

Valrico
Long Pond
Middle Valrico Lake
Valrico Lake

5 pgs

The following is an excerpt from:
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY
HISTORIC RESOURCES SURVEY REPORT

Submitted to:
Florida Department of State
Bureau of Historic Preservation

October 1998

Prepared by:
Hillsborough County Planning & Growth Management
601 East Kennedy Boulevard, P.O. Box 1110, Tampa, Florida 33601

* These excerpts have been taken from the Historic Resources Survey Report with permission given by the Hillsborough County Historic Resources Review Board on December 15, 2003. The intention is to help provide targeted historical information on the water bodies in Hillsborough County.

Valrico (Long Pond)

A series of booms and busts best describes the history of Valrico, a community located east of Brandon, sprawled across State Road 60, in Township 29 South, Range 20 East. Several large cotton plantations existed in this region of antebellum Hillsborough County known as Long Pond, with the Spencers, Clarks, and McKays possessing large tracts of lands. The Spencers owned an area west of Lake Valrico, then known as Long Pond, E.A. Clark possessed the region south of the lake, and the McKay family, of Tampa fame, controlled most of the area north and east of the lake. Between the end of the war and the 1880s much of the region sat “dormant” with just a few people homesteading in the area. This would change with the arrival of the railroad and several enterprising immigrants.ⁱ

The 1880s and 1890s were watershed decades for Long Pond. First, and probably foremost, was the arrival of the Florida Central and Peninsular Railroad in 1890. August W. Windhorst celebrated its arrival for he had established a sawmill on the eastern side of the lake, a mile from the tracks. Windhorst, a Missouri native, moved with his wife to Hillsborough County in 1883. Traveling by boat down the Mississippi River, Mr. Windhorst purchased a sawmill in St. Louis which he brought to Long Pond. The railroad allowed Windhorst to ship his material to Tampa and other communities. Consequently, by 1891 Windhorst expanded the mill to include a planing and shingle mill and a grist mill. However, Windhorst's business burned to the ground shortly thereafter, reportedly caused by a disgruntled employee. Not willing to be defeated, Windhorst went on to conduct the first county agricultural survey in 1892, traveling across Hillsborough on a bicycle. Besides the movement of material out of Valrico, the train brought in immigrants, many of whom were from the north. William G. Tousey, a Tufts College psychology professor, was one such pilgrim who moved to this section of Hillsborough County in the late 1880s. He is credited with christening his new community “Valrico.” A Spanish word meaning “valley of gold,” Valrico has the distinction of being the only community in the country with that name. Becoming a Valrico promoter, Mr. Tousey convinced others to move to the community and invest in citrus and nursery cultivation. He established Valrico Nurseries on the western shore of Lake Valrico, and many of his friends owned property around the nursery.ⁱⁱ

Mr. Tousey was so hopeful about his investments that he had an area platted near the lake and began promoting his Valrico village. As part of this era of success, Jesse C. Green established a post office on December 6, 1890. Three years later, Valrico had a population of 100 with E.J. Smith serving as postmaster. Area farmers grew corn, peas, sweet potatoes, peaches, and oranges. Residents organized a Baptist Church in 1893, and by 1896 had established a school with Mr. Windhorst serving as a trustee, replaced by E.J. Yates on August 4, 1896. Mr. Bryan filled the community's need for a sawmill when he built a steam mill for sawing stove wood near the train depot. Valrico's prosperity would not last. The great freezes of 1894 and 1895 wiped out Tousey's nursery and killed many of Valrico's citrus trees. The would be developer's dream of building a town were dashed when Tousey left and his property was eventually sold.ⁱⁱⁱ

For the next ten years, Valrico experienced a period of transition. Tampa-Havana Lumber Company and the Varnadoe turpentine still were the two largest industries operating in the community. According to Mrs. A.L. Porter, a lifelong resident of Valrico, both industries reduced “the region to a wilderness of stumps.” This did not deter new people from migrating to the area. Valrico’s population dropped to 50 in 1911, but by 1914, the Hamner, Miller, Hunter, Van Sant, Humbird, and Phipps families relocated to the region and began developing property along Hopewell Road (State Road 60). These people and others led a wave of new agricultural prosperity for Valrico.^{iv}

In 1911 the Valrico Sand Stone Company operated in Valrico. This company supplied the materials for the construction of the Valrico Civic Center, the bank building, and a new train depot in 1915. The Fugazzi Brothers, a Cincinnati-based company, and the Florida Citrus Exchange opened packing plants around the new depot. The Valrico Improvement Association, organized on November 21, 1913, raised \$3500 by subscription to construct the civic center which still stands today. For several years W.F. Miller served as the association’s president which at one time had 185 members. The association also helped build the Van Sant elementary school and petitioned the county to pave roads leading to Brandon, Plant City, and Tampa. During the same year the improvement association organized, the Valrico Land Company platted Valrico on the southern shore of Lake Valrico. Lovett Brandon erected Valrico’s first general store in 1912 where residents could purchase dry goods and pick up their mail. In 1915, the association convinced the government to provide Valrico with a rural route.^v

Three years later, Valrico was described as a prosperous agricultural community:

To the east of Tampa, thirteen miles distant, surrounded by high rolling hills and fertile valleys. Valrico, meaning ‘rich valley,’ is rightly named, as the wonderful vegetable and citrus fruit crops harvested in the section amply testify. Almost fifteen hundred acres of citrus fruit trees were set out in groves here in two seasons. Valrico claims herself a suburb of Tampa, and Tampa is proud of the affiliation. A good paved road leads from this city to Valrico and it is one of the most enjoyable of the many automobile rides to be taken. This section, if for no other reason, justifies the time spent in visiting it by the agricultural development it presents to prospective settlers in Florida who wish to see at first hand the methods employed in bringing the wild land of Florida under cultivation. The town may also be reached by Seaboard Air Line railway.^{vi}

Lovic Brandon still served as postmaster and operated a general store in 1918. Mary O. Chase managed a large and very successful dairy, while W.F. Miller managed the Valrico Land Company. Reflecting the importance of agriculture to the community, Samuel R. Van Sant sold farm mortgages and the Florida Orange Growers’ Association, the Grape Fruit Growers’ Association, Phipps & Humbird (fruit growers), and the Fugazzi Brothers (fruit growers) all operated in Valrico. To support all of these fruit growers’ associations and packing plants, reportedly 3000 acres had been planted with nearly 150,000 citrus trees. The community’s prosperity continued through to the mid-1920s where Valrico’s

businesses grew and its population increased to 75. Bert and Ray Porter bought out Lovic Brandon's general store, renaming it Porter Brothers. Not only did the number of businesses increase, but the types, with a nursery, a well borer, a stock breeder, a restaurant, a hotel, a garage, and several citrus growers associations all operating in Valrico.^{vii}

Valrico's success would not last forever. The community could not defend itself against Florida's plummeting land values and the stock market crash. By 1935 Valrico's population increased to 100, but only the two citrus packing plants and the Porter general store continued to conduct business, surviving off the region's truck and citrus farmers. Eventually, even the packing plants closed their doors, with some people moving back to their former homes in the north. This did not keep Valrico down, for 1496 people called Valrico home in 1945. When State Road 60 was paved and connected to Adamo Drive in Tampa in the mid-1950s, Valrico's growth continued as Tampanians fled the city for a suburban/rural lifestyle. By 1986 the community's post office served 6500 families living between Sydney Road to the north and the Alafia River to the south, including those people living in Bloomingdale. Today, Valrico is a mix of residential, agricultural, and retail with approximately 11,000 people residing in the greater Valrico area.^{viii}

i. Bailey, "A Study of Hillsborough County's History, Legend, and Folk Lore, with Implications for the Curriculum," 130; Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Eastern States, "General Land Office, Automated Records Project, Pre-1908 Homestead and Cash Entry Patents."

ii. Bailey, "A Study of Hillsborough County's History, Legend, and Folk Lore, with Implications for the Curriculum," 130; Bruton and Bailey, *Plant City*, 100-101; Mark Fisher, "Valrico," *East Hillsborough Tribune* August 29, 1974, 12F; D.B. McKay, "Record of Williams Family Published in Book Form," *Tampa Tribune* November 29, 1953, 12C; D.B. McKay, "A.W. Windhorst Set Up Valrico Sawmill in '83," *Tampa Tribune* December 18, 1955, 20C; Morris, *Florida Place Names*, 244; Mrs. A.L. Porter, "Valrico 'Valley of Gold,'" *Plant City Courier* September 27, 1927. D.B. McKay reprinted this article in the *Tampa Tribune* January 17, 1954, 6C.

iii. Bailey, "A Study of Hillsborough County's History, Legend, and Folk Lore, with Implications for the Curriculum," 265; Bradbury and Hallock, *A Chronology of Florida Post Offices*, 85; Clarke, *The Gate-to-the-Gulf (Tampa) City Directory, and Hillsboro County Guide, 1893*, 210; Porter, "Valrico 'Valley of Gold,'" "Valrico Happenings," *Tampa Weekly Tribune* June 6, 1893, 8; "Valrico Items," *Tampa Weekly Tribune* July 13, 1893, 2; "Valrico," *Tampa Weekly Tribune* August 10, 1893, 1; "Valrico Doings," *Tampa Weekly Tribune* October 13, 1893, 5; *When History was in the Making*, 11.

iv. *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1911-1912*, 478; Leland Hawes, "Burks Hamner Promoted Tampa Along with Sales," *Tampa Tribune* February 4, 1990, 8H; Porter, "Valrico 'Valley of Gold.'"

v. Ibid.; J.D. Callaway, "Valrico: Small Town Long Gone," *East Hillsborough Tribune* June 18, 1986, 2EH; Charles O'Daniel, "Valrico Depot, Once Bustling, Now Memory," *Tampa Times* October 6, 1971, 9B; Plat Book 2, page 99, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Hillsborough County; Valrico Improvement Association Minutes [1913-1917], University of South Florida Special Collections.

vi. Van Horn, *Rinaldi's Official Guide Book of Tampa and Nearby Florida Towns with Maps and Illustrations*, 204.

vii. *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1918*, 634; *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1925*, 1055; Porter, “Valrico ‘Valley of Gold;’” series of newspaper clippings from the *Tampa Tribune*, the *Tampa Times*, and the *Plant City Courier* in the Valrico file, Hillsborough County’s Planning and Growth Management Department.

viii. Callaway, “Valrico,” 2EH; Federal Writers’ Project, *Seeing Tampa*, 126; Fisher, “Valrico,” 12F; Florida State Chamber of Commerce and Florida Emergency Relief Administration, comp., *Industrial Directory of Florida, 1935-36*, 164; The Planning Commission, *Central Hillsborough Communities Plan*, 6,42; The Planning Commission, *1990 Census Population and Housing by Census Tract*, 7; *The Seventh Census of the State of Florida, 1945*, 31; Janet Taylor, “Times are Changing for Residential Community,” *Tampa Times* October 1, 1976, 1B; Because of the lack of concrete boundaries for most of Hillsborough County communities, I am defining Valrico as falling within 1990 census tracts 122.04 and 132.01.