Welcome
Chito Branch
Mizelle Creek
Owens Branch Creek

3 pgs

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

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Bureau of Historic Preservation

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* 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.
Welcome

Located approximately two miles east of Pinecrest and just south of the intersection of Keysville Road (County Road 676) and Lithia-Pinecrest Road (County Road 640), Welcome’s roots extend back to the last decades of the 19th century. Early homesteaders included James P. Allen, Charles L. Mithcell, Ephram A. Hill, Joshua H. Hunter, Elizabeth Shirley. Mr. Mitchell owned a whopping 439 acres, while the others possessed from 40 to 120 acres. An illustrative example is James Allen who purchased 40 acres in Township 30 South, Range 22 East, Section 34. Buying the property for a dollar an acre, Mr. Allen planted citrus. His venture was so successful that Mr. Allen purchased an additional 40 acres. Mr. Allen has the distinction of naming the community “Welcome,” but why he called it that is unknown. These early homesteaders typically built log houses for their families, but this would change after a lumber mill was built in Welcome. Enough families with children existed in Welcome for a one-room schoolhouse to be established on September 2, 1883 with J.L. Keen, Ephram A. Hill, and a Mr. Bird serving as trustees. While having enough children for a school, the school board drew upon people within and outside the community for trustees. Living in the heart of Welcome, Mr. Hill filed for ownership 120 acres in Section 27 of Township 30 South, Range 22 East in 1891. Mr. Keen also owned property in Keysville, a community to the north of Welcome. With the arrival of a Florida Central and Peninsular Railroad spur line by 1893, Welcome became connected to Plant City and would eventually become a thriving “industrial” community by rural Hillsborough County standards. A grist mill, a lumber mill, a citrus packing plant, and an ax handle and tool manufacturing plant operated out of Welcome during the first two decades of the 20th century. P.H. Varn Packing Company packed their oranges in Welcome and shipped them out by rail. Mr. J.L Rivers arrived in Welcome in 1895 and shortly thereafter built a lumber mill where he also shipped much of material out by rail. This mill supplied the lumber for Tom Q. Jones’ general store which also served as the Welcome Post Office for several years. Malcolm C. Cain created the post office on March 14, 1907, but it was discontinued on December 31, 1911. Three years later, on December 10, 1914, the post office was reestablished. It was again discontinued on September 30, 1916. Elam Bryant began delivering Welcome’s mail when he was appointed a rural carrier on January 15, 1917. Working out of Lithia, Bryant’s route covered twenty four miles, including the communities of Picnic and Welcome. Despite the post office not operating out of the general store, it continued to operate. Eventually the store was bought by J.L. Rivers. His daughter, Verna Rivers, took over management of it in 1946. Welcome continued to prosper, but it would not last. In 1905, the Seaboard Airline Railroad took over operation of the rail line and extended it to Bartow, with passenger service twice a day. Six years later, the first of three Welcome Baptist Churches was built on land donated by James Proctor Allen. By 1916 nearly 100 people called Welcome home. However, during this same year the railroad discontinued service at Welcome because the area’s timber supply had been depleted. Without train service the packing company moved its operation to Plant City. Things became so bad that even the
tracks were removed in 1930. Despite this downward spiral, Frank and Adelson Inc., out of Tampa, platted Welcome City on January 25, 1926, during the height of the Florida land boom. It appears, however, that the boom past Welcome by, for the community never regained its former prosperity.iii

Welcome was close to death, but the community survived. As the county built better roads, people turned to truck farming for a livelihood, growing citrus and vegetables and raising cattle. In 1940 only 1,013 people lived in the greater Welcome area. Fifty years later only 2,936 people live in census tract 139.03, a large area including Fort Lonesome, Picnic, Welcome, and Pinecrest. The community is still predominately agricultural, but many people live in Welcome and work elsewhere.iv

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iv. “Death Takes Granny Weeks, 112-Year-Old Matriarch,” _Tampa Tribune_ May 2, 1940, 1; Grabfelder, “Welcome isn’t what it was,” 2B; Leland Hawes, “Wanted: ‘Brother Charlie and Daisy Mae’ tapes,” 10Baylife; HTHCPB, _The Cultural Resources of the Unincorporated Portions of Hillsborough County_, 29; The Planning Commission, _1990 Census Population and Housing by Census Tract_ (Tampa, Fl: The Planning Commission, 1991), 8,13; U.S. Bureau of the Census, _Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population, Volume II, Characteristics of the Population, Part 2: Florida - Iowa_ (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 99. I am assuming that in the 1940 census precinct 64 includes Welcome, for there are few landscape features or place names to derive an exact location from the census maps. If Welcome fell in precinct 63, then the population would only be 675, or in precinct 66 only 518. All of these precincts include a much larger region than Welcome, so the discussion about slow population growth for the community would still be valid no matter which of the precincts included Welcome.