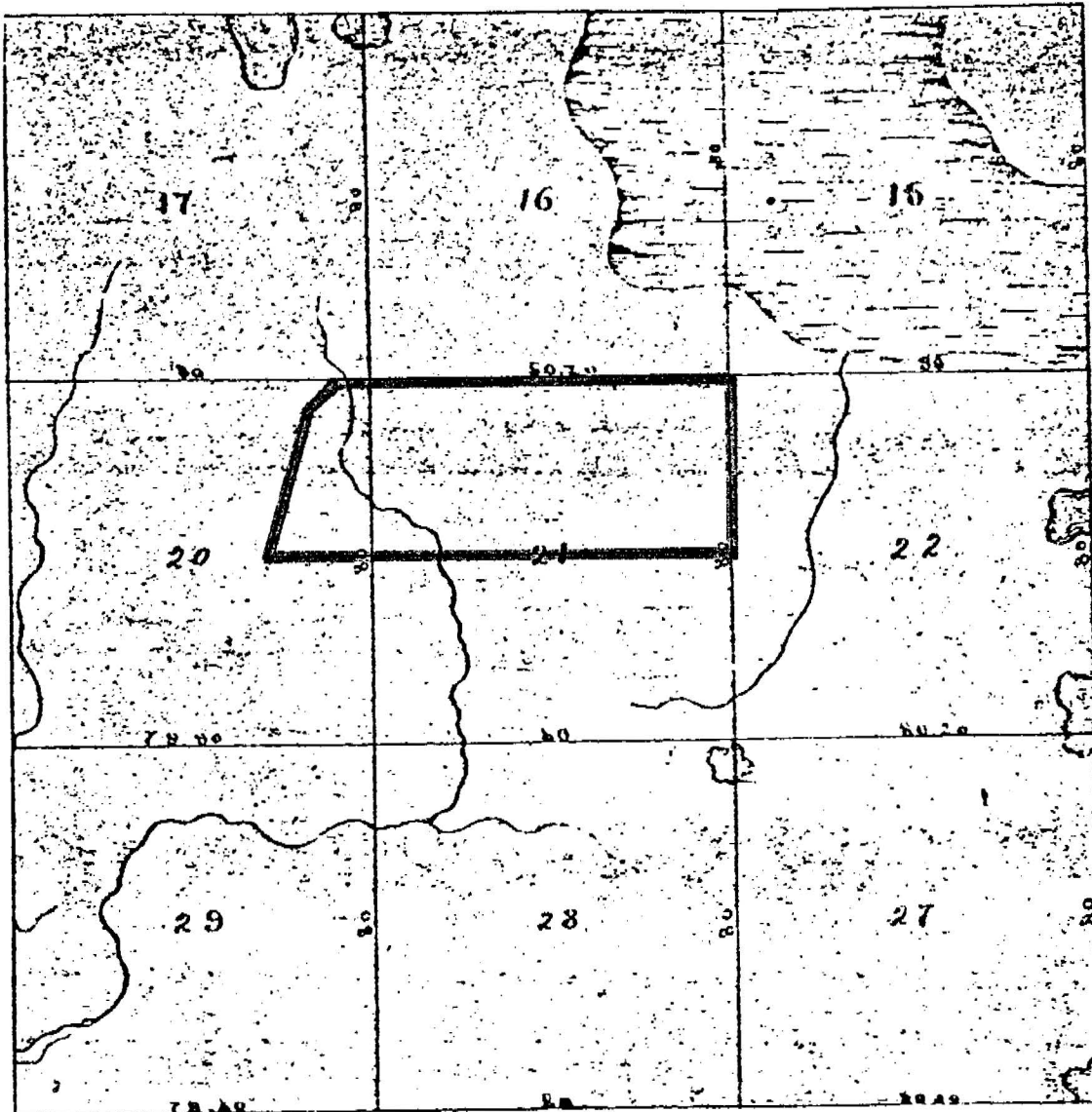
Man would ply the waters of the Myakka River throughout the ages as a means of transportation to and from the uplands. Prior to the 1840's the name of the waterway was "Asternal River". The origin of this name is unknown.

The gulfront below Casey's Key was marked for generations with a tall stand of South Florida Pine that resembled, when seen from the Gulf, a Horse and Carraige. Over the years the area was known as Horse and Chaise. North of Horse and Chaise was a small bay formed by the outflow of three creeks.

Today Horse and Chaise is Venice Beach. The tall pines that stood for generations have long since disappeared into the gulf. The bay is known today as Dona Bay. The three creeks, from north to south, are today Shakett Creek, Curry Creek and Hatchet Creek.

In 1843, two years before Florida became a state, this area of Florida was officially surveyed for the first time. Deputy Surveyor Sam Reid laid out the township and range lines of what is now Sarasota County. At that time Sarasota, as well as Manatee and DeSoto Counties lay within Hillsborough County. Four years later, in March of 1847, Deputy Surveyor A. H. Jones was contracted to survey and establish the section corners within the previously surveyed townships.

In July of 1847, Jones and three assistants went to work with axe, gunner's chain, level and transit to accurately plot the corners and lines of the sections within Township thirty eight south, Range nineteen east. Thomas Zimmer was the axe man who was responsible for clearing sights through the wilderness. The chainmen were Frederick Loring and Frank Reys. For running sixty miles of lines through the wilderness and making and placing twenty-five corner posts, Jones and crew were paid a total of \$60.00.



A portion of the plat of Township thirty-eight south, Range nineteen east showing the terrain in 1847. The Gun Range Site is outlined in red.

The surveyors found the area within section twenty and twenty-one covered with third rate pine and saw palmetto. Much of the pine land encountered was described as being wet. The surveyors also

found within section twenty-one two small waterways. The first one encountered would later be known as Salt Creek. The other led from the slough on the northeast to the creek on the south portion of the section, later to be known as Shaket Creek. At this time none of these waterways were named. Although ponds were undoubtedly present on the property at this time, they were not recorded as they did not lie along the section lines.

After surveying the aforementioned sections, the survey crew proceeded to the east a mile at a time surveying and placing posts. Shortly they came to a river that had in the 1840's taken the name of Myakka.

In 1845 when Florida became a state the settlers along the shore numbered few and far between. William H. Whitaker had homesteaded up the bay in 1842. A fisherman named Philippi lived a few miles to the south of Whitaker. Additionally, cuban fishermen lived along the shoreline, making their living from the sea. The third Seminole Indian Uprising deterred settlers from entering this area in the 1850's.

In 1867 one of the first pioneer families came to the Little Sarasota Bay area. They were the Webb family from Utica, New York. They settled ten miles north of Horse & Chaise on a prominent indian mound along the bayfront. Webb named the spot Osprey, a name that survives today.

Where Shaket Creek and Curry Creek meet the bay there exists a peninsula that is today known as Nokomis. It was here that the

first settler of the Horse and Chaise-Shaket Creek region established his home. On his long trek to his new homesite he would blaze a trail across a tract of land known today as the Gun Range Site.

Jesse Knight, a native of Georgia and an unordained methodist preacher, migrated to Florida in 1852 in search of available land for cattle ranching. He brought his family and cattle to Hillsborough County where he established a home. The area where Knight settled was later known as Knight's Station, and is now known as Plant City.

During the Civil War Knight moved his herd from Hillsborough County to newly created Manatee County, in order to protect his cattle from marauding Union Soldiers. He employed his brother-in-law Shadrick "Shade" Hancock to manage his cattle at Miakka, a small settlement along the Myakka River. His herd numbered around three-hundred head.

Shade Hancock was a skilled cattle man and he knew the Miakka River Valley well. Under his care Knight's cattle thrived. Knight was determined that the area had promise for cattle raising. Shade Hancock suggested an area further south along the bay, where Knight's cattle could roam a large area.

Due to circulating ill health in Hillsborough County in 1868 Knight decided to move his family south into Manatee County and settle at a spot known as Horse and Chaise. Additionally, the Collins family and the Fletcher family would join the caravan

along with Knight's family. Starting from Knight's Station with five wagons and two buggies, the caravan traveled over established trails and routes to Miakka. Here they were met by "Shade" Hancock and prepared for the trip to Horse and Chaise.

From Miakka to Horse and Chaise there was no trail. Hancock led the way through the open pine lands, wet prairies and hammocks along the west side of the Miakka River.

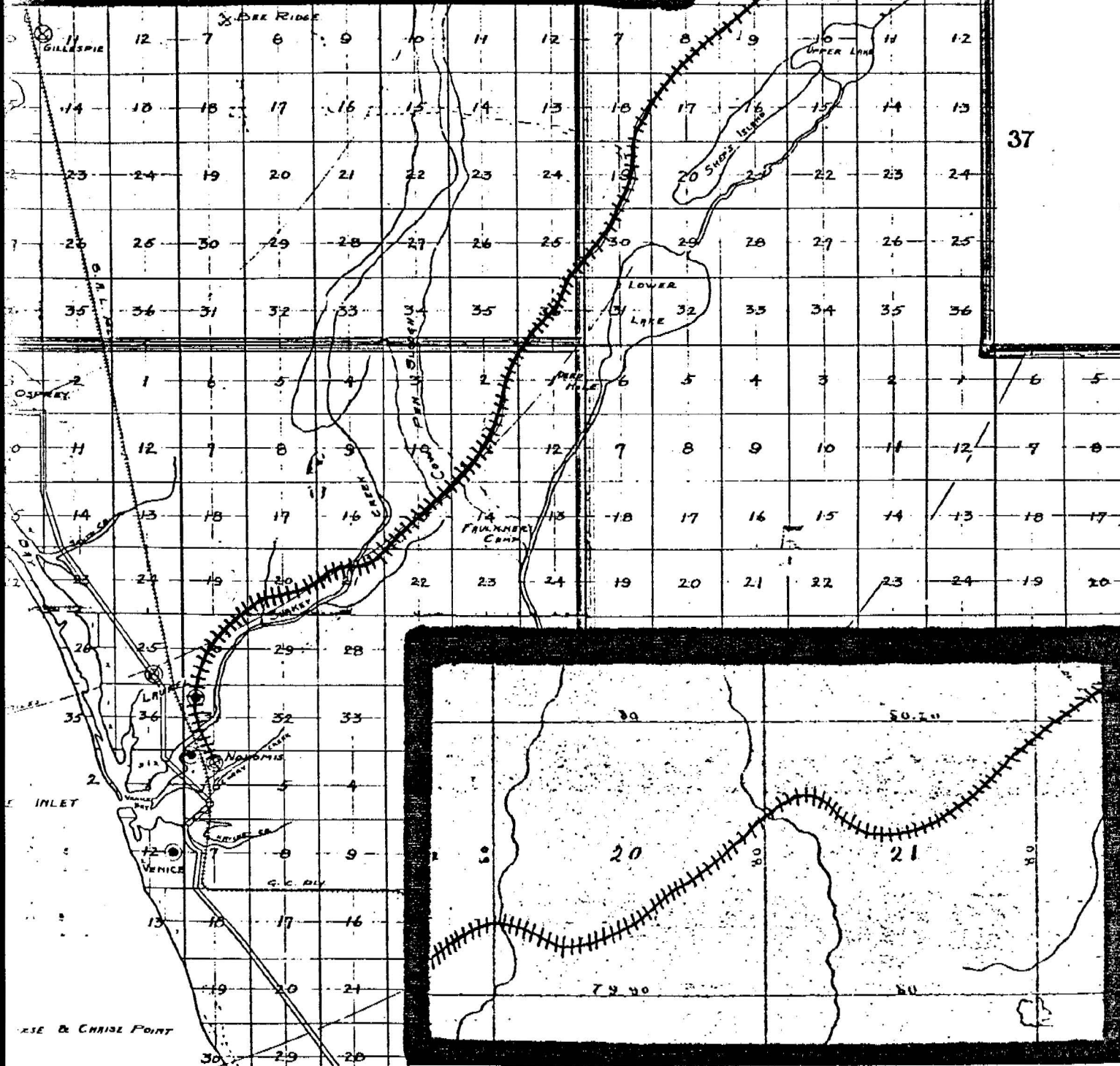
Lillie B. McDuffee, in her book The Lures of Manatee describes the ability of Hancock in guiding the caravan successfully to it's destination.

"From the Miakka to the gulf there was not a suggestion of a road but the old cowherder, true to form, sensed the direction he wanted to go and guided his followers over the trackless waste of open prairies, scrub palmettoes, pines and heavily-wooded stretches, resorting to the pioneer methods of blazing a few trees to make a way for the wagons."

Knight's caravan proceeded south along the west side of the Myakka River and then turned to the west. The trail they blazed through the wilderness cut through the southeast corner of Township thirty-seven south, Range nineteen east. It then meandered in a southwestern direction toward an uninviting obstacle known today as Cowpen Slough.

As proven by the Government Surveyors in the 1840's the slough was crossable, yet the trail was unpleasant and slowed the caravan considerably. After crossing the slough the caravan entered open pine land and while traveling toward the west, forded a small creek and blazed a trail through open pines and hammocks.

The route of Knights trail overlaid on a map of Sarasota County. See inset "A" for the route overlaid on the 1847 survey plat, of sections twenty and twenty-one.



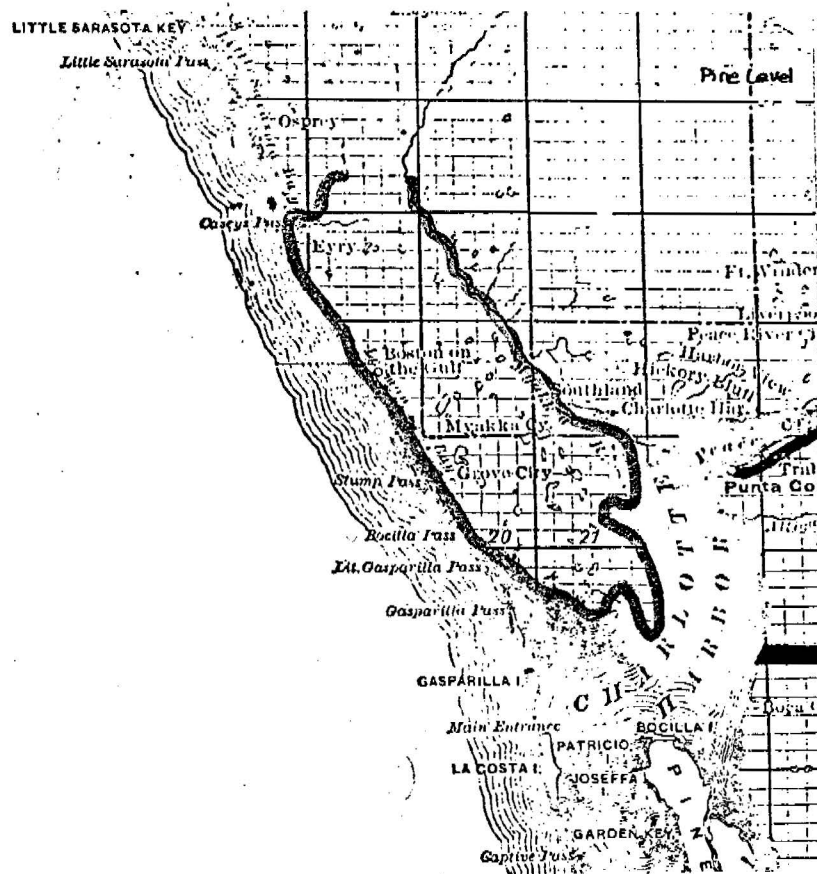
It was at this point in the journey that the caravan was traveling across what is now the Sarasota County Gun Range Site. The trail that was carved by the Knight caravan was used frequently by Knight and other settlers in the following years.

A portion of the original trail exists on the tract today. The western extremity has been improved over the years but the majority of the trail remains in it's earlier form.

Knight and Party continued along the north bank of a creek that led to the bay. When Knight realized that the creek was widening to join the bay they searched for a shallow spot to cross. As Knight approached the creek the lead mules would not budge and in an effort to coax them across Knight's son Bill took an old deerhide and shook it behind the mules. The crackling given off by the shaking hide caused the mules to bolt across the creek. Other animals followed and in the rush many of the Knight's belongings were thrown into the creek. The event was an unexpected disaster, yet all their belongings were recovered. It was at this time that Shaket Creek received it's name, a name that survives today.

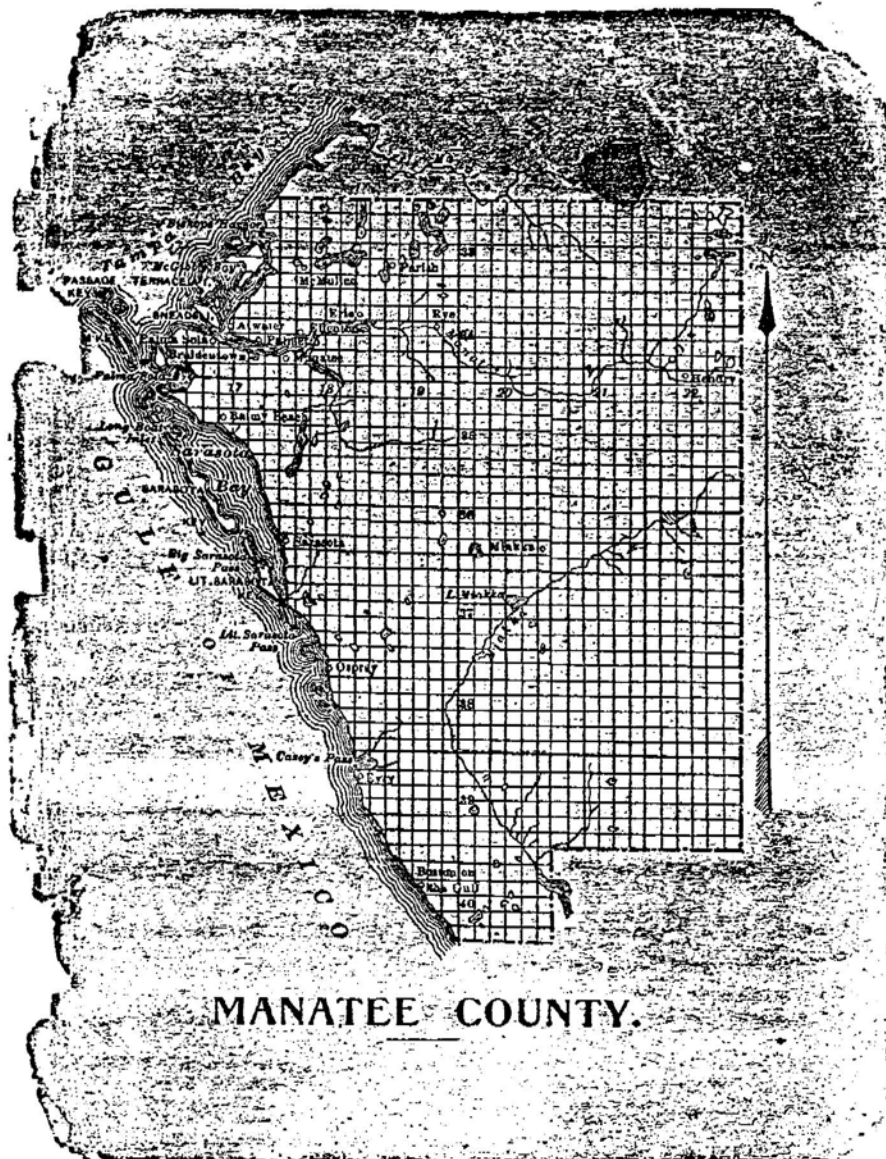
The Knights, along with the Collinses and Fletchers, established their home on the area known today as Nokomis, just south of Shaket Creek. Knight had chosen this particular area for a home-site for several reasons. The greatest of which was that the land was naturally suitable for cattle raising.

Hancock and Knight constructed a split rail fence from Shaket Creek east to the Miakka River. The fence was built at a point where the creek and the river come within three miles of each other. This fence was effective in providing Knight with the largest cattle 'pen' on the lower west coast of Florida. The pen was bounded on the west by the Gulf of Mexico and Lemon Bay, on the south by Charlotte Harbor, on the east by the Miakka River and on the North by the Knight fence. This pen contained over one hundred fifty square miles of land.



The boundaries of the Knight Cattle Pen overlaid in red on a portion of a 1890 map of Manatee County. The approximate location of the Knight fence is illustrated in blue.

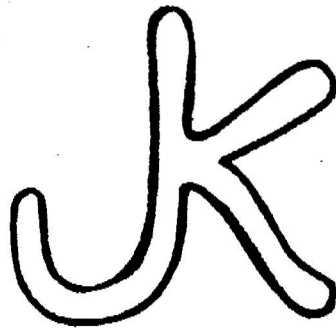
It is likely that Knight's cattle sometimes roamed north across Shaket Creek and grazed in the area of the Gun Range Site. Additionally, other cattle from the Bee Ridge and Myakka River Valley regions would frequently graze along the north side of Shaket Creek.



Map of Manatee County in the late 1880's. Horse & Chaise area appears as Ery.

Just to the north of the Knight fence lay the slough that had been an obstacle to both the Government Surveyors as well as the Knight caravan. It is likely that the name Cowpen Slough is a direct result of the Knight fence building project. The Slough led directly to the fence, or 'pen'.

In the years that followed, Knight's cattle would flourish on the fenced peninsula. At one time Knight had as many as twenty-two thousand head of cattle on the land. Only a small amount of the rangeland belonged to Knight. The majority belonged to the State of Florida and small amounts were owned by settlers. Cattle were free to roam the open range. To identify his cattle from any others that might enter the area, Knight had a brand that marked all his cattle.



The Jesse Knight Brand used
from the 1850's through 1912

The trail originally blazed by Hancock and Knight in 1868 would continue to be used for nearly fifty years as the main artery between Horse and Chaise, Miakka, Pine Level and Manatee. Knight, an unordained preacher, made frequent trips throughout the county, particularly Miakka and Manatee. Settlers coming into the area would also use the trail as it provided the only route between

the coast and Miakka.

Beginning in the early 1880's many settlers realized the potential for living in the Shaket Creek area. Among the settlers of the 1880's were the Blackburns, the Currys, the Lowes, the Wredes, the Higels, and the Roberts.

Mr. George W. Blackburn, a frequent contributor to the "Sarasota Times" expresses his early recollection of this area in this "Times" article of April 13th, 1911.

"Thirty years ago this summer I landed in this county and settled near Osprey. My first trip, soon after, to the Miakka will never be forgotten; no roads, only trails, which I have since helped to beat into roads. Deer were to be seen almost anywhere, turkeys in flocks, and squirrels, well we would not shoot them, they were too small game."

The trail described by Mr. Blackburn is the Venice-Miakka Trail that today meanders across the Gun Range Site.

Life in the Horse and Chaise area in the 1880's is best described in this "Sarasota Times" article written by George "Nemo" Higel in November of 1911 reflecting on the pioneer era.

"Last week we had the pleasure of entertaining E.S. Roberts of Haines City, Fla. Mr. Roberts was one of our early pioneer settlers and will be remembered by a host of the old timers as "Ras" Roberts. Thirty-nine years ago this December, Mr. Roberts left the parental home of his father, now known as the Thompson place adjoining the old Saunders homestead at Oneco and with his young bride started for Horse and Chaise Point and arrived at the home of the late Rev. Jesse Knight. Next morning Mr. Roberts unloaded his goods and chattles under a pine now standing near the Venice Post Office, and at once built a small cabbage shack which was later followed by a comfortable log cabin and for four years, Mr. Roberts was monarch of all he surveyed. Turkey and deer were killed from the doorstep. Hogs furnished the lard, potatoes bought

the flour, which was bought at Manatee for \$8.50 a barrel. Tobacco was generally raised. Society was not invented nor had fashions become a custom. A hickory shirt, dungaree pants and brogan shoes constituted one's Sunday best. 'The happiest four years of my life' said Mr. Roberts. At this early date the Currys, Gates, Harlees, Glaziers, Wyatts and Fogartys made up the Manatee River's population while the settlers along Sarasota Bay could be counted on one hand.

It was real interesting to smoke one's pipe and listen to Mr. Robert's stories of early life and also to learn that long long, years ago such a crime as hog stealing was not unknown. We only wish someone had been a professional at the business and got them all. Nemo"

An act of Congress dated September 28th, 1850 granted the ownership of a great part of this state to the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of the State of Florida. Known as "The Swamp Land Act", this act specified that all land must be improved by drainage.

It wasn't until 1883 that the majority of Knight's cattle grazing land entered private ownership. In 1881 Hamilton Disston had rescued the State of Florida from debt by purchasing from the Trustees for the Internal Improvement Fund of Florida four million acres of "swamp land" for one million dollars.

The text of a speech, presented by T. Frederick Davis at the annual meeting of the Florida Historical Society at St. Petersburg on January 25th, 1938, describes the historic Disston Land Purchase.

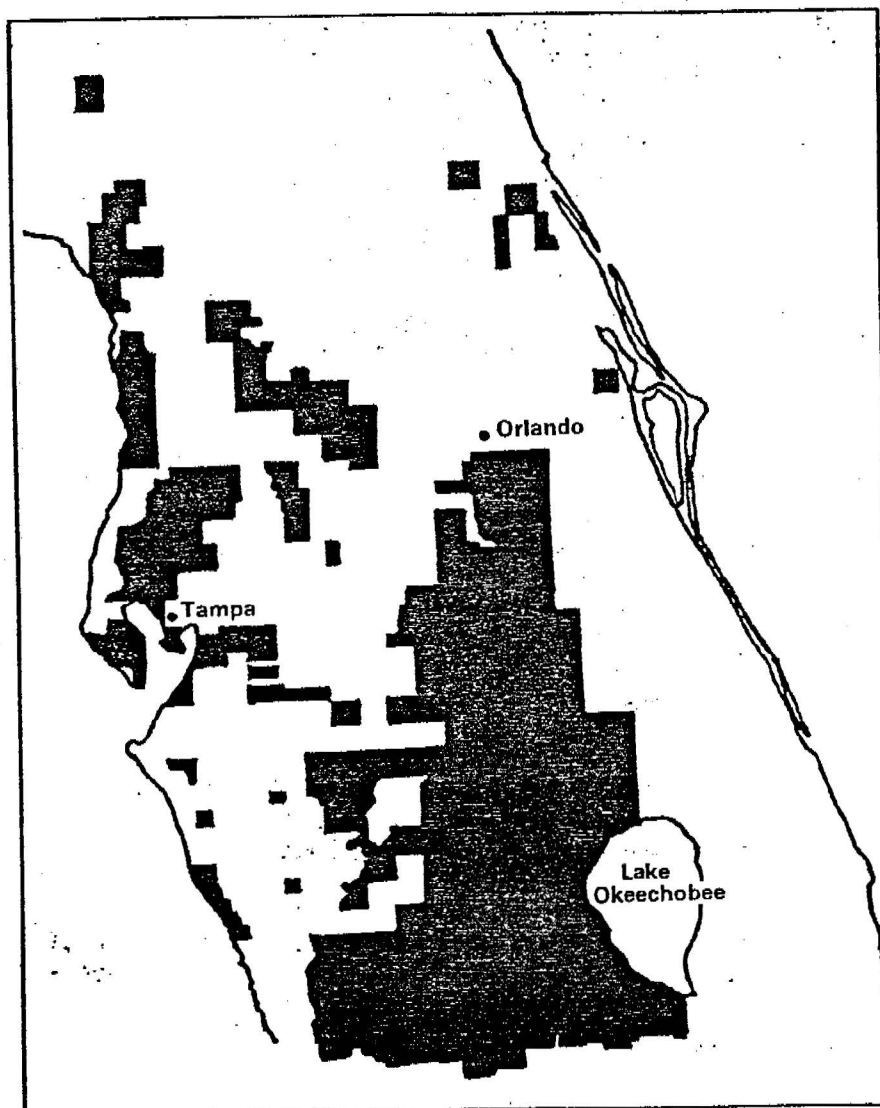
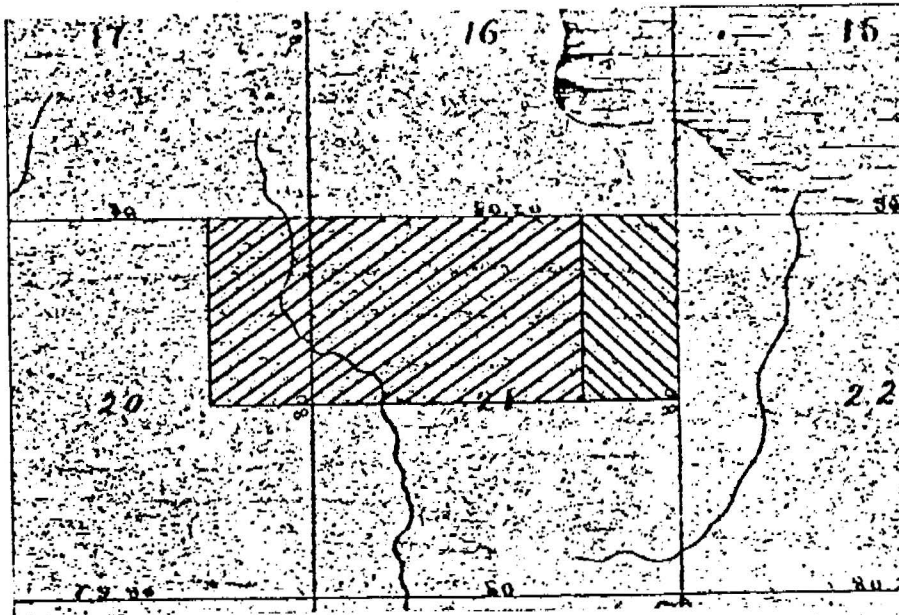
"The terms of the contract required a down payment of \$200,000 and the balance at stated intervals, the whole to be paid on or before January 1, 1882. Upon the initial payment two hundred fifty thousand acres were to be deeded at once to Mr. Disston."

"Mr. Disston signed the contract June 14, 1881, and on or before September 1 he had paid five hundred thousand dollars"

"The money was immediately put to work in satisfying the most pressing claims against the Fund. In anticipation of this, and thereby the release of lands for railroad grants, ten or more companies were already making preparation for railroad construction in Florida. Among them, and probably the most extensive, were interests represented by E. J. Reed. Through preliminaries not now definitely known, Reed and Disston arranged an inter-agreement affecting the Disston purchase contract,"

"On December 17, 1881 Hamilton Disston and Edward J. Reed of the County of Kent, England, entered into an agreement with the consent of the trustees of the I.I. Fund whereby Sir Edward (as he was known in England) was to complete the payments due under the Disston purchase contract, that was \$500,000 not later than July 1, 1882 the trustees having extended the time limit for final payment. Under the arrangement the payments were to be made directly to the Fund, in sums satisfactory to the trustees, and when so made were to be credited to the Disston purchase contract; acceptance of bona fide obligations of the Fund at par as cash still prevailed. When full payment had been made to the Fund, Reed was to receive from Disston two million acres or one-half of the Disston purchase, to be selected as follows: Disston to first select one million five hundred thousand of the four million acres, then Reed to select his two million from the remainder in bodies of ten thousand acres."

A fee simple deed dated the third of February 1883 and signed by the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of the State of Florida conveyed 246.052 acres to Hamilton Disston and his corporation, the Florida Land and Improvement Company, Ltd. This was one of several deeds issued to Hamilton Disston that totalled two million acres. The deed described property that lay within forty-two townships, all situated within Manatee County, Florida. One fifth of the Gun Range Site, the east half of the north east quarter of section twenty-one, Township thirty-eight south, Range nineteen east, was included within this transaction.



The majority of the property known today as the Gun Range Site was never owned by Hamilton Disston. Instead, it was a portion of the property deeded directly to Sir Edward Reed by the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of the State of Florida in accordance with the previously mentioned three way agreement.

A fee simple deed dated September 28th, 1883 and signed by the Trustees conveyed 228,816 acres to Sir Edward Reed. This was one of several deeds issued to Sir Edward Reed that totaled two million acres. The deed described property that lay within twenty-one townships, all situated within Manatee County, Florida. Four fifths of the Gun Range Site was included within this transaction. The northwest quarter plus the west half of the northeast quarter of Section twenty-one plus the East half of the northeast quarter of Section twenty. Neither Disston or Reed ever improved any of their property within the vicinity of the Gun Range Site. Their efforts were concentrated in other areas of Florida.

In 1887 Sir Edward Reed failed to pay taxes on 137,598 acres within Manatee County. The amount due was \$832.46. The property was appraised at \$75,678. Included within the property was four fifths of the Gun Range Site.

On September 3rd, 1888, at a sale by Samuel C. Gates, Tax Collector of Manatee County, Mr. W. D. Barnes, Comptroller of the State of Florida, received a tax deed to 135,758 acres within Manatee County. Mr. Barnes paid the due taxes of \$832.46 plus costs, totaling \$1,259.53.

Mr. Barnes in turn sold the property to Mr. James M. Schumacher for the back taxes. On April 2nd of 1890 Mr. Schumacher received title to the land formerly owned by Sir Edward Reed, totaling 135,758 acres.

The property did not remain in Mr. Schumacher's possession long. On August 20th of 1890 Schumacher sold a portion of his property to the Florida Land and Mortgage Company, Ltd. This transaction totaled 135,841 acres that lay within eight townships. The consideration was \$1,278.

Two days later, on August 22nd, 1890, the Florida Land and Mortgage Company conveyed to the Myakka River (Florida) Land Company, Ltd. a british corporation, 55,910 acres lying in the County of Manatee, Florida. Included within this transaction was four fifths of the Gun Range Site. The consideration was 11,182 Pounds one shilling.

Taxes paid in 1891 by the Myakka River (Florida) Land Company, Ltd. on portions of sections twenty and twenty-one that the Gun Range Site is located within, totaled \$11.61. Taxes paid in 1891 by Hamilton Disston, on a portion of section twenty-one that the Gun Range Site is located within, totaled \$4.40.

On March 14th of 1891, Hamilton Disston sold his property, that contained one fifth of the Gun Range Site, to Peck, Lord & Company. This firm was composed of Willys G. Peck, Joseph H. Lord and Frank R. Webber, Lord's father-in-law.

Peck held a five-eighths interest in the property. Lord and Webber shared a three-eighths interest. For a total of 8,395 acres the consideration was \$18,470.

Taxes paid in 1892 by the Myakka River (Florida) Land Company, Ltd. totaled \$11.40, a decrease of twenty-one cents from 1891. Conversely, taxes paid in 1892 by Peck, Lork & Company on their one half section totaled \$5.30, an increase of ninety cents from 1891. This tax increase could possibly have been due to improvements made to the property in the form of citrus groves.

Joseph H. Lord had come to Florida in 1885 to buy phosphate lands for future exploitation. Lord first visited the Venice area in 1890 or 1891 and immediately began purchasing real estate. For over a decade Lord spent much time in the Venice area improving land and setting out groves. Lord also invested in Sarasota real estate and by 1906 owned four of the five corners of five-points.

It may have been Lord who first proposed the draining of the Cowpen Slough and other wetland areas of Manatee County to create improved agricultural lands. The following excerpts are from an article, published in the "Sarasota Times" in February of 1913, that was one of many written by Joseph Lord advocating the improvement and cultivation of the prairie lands.

"For many years I have considered our prairie lands to be among our most valuable assets for fruit and vegetable growing and for general agricultural purposes."

The article continues.

"It is well known that some of the most luxuriant orange and grapefruit groves in Florida are on this class of land and numberless experiments hereabouts have demonstrated that our prairie lands, properly drained and cultivated, will successfully and profitably produce every variety of fruit and vegetable crop that is suited to this climate. We have no poor, no unproductive land."

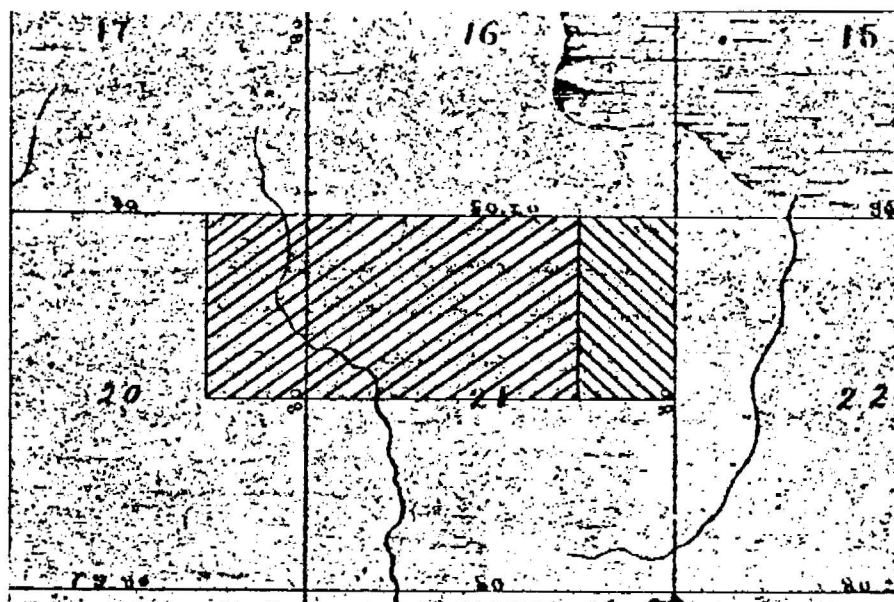
On December 26th, 1902, the Myakka River (Florida) Land Company, Ltd. conveyed to Henry Lawrence Horton of 66 Broadway, New York, New York, 14,995 acres lying in the County of Manatee, Florida. Included within this transaction was four-fifths of the Gun Range Site. The consideration was \$95,722.23.

Taxes paid in 1903 by Mr. Horton on portions of Sections twenty and twenty-one containing the Gun Range Site totaled \$15.36. 1903 taxes paid by Venice Fruit Co. totaled \$5.12 on half of Section twenty-one that the Gun Range Site lies within.

On February 28th of 1903, Mr. Henry L. Horton conveyed to the Southern Investment Company, a corporation registered in the state of Delaware, 14,995 acres lying in the County of Manatee, Florida. Included within this transaction was four-fifths of the Gun Range Site. The consideration was \$95,722.23.

The Southern Investment Company actively engaged in purchasing land in Manatee County in 1902. Vast tracts in the south Venice area as well as town lots in Sarasota were purchased by the Company in the years to follow. In October of 1902 the Company bought from Knight, Crowell and Savarese of Tampa, the DeSoto Hotel at the foot of Main Street in Sarasota. They enlarged the hotel and renamed it the Belle Haven Inn. The hotel was Sarasota's finest for years.

It is unlikely that the Southern Investment Company made any improvements on their land in the Cowpen Slough area.



Southern Investment Company



Lord and Company

Land ownership of the Gun Range Site in 1909 overlaid on the 1847 survey plat.

The Southern Investment Company retained title to the property until July 18th of 1910 when they sold it to Potter Palmer Jr , through his mother Mrs. Potter Palmer in trust. Potter Palmer Jr. received title to 15,913 acres lying in the county of Manatee Florida. Included within the transaction was four-fifths of the Gun Range Site.

The transaction was handled by Joseph H. Lord whose nationwide advertisements had initially prompted Mrs. Palmer's visit to the area in February of 1910.

An article appearing in the Venice News column of The Sarasota Times on June 2nd, 1910, written by George "Nemo" Higel, describes the pending sale of land including Potter Palmer Jr.'s tract.

"We are in receipt of a letter from Col. J.H. Lord, senior member of the enterprising firm of Lord & Edwards, in which we learn, the company have practically sold to Mrs. Potter Palmer of Chicago, a vast tract of land in the Sarasota vicinity. This purchase embraces the well known Means lands, the famous Cow Pen sloughs and a large acreage of the rich and fertile Miakka pasture lands. This is pronounced as fine a tract of land as we have in the county, being admirably adapted to irrigation or to drainage. The splendid pasture lands set to cultivated grasses will equal; if not rival the famous Blue grass region of Kentucky. The rich hammock and muck lands are adapted to sugar cane, Irish potatoes, onions, all of which are staple crops and for which home markets are far from being supplied. As a truck and vegetable growing section this tract is second to none, and perhaps in a few years, we shall see packing plants and canning factories in our county. Nemo"

A later article in the "Times" on June 30th, 1910 confirmed the sale and announced the plans of the Seaboard Air Line extension to Venice through the Palmer land.

"Mrs. Potter Palmer has undertaken one of the greatest development propositions ever known in Florida. She has just completed a purchase of between seventy-five thousand and one-hundred thousand acres on the West coast of Florida, in Manatee County, extending approximately twenty-five miles along Sarasota Bay from Sarasota to Venice, Florida, and about twelve miles inland. The Seaboard Air Line has just authorized a twenty-five mile extension from the terminus of Fruitville to Venice, bisecting the property just purchased by Mrs. Palmer."

The article continues:

"Mr. J.H. Lord, who is in the Florida land business, with headquarters in the Marquette building, Chicago, is responsible for Mrs. Palmer's going into Florida."

Neither Mrs. Palmer nor her son Potter Palmer Jr. made any immediate improvements on their property in the Cowpen Slough region. Instead their efforts were directed to establishing their homes at "The Oaks" in Osprey and "Immokalee" further north along the bay. Additionally they were beginning to develop range-land known as Meadowsweet Pastures in the Myakka River Valley Region.

Mrs. Palmer's purchases resulted in the Seaboard Air Line extending it's tracks from Fruitville to Venice and this alone would change the lifestyle and appearance of the entire Venice area.

George "Nemo" Higel chronicalled the current events of Venice from 1899 through the early 1920's in a column in the Sarasota Times called "Venice". "Nemo" offers us a glimpse of life in Venice in the following news articles of 1910.

"Automobiles, capitalists and speculators are so frequently seen on our streets that we crackers actually think things are booming. A few even wear starched shirts and collars on Sunday and we all believe the railroad is coming."

"Fortunate will be the chap who owns a few shovels of sod at Venice when the railroad arrives."

"Venice is looking forward with pleasure to the revival and the railroad. The former we trust, will prepare us for the latter."

"We learn the right of way for the Seaboard extension has now penetrated through our little rival Laurel, and at last accounts was headed for the Gulf. We anxiously await development."

"The old Dredge Suwannee these days is animated with signs of life and a competent corps of engineers with many able assistants are decorating our bays with red and white flags; the opening chapter of a project, the government has in view to connect us to the outside world by deep water."

"Daily we hear the buzz and hum of the pile driver as the pilings are being sunk in Shaket Creek for the Seaboard, and as the sound is gently wafted over the water, it seems to say, "Coming nearer, coming nearer", and we reverently murmur a fervent "Amen"."

"Nemo" continues into 1911 with his writings.

"Possibly the most absorbing topic of conversation is the railroad and the possibilities of our burg. The trestles are about completed across the three creeks, and grading and filling goes rapidly on. In fact, camps are located at both ends and in the middle, and, like little children, we now look forward in anticipation of the choo-choo cars."

"The present terminus of the Seaboard Air Line situated within a quarter of our abode is a scene of very much activity these days and perhaps a force of 15 sons of Africa are grading the Y, and finishing up the main track. The station is to be located in what from childhood we have known as the Sapling Thicket, which is now all cut down. Though we look for better things, we confess we miss the thicket."

"Albert Blackburn was in our section last week, looking for help to lay out a county road from South Creek to Venice. This road will be built on a straight line, through the Palmer Lands, Mrs. Palmer giving a deed to the county for lands used. Road beds will be thrown across both Shaket and Curry Creeks, doing away with the constant source of annoyance and expense. Albert wishes to put in concrete walls along the sides of the roads through creeks. In fact, if our county commissioners would listen to Albert, they would have good roads, but I reckon the question, "What are you going to do when the bill comes due?" will cut some figure in Albert's dreams."

"The Knight Bros., assisted by local talent, are marking and gathering beef cattle for the Tampa market. Considering the dry weather range cattle are looking fine."

"We learn the work on the Seaboard extension is rapidly being completed, and the iron has been laid south of South Creek; in fact, we still have hopes of some day seeing the choo-choo cars."

"We were impressed with the truth of the old adage, "There is an end to all things," when we learned work on the county road from South Creek to Venice was completed. Road overseer Blackburn and help have done a good job."

As well as reporting the good news of the day "Nemo" was also responsible for reporting the unfortunate news.

"Died at the home of his daughter, Mrs. A.F. Wrede, October 5th, Rev. Jesse Knight, aged 94 years, familiarly known throughout the county as Uncle Jesse. Mr. Knight was one of the pioneer settlers here having settled here shortly after the Civil War."

"The Knight Bros., assisted by local talent, are employed gathering and marking cattle during the past week, and report the cattle prospects unusually good."

"We learn that the entire stock of cattle owned by the late Rev. Jesse Knight has been sold to Dink Murphy, the consideration being \$15,000 spot cash."

In late 1910 a firm by the name of Hall and Harrison established a turpentine camp west of Cowpen Slough. At this time J.H. Lord leased a portion of his property to the turpentine interests. Specifically, that portion of property owned by Lord that is now one fifth of the Gun Range Site was leased and likely was turpented in 1911. By December of 1911, the turpentine camp had moved south to the Alligator Creek area.

The activity at the Hall & Harrison camp is described by "Nemo" in these articles from 1910 and 1911.

"Hon. W.E. Stephens and sons have secured the job of surveying the Hall and Harrison turpentine track in the Cowpen Slough neighborhood, and we learn the Company has begun boxing for turpentine."

"The Hall and Harrison turpentine camp is running full blast, chipping, dipping and hauling, keeping the men busy and Manager Williams on the rush."

"We learn that Hall & Harrison are negotiating for the purchase of a tract of land from L.J. Knight, lying between Hatches and Shaket Creeks, upon which they will immediately erect a still and several buildings to be used in connection with their turpentine work here."

Around 1910 work began on a new road from Venice to Miakka. This trail ran along the south side of Shaket Creek and met the old trail at Cowpen Slough. The old trail would still be used by residents of Osprey and Laurel as it was most convenient.

By November of 1911 the Seaboard had penetrated Venice and in the years to follow would replace the forms of transportation that had been relied on for years. At the time of its arrival there were fewer than a dozen families within a mile of the terminus, and the arrival of the first train was less than exciting, as "Nemo" recorded.

"Sunday was a red letter day in the history of Venice. The Seaboard Air Line extension from Sarasota to Venice ran its first passenger coaches over the line, and, while we deeply regret we were not at the station to waive our handkerchief on the arrival, the welcome the town of Venice gave them will always be remembered as the quietest and most orderly in railroad history."

Undoubtably due to the railroad's arrival as well as the improved roads serving the Venice area, one of Venice's major transportation links discontinued service in early 1912. "The Fox", a gasoline launch owned and operated by W.J. Lowe for several years between Venice and Sarasota was no longer needed for trade.

"Nemo" describes the transition in this Sarasota Times article.

"Another one of our old landmarks faded from view when Capt. W.J. Bill Lowe disposed of the Fox, for years our main dependance for transportation with the outside world."

It is very likely that the creek that runs north off the Shaket Creek just west of the Gun Range Site was named for Lowe's launch.

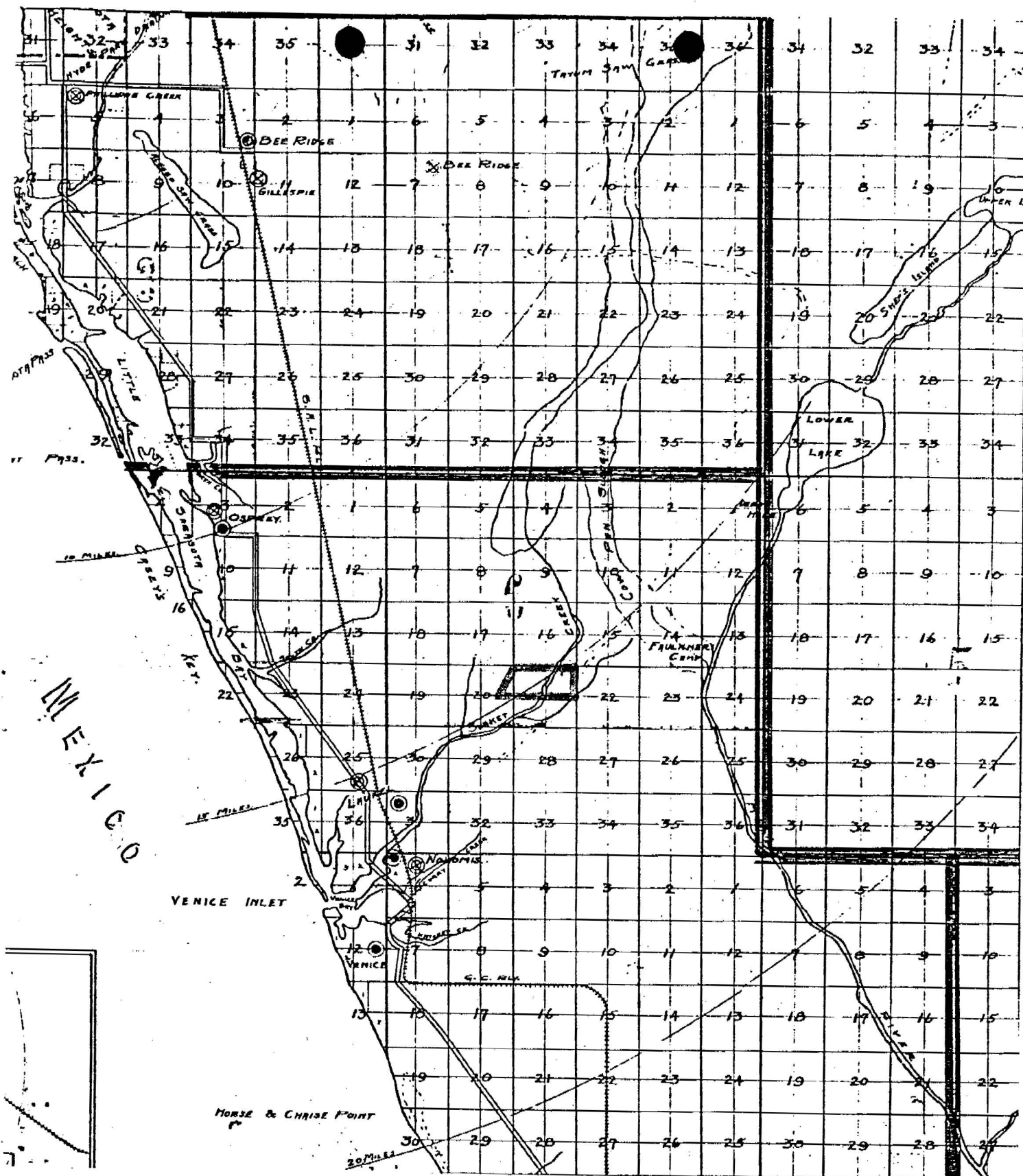
Mrs. Palmer's grand plan for the development of her south Manatee County property was slowed considerably by the outbreak of World War I. Her death in 1918 slowed development to a standstill.

When Sarasota County was created in 1921 the Horse and Chaise--Shaket Creek region was included within the boundaries of the new county.

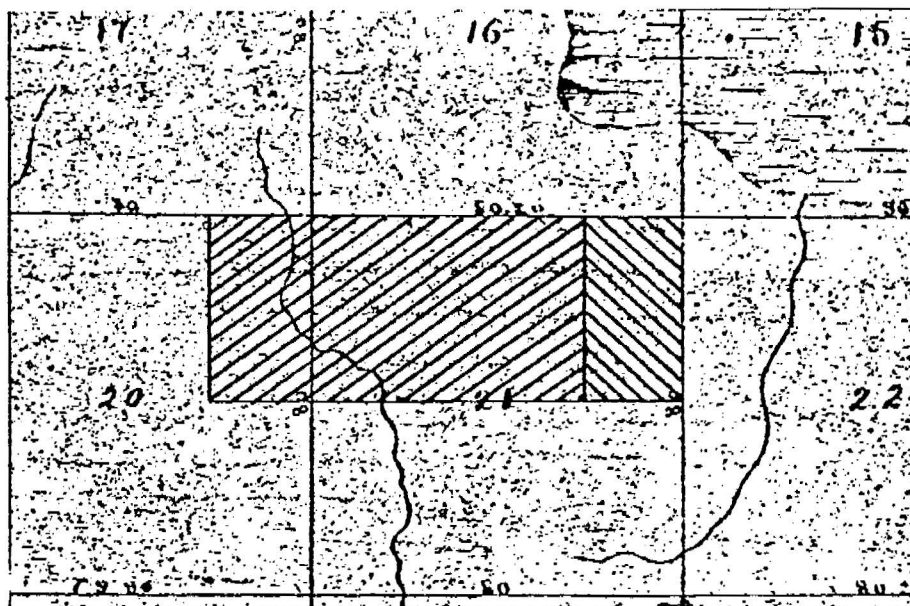
The Gun Range Site remained in the Palmer's possession until September of 1926 when the Palmer Corporation conveyed 3,080 acres to Col. Jacob Ruppert, a resident of the Panama Canal Zone, for a consideration of \$184,800. The Gun Range Site lay within this acreage.

It is unlikely that Col. Ruppert ever visited his Sarasota property. His Florida land holdings were managed by Ray Dugan of St. Petersburg. Col. Ruppert is significant in the history of the Gun Range Site as being the landholder who brought together the two separate parcels that make up the tract today.

In October of 1933 Col. Ruppert bought the tract formerly owned by J.H. Lord & Company from Lewis T. Wray, Special Master in Chancery, as the owners had failed to maintain their tax payments during the depression. The deed granted to Ruppert 920 acres for a consideration of \$5,000. At this time Ruppert owned substantial acreage in the Cowpen Slough area.



A portion of the first map drawn of newly created Sarasota County in 1921. The Gun Range Site is outlined in red.



Tract purchased by Ruppert in 1926 from
Palmer Corporation



Tract purchased by Ruppert in 1933 from
Lewis T. Wray, Special Master in Chancery.

After the death of Col. Ruppert in the late 1930's his Sarasota County property was disposed of by Ray Dugan, executor of his estate.

On August 6th, 1941 Ray Dugan conveyed to Mr. Fred House of Sarasota considerable acreage in the Cowpen Slough area. Included in the transaction was the property known today as the Gun Range Site.

On June 23rd , 1945 Fred House conveyed to Mr. & Mrs. C.A. Stukins and Mr. & Mrs. E.J. Ewing of Detroit, Michigan, over 4,000 acres for an undisclosed sum. The deed conveyed a half interest to the Stukins and a half interest to the Ewings. This transaction included the Gun Range Site.

On June 25th, 1948 Mr. & Mrs. C.A. Stukins conveyed their one half interest in the parcel to Mr. & Mrs. Ewing for an undisclosed sum.

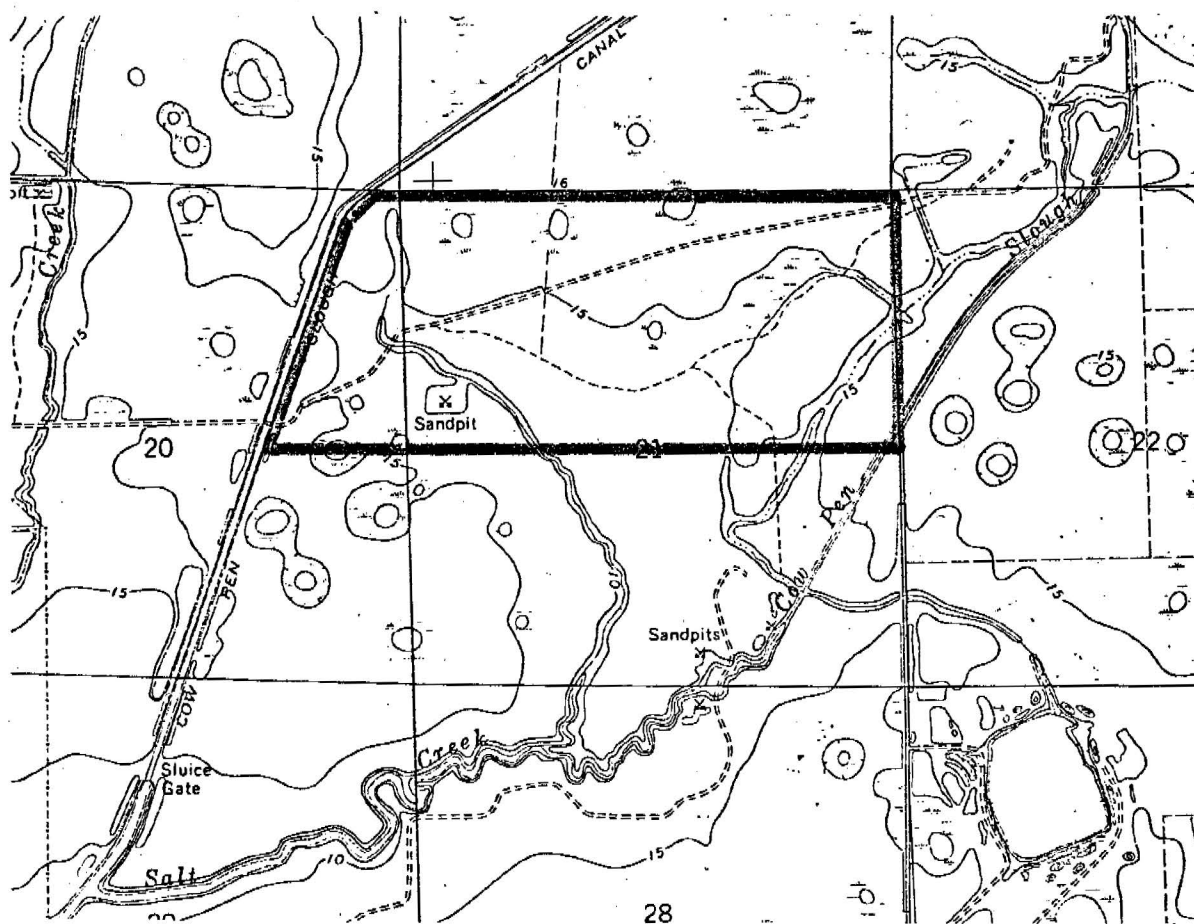
Mr. Ewing named his property the Shakit Creek Ranch. Between 1945 and 1958 the tract was used primarily for raising Hereford cattle. In 1958 when Sarasota County taxes were re-evaluated Mr. Ewing began developing a subdivision named Mission Valley Estates to the west of the Gun Range Site. Mr. Ewing realized that the property had simply become too valuable for ranch land.

In 1959 planning was begun on the Sarasota West Coast Watershed project. The project focused on channelizing the Cowpen Slough to provide flood relief for the agricultural lands adjacent to the slough. Phase I of the project began in October of 1963. Phase I extended from south of Laurel Road approximately two miles to the north. It included a dam with flood gates at Shaket Creek and at the Ewing bridge. The project was executed by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, and was paid for both by the federal government as well as by Sarasota County.

A 1973 U.S.G.S. topographical map shows the improved channel that lies on both sides of the Gun Range Site. The Cowpen Slough Channel drains one of Sarasota County's largest watersheds.

On December 20th, 1968, E.J. Ewing conveyed to Mr. Merl C. Kelce, 1,928 acres of Ewing's Shakit Creek Ranch. Included in this transaction was the property known today as the Gun Range Site. On the same day Merl Kelce conveyed the same property to Mr. Karl H. Schewe for an undisclosed consideration.

On May 14th, 1971 Karl Schewe conveyed the property to Mr. Cody Fowler. Mr. Fowler conveyed the property to the current owners in the 1970's.



1973 U.S.G.S. Topographical map illustrating the channelization of Cowpen Slough. The Gun Range Site is outlined in red.

SUMMARY

Pleistocene animals and Paleo-man were the first inhabitants in the Cowpen Slough region. Settlers did not arrive until the U.S. Government had established surveys of the region in the 1840's.

The first settler of the Horse & Chaise area, today's Nokomis and Venice, was Jesse Knight who arrived with his family in 1868. Coming from Miakka with Shade Hancock as a guide, the Knight Caravan blazed a trail to the Gulf of Mexico with three families, five wagons and over 300 head of cattle. The trail transverses the Sarasota County Gun Range Site. Knight established one of the largest cattle herds in Southwest Florida and is recognized as one of Florida's outstanding cattlemen.

The Gun Range Site entered private ownership in 1883 when it was included in land offered to Hamilton Disston for 25¢ an acre. For fifty years, from 1883 to 1933, the Gun Range Site was split into two parcels with separate ownerships. In 1933 Col. Jacob Ruppert fused the two parcels that remain together today. From 1945-1968 the property was owned by Mr. E.J. Ewing who was the founder of Mission Valley Estates Subdivision.

In 1983 Sarasota County began planning to create a Gun Range Site on the tract.