

# Sarasota County

COUNTY SEAT: *Sarasota*

POPULATION: 52,800

INCORPORATED CITIES: *Sarasota, Venice, Englewood.*



SARASOTA COUNTY is located in south Florida, on the west coast of the peninsula. Its 396,800 acres are bordered by Manatee, De Soto, and Charlotte counties and the Gulf of Mexico. Sarasota, the county seat, is in the northwest portion of the county, 54 miles south of Tampa and 35 miles south of St. Petersburg, on Sarasota Bay and the Gulf of Mexico.

The county has semi-tropical weather, with an annual average temperature of 71.0 degrees, varying from an average low of 61.5 degrees in January to an average high of 80.1 degrees in July and August. Average annual rainfall is 57.11 inches, with the heaviest rain in June, July, August, and September. Elevation above sea level is 18 feet.

Tourists, agriculture, and commercial fishing are the major sources of income. The principal agricultural activity is truck farming and the leading winter vegetable crops are cucumbers, eggplant, tomatoes, and celery. Staple farm crops include corn, oats, potatoes, sugar cane, field peas, velvet beans, and hays. In 1954 there were 349 farms in the county embracing 196,785 acres of farm lands; 1,040 acres were planted to vegetables. Oranges are the principal fruit, but grapefruit and lemons are also grown to a considerable extent; 3,700 acres were planted to citrus in 1955-56. Watermelons are grown extensively in the county, as are strawberries. The raising of purebred beef and dairy

cattle is also of importance, with 180,170 acres devoted to pasture lands in 1954. Sarasota has a livestock market.

The commercial fishing industry is very profitable in Sarasota County, and production is on the increase. Recent annual figures show that 973,648 pounds of food fish and 24,058 pounds of crabs, crayfish, and other miscellaneous fish were caught and marketed.

There are 208,600 acres of commercial timberlands in the county, 58 per cent of the total county area, and income from this source is of great importance. The shell industry, a lychee nut nursery, and furniture manufacturing from bamboo and palms are also profitable assets to the area's economy. Light industries, including an electronics firm, are located here.

Sarasota County is one of the State's leading west coast tourist centers and thousands visit here annually. About 30 per cent of the income of the city of Sarasota alone is derived from tourists, and the population of the city has increased tremendously because of the great number of winter visitors who become permanent residents. The city of Sarasota is the winter home of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus, and the state-owned John and Mabel Ringling Museum of Art is a popular attraction. The Boston Red Sox hold spring training here.

The Myakka State Park, Museum of the American Circus, the Lido Beach Casino, greyhound races, yacht races, sports fishing, and other attractions are increasing this county's standing as a tourist area. The first golf course in this county was laid out at Sarasota in 1885 and there are three courses here. There are forty-seven churches and three libraries.

Assessed valuation of the county in 1956 was \$86,194,792. Retail sales amounted to \$96,268,000, and banking resources were \$27,984,000. Total annual wages paid in the county in 1956 were \$26,883,358. Effective buying income in 1956 was \$1,644 per capita and \$83,198,000 for the county.

Quail and duck are hunted here. Fresh water bass and bream are caught in the Myakka River. Kingfish, shark, sheepshead, flounder, drum, mangrove snapper, bluefish, ladyfish, redfish, cobia, catfish, mackerel, jack, speckled trout, snook, tarpon, pompano, and grouper are caught in the Gulf of Mexico and the bay.

There are seventeen elementary and secondary schools in the county, with an enroll-

ment of 10,675 pupils in 1956-57. There are 225 hospital beds available. Three daily newspapers, the Sarasota Herald Tribune, Sarasota News, and Sarasota Journal and two weekly newspapers, Sarasota Sun and Venice Gondolier, are published here.

U. S. Highway 41 runs along the coast and Florida highways 72, 780, and 789 enter the county. Rail service is provided by Atlantic Coast Line and Seaboard Airline Railway, and bus service is provided by Tamiami Trailways. Scheduled air transportation is available by National Airlines; chartered air flight service is also available.

Sarasota County was created in 1921 from Manatee County. The name Sarasota comes from an old Indian legend and was applied to a prominent part of the county's shoreline known as "The Point of Rocks," which protrudes into the Gulf of Mexico near Crescent Beach. The name was spelled Porte Sarasota, Boca Sarasota, and Sara Zota on early Florida maps and the exact meaning is not known. Spanish and Cuban fishermen maintained camps here for over a century before the first American settlers arrived here in 1842.

