A Historical Geography of Southwest Florida Waterways

VOLUME ONE

Anna Maria Sound - Lemon Bay
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# Table of Contents

7 **Introduction**

10 **Historical Development of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway**
    10  The Boating Geography of Southwest Florida Before Coastal Development
    12  Dredging History of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway
    16  Dredging of Access Channels and Residential Canal Development
    22  Land and Water Changes Along the Waterway
    28  Land Use and Land Cover Changes Along the Shoreline
    29  Prominent Features of the Boating Waterfront
    37  Photographic Record of Waterway Changes

46 **Inlet Dynamics**
    46  Inlet Locations and Status
    48  Inlet Features
    49  Type of Inlets
    50  Historical Changes

59 **Altering Land and Water for Coastal Development: Venice, Florida**
    59  Physical Geography
    61  Land Reclamation or Waterway Navigation?
    62  Changes on the Waterways and Along the Waterfront

68 **Loss of Seagrasses**

70 **Cortez: A Working Waterfront**

74 **Charting Sarasota Bay**
    74  Historic Methods of Charting
    76  Mid-20th Century
    77  Charting in the 1990s
    78  The Near Future

79 **Glossary**

80 **Scientific, Technical and Boating - Related Information on the Waterways of Southwest Florida**
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About the authors

Gustavo A. Antonini is a professor in Geography. Gus received B.S., M.A., and Ph.D degrees from Columbia University in New York City. He has been with the University of Florida since 1970 and is a recipient of University of Florida Research Achievement Award. Gus teaches courses on remote sensing, aerial photo interpretation and mapping.

Prior to 1988, he worked mostly in the Caribbean and Latin America on natural resource and watershed management issues. Since 1988, Gus has focused on Florida coastal management and marine recreation planning as a Sea Grant senior scientist on policy-directed research and extension education projects dealing with boat live-aboards, derelict vessel removal, hurricane recovery, artificial reef monitoring, anchoring, waterway management and boat traffic evaluations.

Gus has boated in Florida for 25 years and has cruised the Caribbean, Bahamas and U.S. eastern seaboard aboard a Cheoy Lee Cruiserae 35, La Vida, which also serves as a self-contained field station for the waterway research. Gus holds a Merchant Marine Master’s Ticket (100 tons), and is a 25-year member of U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary.

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Paul Roat is a Florida native who has spent most of his life on the barrier islands of Manatee and Sarasota counties. Paul graduated from the University of South Florida with a degree in photojournalism and has spent 22 years writing or editing community newspapers, magazines and books. Paul works with Tom Cross, Inc., a consulting firm specializing in environmental and marine writing and graphics. He is news editor for the Islander Bytander, a community newspaper based on Anna Maria Island.
Sarasota Bay has been described as “Paradise Found” because of the profound natural beauty of the system. The first explorers as well as the first European settlers of southwest Florida were drawn to Sarasota Bay because of the diversity and abundant productivity of the region’s natural resources. These same attributes continue to draw settlers. Whether or not this dramatic area continues to be both compelling and productive has a lot to do with our understanding of the complexity of the Bay system and the ways in which future development can impact the natural environment.

While portions of the Sarasota Bay system have changed little in the past 100 years, in some areas it appears as if society’s primary goal is to see how much we can change nature to meet our needs. Massive dredging and fill projects have reshaped the land and waterways. We have made land where nature did not, and dug waterways in areas nature picked to be seagrass beds.

A historical perspective is necessary if we are to grasp the real effects of this change, for alterations of this magnitude do not happen overnight. Change occurs in seemingly little, yet irreversible steps — a dredging project this year, new waterfront lots the following year. New spoil disposal sites are needed, the vegetation slowly changes and salinity and the natural flushing action of the small bays are altered.

As a society, we have traditionally depended on the geographer and the anthropologist to help us understand that which lies around us in the landscape but which is not readily observable or comprehensible. With this book, author Gustavo Antonini, Ph.D., is giving us a telescope that allows us to look at Sarasota Bay Past as we chart Sarasota Bay Future.

A Historical Geography of Southwest Florida Waterways, Volume One: Anna Maria Sound to Lemon Bay is about the strong relationship between human dreams and the endlessly changing coastal environment. Dr. Antonini unveils the complex story of the past one hundred years of human alterations to this interesting and beautiful area. For those of us who care about the Sarasota Bay system, the historical, environmental, cultural and geographic information provided in this book can help us realize how the aspirations of society can impact the future of this natural resource system. Armed with this information, citizens can do a better job of shaping a future that includes the safeguards needed to maintain a healthy environment and growing communities.

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