



Bird Key/Big Pass 1990



Bird Key/Big Pass circa 1927



Bird Key/Big Pass circa 1885

# A Historical Geography of Southwest Florida Waterways

VOLUME ONE

Anna Maria Sound + Lemon Bay





**Sea Grant**  
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- 2) Perspective view of NOS Chart 11425
- 3) 1927 aerial from the Ringling Museum of Art

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# *A Historical Geography of Southwest Florida Waterways*

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### About the authors

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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.

Margaret Davidson  
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