



PHOTO/SARASOTA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Sewage pipes from some of Sarasota's downtown businesses emptied directly into Sarasota Bay in 1904.

Sewage a pesky problem for years in Sarasota

Waste management has always been an issue throughout Sarasota County's history. As far back as 1900, when Sarasota County was still part of Manatee County, the needs of a sewage system were becoming apparent. The most populated area after 1900 was the town of Sarasota. The issue had been raised by many citizens of the town that something needed to be done. Dr. Jack Halton, prominent doctor in town, denounced the outhouses and cesspools in the business district. As stated in Karl Grismer's book, "The Story of Sarasota," Dr. Halton said that the town's lack of sewers was a disgrace to the community. To emphasize his point, he said that the stench from the cesspool at the Belle Haven Inn, the town's deluxe hotel, was so nauseating he had been unable to finish eating a meal in the hotel's dining room.

Although many agreed some improvement was needed, no system was developed in Sarasota until 1904. Joseph H. Lord, owner of the Sarasota House Hotel, installed six-inch pipes in the alleys behind Main Street. The merchants on Main Street could tap into the system for a small rental fee. These pipes then ran and emptied into the bay, as shown in the lower half of the above photo. This served Main Street until 1911, when voters approved a \$20,000 bond issue for building a waterworks and sewage system. The business section and central residential section of the city had both water and sewer once the system was complete. The water was obtained from a well drilled at Sixth and Lemon streets (State and Lemon, today). The main sewer line was extended 400 feet into the bay. In 1912, another bond issue passed to expand the water and sewer systems to all of the 1,500 residents of the town of Sarasota.

In 1944, the city of Sarasota ex-

panded its water-sewage systems. However, it was not until 1953 that the first waste treatment plant was built. Before the building of this plant, sewage was collected by a system of lines under the south side, downtown and bayshore areas, and allowed to run into the bay at Hudson Bayou and Whitaker Bayou. After the plant was built, pumping stations were constructed near the outfall points at the two bayous and the sewage was pumped to the plant to be treated.

Along with growth in the unincorporated areas of the county, the municipalities of Venice, Englewood and North Port began to develop in the southern half of the county. In 1926, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers laid out the city of Venice but did not install a sewage system. After the Florida land boom ended, there wasn't a movement to install a system until the development of the Venice Air Base during World War II. After the based closed in 1946, the city of Venice tried to pass several bond issues to use the old plant that had been installed by the U.S. Army. It was finally approved in the late 1950's and the old plant was converted to modern use.

At about the same time as Venice was installing its system, the Englewood Water District and the City of North Port were developed. The Englewood district provides water to the entire district and sewer system to a portion of Sarasota County. The City of North Port was developed by General Development Corporation. General Development Corporation, in a 30-year lease, agreed to provide water and sewage systems. In 1992, the City of North Port took over the systems.

From outhouses and cesspools to today's modern waste treatment plants, Sarasota County continues to develop a regional sewage system to meet the demands of a growing population.

Mark D. Smith, archivist

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