



This document highlights the history of the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in the 20th century from its inception in 1912 to 1999 and highlights the historical events of the years in which they served. It does not include the elected officials that currently hold office. This history serves as an archival record of Pinellas County's history in the 1900s through the lives of its many dedicated public servants.

A History of the Board of County Commissioners of Pinellas County



Pinellas County, Florida

"Serving You Every Day"

FOREWARD

"Time is but the stream I go fishing in," said American philosopher Henry David Thoreau. We as human beings – with the help of our ancestors, family members, teachers and others – go fishing in that stream.

The past survives by a continuous process of selection. It is up to us as a society to preserve this history, that it might give us a sense of security in the foundations of our heritage, and instill in us the courage and confidence to look to the future. Most important, it will enable us to explain to future generations our sense of place and time in the continuum of human experience – the stream, if you will. How can we expect our children to fully understand the long record of human experience and achievement, if all visible reminders of the past are lost forever? How much of what makes our own community pleasant is a product of another era? Our future depends as much on our past achievements as it does on our dreams of tomorrow.

Future generations are here being offered a glimpse of their county's heritage, through A History of the Board of County Commissioners of Pinellas County. The board's successes, along with foibles, have been set forth to ensure a continuous pathway of information from yesterday, through today, and into tomorrow. As Patrick Henry said, "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging the future but by the past."



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sallie Parks". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

Sallie Parks, Chairman (1996, 1999)

Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners

AUTHOR'S NOTE

These are not intended to be, nor are they, the definitive biographies of the members of the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners from 1912 to the present. The effort is to give, in the lives of the commissioners, a glimpse of the history of Pinellas County as it unfolded through their lives and their efforts to bring about the growth and development of the county and its government.

You may notice while reading this booklet that dates are missing for the lifespans of some of the commissioners. Many people researched this information through newspaper clippings, cemetery rolls, anecdotal recollections of relatives, and other sources. This is as complete a record as was possible to set forth. For similar reasons, not all commissioners will have a photograph to accompany their biographies. Also, as the commissioners' terms in office are recorded, you may notice a change in the mid-1960s, when terms went from being listed in odd-numbered years to even-numbered years, according to state documents.

Sue Searcy Goldman

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Sue Searcy Goldman
October 30, 1996
Heritage Village
Largo, Florida

INTRODUCTION



W.L. Straub, in 1907, wrote an editorial in *The St. Petersburg Times* which, many believe, inspired the movement to secede from Hillsborough County and to form a separate governmental entity. An earlier move to secede in the late 1800s was unsuccessful. The editorial cited population numbers in the Pinellas peninsula and gave estimates on the cost of establishing a separate county government. Straub answered the critics who believed the argument that taxes would increase upon division. After presenting facts and figures for a new county, Straub touched on the undeniable realism and the abiding reason for a new county on the Pinellas peninsula. He wrote of the West Coast people “being compelled for all county business to journey across a small ocean and take perhaps two days to transact it... a new seat of government was needed.” Myrtle Schar-Betz tells of sailing with her father from their home on Hog Island with a hull filled with fresh fish and a deck covered with fresh

garden produce. Without refrigeration the contents had to be sold in the first hours of reaching Tampa or be dumped overboard. Taking produce to market and purchasing items

not available on the peninsula was at least a two-day affair.

This involved an overnight trip in the very best of circumstances. Laura Brumby describes a two-day round trip by boat of her menfolks from Safety Harbor to Tampa just to pick up the mail or to transact any business.

John Stansel Taylor, Jr. knew well from his position as Florida state senator representing Hillsborough County, but living on the peninsula, how much power in the Florida Legislature a separate county could wield. With the

help of other interested citizens, among them future county commissioners (S.S. Coachman, F.A. Wood, O.T. Railsback, Jefferson Lowe and L.D. Vinson), he set about convincing the governor, Cabinet, House and Senate of the need for separation from Hillsborough. Since concerted lobbying of other legislators would be needed, Taylor did not run for re-election until he was convinced he had enough support to pass a bill for separation from Hillsborough. Dreams of a new county became a reality in 1911, when the Florida Legislature passed a bill creating Pinellas County, giving an accessible government to people naturally divided by distance.

The present Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners, which meets every Tuesday in a comfortable, well-appointed chamber within the newest courthouse, is quite unlike the first commission appointed By Governor Albert



Gilchrist in 1911. In fact, in their first meeting the original five commissioners divided strongly, but perhaps naturally, between Upper Pinellas commissioners and those from Lower Pinellas. They held their first meeting on January 2, 1912, in the Citrus Exchange Building on Cleveland Street in Clearwater. The dynamics of the meeting may seem rather contradictory to the novice in politics, although it was well known that Frank Wood and O.T. Railsback, both from St. Petersburg, preferred that the county seat be established in that city. They each turned down the nomination for chairman of the commission. This office, which later was to hold great power and prestige, seemed an albatross in the first barrage of propositions and voting. These two, in fact, were to dominate the action of the meeting by motions and seconds until the choice of a county seat was proposed. Then the three commissioners from Upper Pinellas stood together to choose Clearwater as the seat of government. In the very next meeting the city of Clearwater offered property for the site of the first courthouse. The meetings of March 1912 were dominated by proposals for building a courthouse, but not necessarily in Clearwater. In April, a petition by St. Petersburg citizens to have a referendum for a site location was presented to the board. Frank Wood, commissioner from District 1, asked for a motion to accept. Because the three Upper Pinellas commissioners knew the petition contained the possibility of a St. Petersburg site being chosen, they voted 3 to 2 against acceptance of the petition. By May 7th a bid was accepted to build the courthouse on the property offered by the city of Clearwater, and by June 7th it had been finished. Some citizens remember that bonfires were used to light the area so that construction could go on around the clock. It was so hurriedly constructed that the rest rooms were left out, and the jail was immediately too small for its inmates.

In a grand jury presentment in September 1914, the commission was accused of mismanagement of the funds derived from a roads bond issue. A very sweeping indictment accused

the members of using their districts to form enclaves of individual and absolute control over divisions of the county, leading to an arbitrariness of one-man rule in each district. With terms lasting only two years, this autocratic rule could be remedied by a vote of the people. As the terms were lengthened to four years and the commissioners elected countywide, much of the one-man rule was ended. Also ended was the power to practice nepotism and award contracts without advertisement. These changes made it easier to investigate and prosecute illegal favoritism. The indictments of the grand jury were deemed without sufficient evidence in court, and none of the commissioners went to trial.

In the 1944 general election, an amendment to the Florida Constitution was adopted, changing the length of county commissioner terms in office from two years to four years. Commissioners elected from the even-numbered districts in 1944 were to serve for two years; those elected in 1944 from the odd-numbered districts were to serve for four years. Thereafter, the terms were for four years.

In 1964, Pinellas County voters approved a referendum adopting a commission-administrator form of county government, the first in Florida.

Statewide, voters in 1968 approved adoption of a revision to Article VIII of the Florida Constitution, providing for basically two types of county government—charter and non-charter. This legislation curtailed the power of the Florida Legislature, in that special acts relating to a county operating under a county charter are not effective until approved by vote of the electors. As stated in the Florida Constitution, this represents a significant constraint upon the power of a legislative delegation to control its local government and is a constraint which is available only when a county has adopted a charter.

In 1980, county voters approved the adoption of the Pinellas County Home Rule Charter.

1910- 1919

May 17, 1918:

“Mr. T.W. Hartley appeared before the board and requested that it sell him one of the county mules for \$250 on deferred payments.” The sale was approved on condition that the title to the mule reside with the commission until the debt was paid in full (or the death of said mule had occurred).

COMMISSIONERS' TENURE

Soloman Smith Coachman,	1911 – 1915
Jefferson T. Lowe,	1911 – 1915
Oliver T. Railsback,	1911 – 1915
Levin D. Vinson,	1911 – 1915
Frank A. Wood,	1911 – 1915
George Edwards,	1915 – 1921
Charles E. Jackson,	1915 – 1917
Daniel “Doc” Byrd McMullen, ..	1915 – 1917; 1931 – 1935
George W. Stahl,	1915 – 1921
John S. Taylor,	1915 – 1923
B.C. Bass,	1917 – 1919
Edward H. Beckett,	1917 – 1949
George Ward McMullen,	1919 – 1921

SOLOMAN SMITH COACHMAN

The first chairman of the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in 1912, Coachman was born in rural South Carolina. He came to Richland, Florida in 1881 and moved to the Pinellas area in 1886.

In a story about Coachman in the Clearwater Sun (1951), Nancy Meador said, "He had sawed all the lumber for the first unit of the Bellevue [Hotel], for the Verona Inn and most of the big homes on the waterfront."

Coachman purchased the McMullen homestead in 1902. Not content to supply lumber for many of the buildings in Clearwater, he expanded the groves on the McMullen homestead and established a mercantile business in downtown Clearwater, building the first brick structure in that city. It stands at the southeast corner of Ft. Harrison and Cleveland Street. He also established the S.S. Coachman and Sons Packing Company.

Coachman's wife tells the story of living at the Gray Moss Annex in the early years of marriage, but as their children grew and wanted to play in the street, they decided to move to the log cabin on the McMullen property. It was not until 1921 that they built a much larger house. In 1909, S.S. Coachman and Dan McMullen strung the first telephone line (outside the city) from his store in the city to both of their homes.

In 1910, Coachman was among the prime campaigners for the separation of the Pinellas peninsula from Hillsborough County. Leaders of the area met on his front porch to plan the steps needed to push through (in the Florida Legislature) the bill to create the new county. When the news arrived that the bill had passed, the Coachmans sponsored a street dance in Clearwater.

Along with all the first commissioners, Coachman was accused of using official materials and men to build roads to his



own groves. Perhaps Mrs. Coachman's view of his life best describes the man. As she told Nancy Meador, "He was greatly criticized because he had vision and wanted to see this section progress." Coachman served on the board of the Clearwater Citrus Exchange in 1911.

JEFFERSON THEODORE LOWE

The one member of the original five commissioners who exemplifies the earliest pioneers of Pinellas is Jefferson Lowe.

His great-grandfather Gideon had been shipwrecked near Bermuda in the middle 1700s, emigrating to the Bahamas soon after, where he later was given a grant of land. After Gideon's death, his grandson William emigrated to Key West.

William's son, John, (Jefferson's father) first put into the intracoastal waters of Pinellas about 1847. He built a temporary home in what was then Anona (currently part of Largo) and, with his sons, sailed a busy cargo route between Cedar Key, Key West and Cuba. They transported fish, seafood and citrus, and, of course, the mail. In 1859 they came to live permanently in Anona where John, a Confederate veteran, had homesteaded. He donated land for a school, a church, and a cemetery.

In 1883 Lowe took over the post office in Anona, acting as postmaster until 1922. He was appointed to the commission by Governor Gilchrist in 1911, and in 1913 was elected for a two-year term ending in 1915. He lived, worked, and died where his father and mother had homesteaded land before the Civil War began.

Jefferson Lowe was born in 1856 and died in 1952.



OLIVER T. RAILSBACK



Appointed by Governor Albert Gilchrist as one of the original five Pinellas County commissioners, Oliver Railsback represented a growing number of second generation pioneers in Florida. His parents came from Argos, Indiana in 1880. They purchased 40 acres of land near Crescent Lake in the St. Petersburg area, on which they established citrus groves.

In 1902 and 1903, Railsback served as a St. Petersburg city councilman and, in addition to his work as a citrus grower, established the first bottling works for Coca Cola on the peninsula.

After his appointment in 1911, he was elected in January 1913 to a two-year term for District 1. He is remembered as a quiet, capable businessman and planter, who understood the value of roads and sea routes that were accessible to markets of the world – a valuable perception on that first County Commission.

Railsback died in 1926 and is buried in Royal Palm Cemetery in St. Petersburg.

LEVIN DENTON VINSON

Living nearer Old Tampa Road than the other members of the first commission, Vinson may not have felt as great the need for better interconnecting roads. Yet he, too, understood the urgent need for local courts and licensing bureaus.

Vinson moved to Tarpon Springs from Houston, Georgia in 1890 to join his brother, James Martin Vinson, who had relocated to Pinellas County 10 years earlier. The brothers established a mercantile business where they made cigars. In addition to dry goods, buggies, and furniture, they kept a few caskets in the back of the store. Family members had begun preparing bodies for burial as the need arose. In the late 1890s, Levin Vinson established a funeral home, which is today operated by his great-grandson, Dan.

Along the way, Vinson purchased an America's Cup winner – the schooner Madeleine – which he used in a small sponge harvesting trade. After his appointment to the commission in 1911, he served a two-year term.

Vinson died in 1926 and is buried in Tarpon Springs' Cycadia Cemetery.



FRANK A. WOOD



Canadian-born, Frank Wood represented the influx of bright, energetic young men coming to Florida at the turn of the 20th century.

Teacher, bookkeeper, lumber man, and manager of a mining company in British Columbia, Wood came to St. Petersburg, Florida in 1900 at the urging of a friend and partner. In 1905, he established the Central National Bank, building the first brick structure in St. Petersburg.

As if in tribute to the energy and general approbation of Frank Wood, Governor Albert Waller Gilchrist appointed him in 1911 to be a member of the first Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners. Frank Wood's organizational skills were invaluable to the fledgling commission as it chose persons for the official positions of responsibility in that first county government. After serving one term, he was elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 1914.

GEORGE EDWARDS

Born in North Wales, George Edwards came to Vermont with his parents in 1859. After marrying in New Hampshire, he moved with his family to Florida, first to Hernando County, then to Pinellas County in 1897.

Edwards bought a lot on Central Avenue in St. Petersburg and built a two-story building. He lived there for 10 years before moving to his 5-acre property on Ninth Avenue North.

Between 1898 and 1902, he served as a member of the Town Council. In 1903 he became St. Petersburg's first mayor. In addition to this position, he served two terms on the Pinellas County School Board.

In 1915, he was elected to the Board of County Commissioners where he served three two-year terms, part of those as chairman. Serving with John S. Taylor, Byrd McMullen, C.E. Jackson, and George Stahl, he helped to shape the future of Pinellas County in establishing major access routes, building the county courthouse and jailhouse, and laying the foundations of government.

George Edwards was born in 1853 and died in 1941.



CHARLES EDMOND JACKSON



A Virginian at birth, the son of an Englishman from Nottingham, Charles Jackson worked in sawmills as a young man. He came to Floral City, Florida in 1884 to work in the phosphate mines. Later he worked on the Tavares, Orlando & Apopka Railroad. While travelling in Tarpon Springs with his brother-in-law, he found a sawmill for sale and purchased it.

It was while sawing lumber for many of the houses built in Dunedin that he was engaged to cut the timbers for the first Stevenson Creek Bridge in Clearwater. Living near sawmills in Tarpon Springs and Sutherland (now Palm Harbor), and finally at Sunset Point, allowed the family to become acquainted with the children and grown-ups of the northern Pinellas area.

As his children grew to school age, he moved the family in 1909 to the northeast corner of Ft. Harrison Avenue and Turner Street. The girls attended South Ward Elementary and the Old Presbyterian Church (now Peace Memorial).

After a disastrous fire on Cleveland Street, and longing for the country, Jackson bought a large home and grove in Sutherland. He established another sawmill between his home and town, sawing lumber for the gymnasium and the boys' dormitory in the newly-opened Southern College.

In 1915, Jackson was elected to the Board of County Commissioners from District 5. Schools and the growth of the county were prime interests of Jackson. He joined the commission as the new courthouse was being built, and at a time when the improvement and building of roads was a priority.

Charles Jackson was born in 1869 and died in 1959.

DANIEL BYRD McMULLEN

“Doc” Byrd, as he was known, became a very valuable citizen of Pinellas County. Born in 1880 in Clearwater when it was still part of Hillsborough County, he went away to Southern College in Leesburg and attended Florida Methodist College. In 1904, he was graduated from the Atlanta College of Physicians and Surgeons (now part of Emory University). After almost two years of travel he entered practice in Largo. Because of ill health, he gave up his practice, but seemed to have felt able to establish a drugstore and make his deliveries by bicycle. In 1914, he reopened his practice of medicine in Safety Harbor and, in 1915, was elected to a two-year term as Pinellas County commissioner from District 4.

He moved back to Clearwater in 1917 and continued his practice in the city of his birth. McMullen was active in the State American Medical Association, the Order of Masons, the Knights of Pythias, Order of Odd Fellows, Woodmen of the World, and the Methodist Church.

McMullen served two terms as a county commissioner. He was first elected to the board in 1915 for a two-year term, and again in 1931 and 1933 for two additional terms.

Daniel McMullen was born in 1880 and died in 1955.



GEORGE W. STAHL

George Stahl was elected to the Board of County Commissioners during the period of construction of the new courthouse. Minutes of the May 17, 1918 meeting show he approved the bid for furniture in the offices of the commission.

It was a time of growth and refinement of the county's facilities. It was by this same commission (George Stahl, W.E. Taylor, George Edwards, John S. Taylor, B.C. Bass and E.H. Beckett) that unanimous approval was given for an automobile toll bridge linking the mainland on Boca Ciega Bay to Pass-a-Grille (on the island known as Long Key).

George Stahl came to St. Petersburg from Pennsylvania and planted orange groves at a place designated as Stahl's Way.

Photo not available

JOHN STANSEL TAYLOR

State senator, state representative, mayor of Largo, Pinellas County commissioner, president of the Florida Citrus Exchange, member of the State Citrus Commission – John Taylor's willingness to serve was ended by a catastrophic illness. He was returning from an effort (in Washington, D.C.) to further the interests of citrus growers and packers when he became ill.

Joining the commission just after the initial board had been so roundly criticized for its misuse of road bond funds, Taylor led George Edwards, George Stahl, Dr. Byrd McMullen, and C.E. Jackson to a solid, legal process of granting contracts. He served on the commission for eight years. His experience in the Florida Legislature had profoundly influenced and qualified him for administration of public duty and he used this knowledge to press for adequate roads.

Taylor had a vested interest in Pinellas County Government. Not only was he one of its landowners of vast acreage, he owned one of the most successful citrus growing and packing businesses in Florida. He had fought hard and had risked his reputation to make sure the Florida Legislature passed the bill in 1911 for the separation of Pinellas from Hillsborough County.

Having been elected to the Florida Legislature as a representative from Hillsborough County in 1904, he became convinced the Pinellas peninsula needed its own government. He did not run for re-election to the House of Representatives, but lobbied the next session for a bill to form a new county. In



1912, he was elected Pinellas County's first senator to the Florida Legislature. In 1925, he served as president of the State Senate, which at that time was next in line to succeed the governor. John Taylor's influence in the interests of Pinellas County citizens was felt throughout Florida and the nation.

Taylor's parents were early pioneers arriving in the area in 1835. John Stansel Taylor was born in West Hillsborough County (Pinellas) in 1871; he died in 1936.

B.C. BASS

B.C. Bass came to Dunedin in 1910 and in 1917 became the first county commissioner from Dunedin. One of his pleasant duties, while on the Board of County Commissioners, was to introduce and support a petition by 25 voters from Oldsmar for a voting precinct in their community.

Bass opened a real estate office and became an early developer of subdivisions at a time when the Upper Pinellas peninsula was becoming more than farming communities. He served one term on the Dunedin Town Council.

Bass was there to see the new courthouse opened and was present to hear the praise given by the grand jury of 1918 to the commission for the beautiful condition of the new courthouse. As if to fulfill its duty as an investigative body, the grand jury also criticized, and suggested changes in, the plumbing inside the jailhouse.

B.C. Bass was born in 1884 and died in 1957.

EDWARD H. BECKETT



A native Floridian born in Clearwater in 1882, Edward Beckett knew the district in which he was elected. He had moved to Tarpon Springs, the heart of District 5, in 1901. He worked side by side with Levin Denton Vinson, in Vinson's general store.

After opening his own clothing store, Beckett expanded his business to various branches in the state. Then in 1929, in addition to managing his 53-acre orange grove and his 8-acre truck farm, he opened a real estate and insurance business in Tarpon Springs.

Beckett had served as city councilman in Tarpon Springs and as chief of police in Clearwater before being elected to the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in 1916. He was a divisionist and had been active in pushing secession from Hillsborough County. For 32 years on the County Commission, 16 of those as chairman, he led the push for public parks and efficient water systems. In the minutes of the commission meetings, Beckett often voted for new roads and for paving of those already constructed. While serving as chairman, his favorite saying was, "It's all right to disagree, but let's not fall out over it."

Beckett was an Elk, Odd Fellow, member of the Knights of Pythias, and served for several years as president of the Tarpon Springs Chamber of Commerce. He was a director of the First National Bank of Commerce in Tarpon Springs.

Edward Beckett was born in 1882 and died in 1962.

GEORGE WARD McMULLEN

Ward McMullen, as he was known by all his family and friends, was primarily a cattle rancher. One of several ranchers on the peninsula, he shipped cattle to Cuba, and was the first person to apply for a permit to sell beef in the city of Clearwater. In an interview with Philla Holmes of the Clearwater Sun (Oct. 29, 1965, Mailaway) he described the loading of ships, "The cattle were taken from the shipping pens area, now known as Bayview, where they swam to boats and were hoisted aboard."

On his 80-acre tract of land near McMullen-Booth Road, McMullen raised sugar cane and citrus. He built his own sugar mill (for making syrup) and sawmill. Although the land was given to him by his father, James Parramore McMullen (Captain Jim), the land originally belonged to his great-grandfather, William Taylor, who had raised cotton on it in the early 1800s.

Ward McMullen was born in 1870 in the log cabin built by his father and mother, Elizabeth Campbell, in 1848 at Coachman Station. He grew up in Safety Harbor and Bayview. Although his father had come from Quitman, Georgia, McMullen was sent to Smith Institute in Lexington, Kentucky for his formal education.

Believing, as did his father and uncles, that all privileges carry responsibility, McMullen served as a public school trustee in 1915. He campaigned for a seat on the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in 1919, won and served a two-year term.

McMullen's era saw the continuing construction of badly needed access roads on the peninsula, the land boom, and growth in population. Ward McMullen died in 1966.



1920–1929

E.M. Elliott, a
colorful land speculator,
purchased Weedon Island in 1923.

Envisioning the island as the
Riviera of Florida, he turned the
former Weedon family residence
into a speakeasy that prospective
buyers were encouraged to visit.

Many a person got lost
in the thick woods and
palmettos after a day of
buying property.

COMMISSIONERS' TENURE

John P. Lynch,	1921 – 1927
Reginald H. Sumner,.....	1921 – 1927
Bertie B. Sutton,.....	1921 – 1925
William T. Harrison,	1923 – 1927
William L. Hackney,	1925 – 1929
S. Jack Corey,	1927 – 1929
William B. Harris,	1927 – 1940
Joseph R. Thomas,	1927 – 1937
Maurice B. Thayer,	1929 – 1931
Charles R. Carter,	1929 – 1939

JOHN P. LYNCH

John Lynch was elected to the Board of County Commissioners in 1921 for a two-year term and was re-elected in 1923 and in 1925 for two additional terms.

It was the commission, including Lynch, R.H. Sumner, B.B. Sutton, W.T. Harrison, and E.H. Beckett, who heard countless petitions to construct new roads. In a single meeting on February 7, 1922, there were six petitions posted and approved by the board.

While he was on the commission, authorization was given to build the Seminole Bridge over Cross Bayou. It wasn't accomplished without adjustments. On October 4, 1923, Lynch had the duty of announcing to The St. Petersburg Times that a change of plans for the bridge included the addition of 21 spans. In the years of urbanization of Pinellas County, the Lynches donated to the city of St. Petersburg the five acres of land on which stands All Childrens' Hospital.



REGINALD HUBER SUMNER



Publicity about the beauties of Florida reached Europe not only by news articles and stories, but also by personal accounts of men who had volunteered to serve in the Seminole Wars of the 1840s and 1850s.

Englishmen were drawn to the central Gulf Coast of Florida especially. The Sumners were among the families attracted to Florida. Reginald Sumner was born in Crawley, England and brought by his parents first to Eustis, Florida in 1885, later moving on to St. Petersburg. Here he learned wallpapering and house painting.

By 1908, however, Sumner had sold this business to establish himself full-time in real estate. At one time he owned the Royal Palm Cemetery. In 1922, he erected the first steel building in Pinellas, on the southwest corner of Seventh Street and Central Avenue.

Sumner served as a director of Ninth Street Bank and Trust Company and, with many of his fellow Britons, was a member of St. Peter's Episcopal Church. Sumner was elected to the Board of County Commissioners in 1921 and served along with John Lynch, W.T. Harrison, Bertie Sutton, and E.H. Beckett. As was true of most who owned acreage in Pinellas County, he planted and harvested citrus.

Reginald Sumner was born in 1879 and died in 1949.

BERTIE B. SUTTON

Bertie B. Sutton was elected to the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in 1921 to serve a two-year term. He was re-elected to another two-year term in 1923.

Sutton, a pioneer resident of Dunedin, served on the commission with J.P. Lynch, R.H. Sumner, W.T. Harrison, and E.H. Beckett. In their meeting of June 9, 1922, the board approved a bond issue of \$2,695,000 to pay for hard-surfacing the county's highways. By August 23, 1923, that sum was presented to the voters for approval as \$2,863,030. This increased budget included \$2,597,000 for highways and \$266,000 for bridges.

Sutton was an owner of large acreage in the Curlew Road area. It was he who chose the name Curlew in honor of the beautiful buff-colored, almost pink, birds flying over and often wading in the nearby salt marshes of the area. Sutton gave land for the building of Curlew Methodist Church and Curlew Cemetery where he is buried.

While Sutton was on the commission, a practice was begun which may seem quaint to those of the computer era. One or two viewers were appointed to go out when a request for a new road was made in rural Pinellas. The viewers would observe the area and mark out the best route for the proposed road. Then the viewers would report back to the commission with their findings. If approved, the road would then be built.

Bertie Sutton was born in 1878 and died in 1939.

WILLIAM T. HARRISON



During his early years in Clearwater, William Harrison operated a dry goods store and grew citrus on a large 89-acre grove northeast of Dunedin. He served on the Clearwater City Commission from 1913 to 1915 and again from 1920 to 1921.

Harrison was elected to the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in 1923 and served until 1927. He is reported to have done much to influence the building of the highway along the shoreline in Dunedin (St. Petersburg Times, Dec. 21, 1937). Born in 1879, and an avid hunter most of his life, Harrison died of a cerebral hemorrhage while hunting near Leesburg, Florida in 1937.

WILLIAM LEVINE HACKNEY

Although at his death, William Hackney was living in Safety Harbor, where he had served as town councilman and mayor, he was born in St. Petersburg of pioneer settlers.

Hackney served on the Board of County Commissioners in 1926 with Ed Beckett, J.P. Lynch, W.T. Harrison and R.H. Sumner.

Besides road building, which in the early years of Pinellas County was a constant need, the new courthouse (1917) was already in need of expansion. Criticism by a grand jury, concerning the plight of prisoners in the jail and the shortage of private rooms for depositions and hearings, prompted the commission on June 22, 1926 to award a contract for expansion of the courthouse and jail to B.F. Walker and Sons. (Minutes of Board of County Commissioners' meetings, Book #6, pp.76-77).

William Hackney was born in 1872 and died in 1937.



S. JACK COREY



Chairman of the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in 1929, Jack Corey died on July 16th of that year. A measure of his value to the commission and the county was well expressed by a resolution adopted by the commission upon his death. Corey had been particularly interested in the causeway (and the beautification of it) across Boca Ciega Bay, connecting the mainland with Pass-a-Grille. The commission named the causeway Corey Memorial Causeway in his honor.

Corey was born in Greenville, North Carolina in 1893. Upon leaving business college, he worked at a lumber mill in Norfolk, Virginia until appointed commercial agent for the Seaboard Airline Railroad. Corey was later transferred to Florida, first to Bradenton, then to St. Petersburg in 1916.

In 1920, Corey left the state for a short time, realized his mistake and returned to St. Petersburg to join the firm of Foley Carter Insurance, of which he became vice president, then president.

While on the commission, Corey had the pleasure of announcing the completion of two important projects: the John's Pass Bridge and the county detention home in Largo. The completion of the John's Pass Bridge was especially meaningful to him since he served as president and director of the Gulf Coast Scenic Highway Association.

WILLIAM B. HARRIS

William Harris was elected to the Board of County Commissioners in a period of rapid development in Pinellas County. Roads were now connecting all parts of the county, but many of the roads were not yet hard-surfaced. Road building was Harris' special interest. He knew how they could be built both efficiently and well.

William B. "Bill" Harris served as a member of School District No. 7. His interest in, and faithfulness to, furthering the availability of schools was rewarded by the naming of Harris Elementary School (now Harris Teen Information Program) in St. Petersburg.

Harris was a director of the First Security Bank of St. Petersburg (later Union Trust Bank), a member of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, and of the First Baptist Church.

William B. Harris was born in Suwanee County, Florida in 1873, of parents James and Sarah Lealman Harris, who themselves were born in North Florida. William came to St. Petersburg from Floral City in 1876 with his parents. As an adult he bought 12½ acres on what is now Lealman Avenue and 28th Street. He planted an orange grove and spent the rest of his life there. Bill Harris died in 1940 and is buried in Sunnyside Cemetery.

JOSEPH R. THOMAS



Known in Clearwater as “Uncle Joe,” Joseph Thomas served four terms as mayor. He arrived in Clearwater in 1910 from Sparr, Florida. Thomas operated a grocery store, a Ford dealership, and grew citrus in addition to serving as a city councilman, city auditor, city clerk, tax assessor and tax collector.

Originally elected to the Board of County Commissioners in 1927, Thomas served on the commission until 1937, when he was defeated by John Chesnut, Sr. In a story entitled “Thomas Seeks Renomination” the St. Petersburg Times (March 29, 1936) reported, “During his service with the city [Clearwater], most of the paved streets were put down, and during his service to the county, roads have been extended to all communities in his district which covers Clearwater and southward to the Seminole Bridge.”

Joseph Thomas was born in 1875 and died in 1969.

MAURICE B. THAYER

Maurice Thayer arrived in Clearwater in 1924, where he established the Thayer Motor Company. However, he had first been a realtor and was an early member of the Clearwater Board of Realtors. Thayer was the first Republican on the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners. His only term lasted from 1929 to 1931.

On July 16, 1930, the St. Petersburg Independent stated, "Roads are the most important things in the county." Since 1912, roads had been most important to the fledgling county. The lack of roads limited marketing of the abundant citrus crops and the transportation of cattle.

In 1930, Thayer was part of the commission delegation to Tallahassee to meet with officials of the state Highway Department. Their mission was to ask for better care of the state roads within Pinellas County.

Born in 1887, Maurice Thayer died in 1964.



CHARLES R. CARTER



Carter was appointed to the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners by Governor Doyle Carlton upon the death of S. Jack Corey in 1929. Carter was re-elected to four two-year terms, then in 1938, he withdrew as a candidate for the Board of County Commissioners in order to run for the position of Clerk of the Circuit Court as a Democrat. His comment at the time is interesting: "I am merely an old employee ... asking his employers ... the people of Pinellas County ... for a promotion" (St. Petersburg Times, April 9, 1938, p.5).

While on the commission, Carter became concerned over the deterioration of county roads which had been taken over by the state Highway Department. He felt that these roads needed resealing. Twice in 1930, Carter made attempts to demand resurfacing of these roads by the state.

On July 15th, he was part of a delegation to Tallahassee to attend state Highway Department meetings. And on July 25th, Carter toured the county with representatives from the state Highway Department to examine road conditions.

1930–1939

Grand Central Airport and Sun Haven Movie Studio drew crowds to Weedon Island. Air shows and gala film openings made the island an entertainment center until the government stepped in to claim back taxes. Meanwhile, archaeologists from the Smithsonian Institution excavated the island's Indian shell mounds.

COMMISSIONERS' TENURE

William J. Christie,	1935 – 1941
John Chesnut, Sr.,	1937 – 1953
William H. Belcher,	1939 – 1951

WILLIAM JOSEPH CHRISTIE

William Christie served on the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners from 1935 to 1937 and was re-elected to three additional terms. However, he resigned during his third term to become the postmaster in Dunedin, and was replaced by the appointment of Frank G. Merrin.

A 40-year resident of Pinellas County at the time of his death, Christie came in 1912 with his parents from Asheville, North Carolina. After attending Clearwater High School, he served in World War I in France.

Returning to Pinellas County, Christie established an agency for real estate and insurance, and he became a city commissioner in Dunedin. Minutes of the Board of County Commissioners meetings show that Christie was active on several committees and that he voted consistently for a fiscally sound budget.

Born in 1899, William Christie died in 1952.

JOHN CHESNUT, SR.



“We knew we had the most beautiful county in Florida,” said John Chesnut, Sr. When asked in 1952 what he believed was his most significant contribution in the 16 years (1937 to 1953) he was on the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners, he chose county parks. With Chauncey Brown, Courtney Campbell and Ed Beckett, he helped organize the Park Board. The push for the purchase of Ft. De Soto for a park is attributed to him. The beaches in general were of concern to him; access to and from the beaches was of special concern. Chesnut worked to build the Belleair Beach Causeway and the first Sunshine Skyway Bridge. He worked to make possible the Gulf Beaches water system. After leaving the commission, he would often say that he wished he had gone along with Ed Beckett’s push to buy a mile of beach frontage for \$50,000.

Chesnut moved to Pinellas from Gainesville, Florida in 1923. With brother-in-law Alfred Marshall, he formed an insurance and real estate agency, later known as Chesnut and Chesnut, Inc.

In addition to this business, he managed the Clearwater Municipal Auditorium and the Clearwater Yacht Club. A large family farm in western Hillsborough County kept his boys, John, Jr., Arthur, and Tom, busy when they were not playing sports at Clearwater High School.

Perhaps for future generations, one of his most significant contributions was the purchase by the county of the block on which the courthouse already stood. Today it holds the expanded center for the county’s business transactions.

To honor Chesnut for his 16 years of leadership and interest in the acquisition of land for public use, a large park on Lake Tarpon in East Lake was named for him. Chesnut was a lifelong Democrat. He lived from 1901 to 1987.

WILLIAM HENRY BELCHER

A native of Pinellas County, Henry Belcher served as deputy sheriff (1924-1932) for Roy Booth during Prohibition. He led many raids against rum-runners from Cuba, and in response to those who criticized his energetic arrests as hurting the tourist trade, he said, "I had sworn to enforce the laws and I'd do the same thing again today." (Paul Davis, St. Petersburg Times, Feb. 9, 1967).

When Belcher announced in 1938 that he would campaign for the District 2 seat on the Board of County Commissioners, he had already served as mayor of Largo, Largo city commissioner, and town manager of Largo. In his announcement, Belcher stated that he felt he knew the problems of the county and its people. He won the election and served from 1939 to 1951; he served as chairman in 1941 and again in 1945. Belcher retired to his large groves, cattle ranch and gardens. In fact, he was principally known as a citrus grower. He had served as John S. Taylor's able manager of the Citrus Growers Association for 25 years.

His favorite remembrance was of his father carrying the U.S. Mail by sailboat from Tampa to the post office at Big Bayou. Belcher was born in 1875 in the family home on Pinellas Point. He died in 1967.



1940–1949

Local transportation facilities and hotels were taken over by the federal government during World War II. The proximity of MacDill Air Force Base and the temperate climate made Pinellas County an ideal location for training troops. Many of these military service personnel returned to the area to live after the war.

COMMISSIONERS' TENURE

Drayton Orville Harris,	1940 – 1949
Frank G. Merrin,	1941 – 1947
Andrew E. Potter,	1947 – 1951
Joseph B. Cramer,	1949 – 1949
Edward H. LaVoie,	1949 – 1953; 1957 – 1961
Andrew Guy McEachern,	1949 – 1951

DRAYTON ORVILLE HARRIS

Son of former Commissioner W.B. Harris, Orville Harris became a Pinellas County commissioner in 1940, when he was appointed ad interim following his father's death. Upon completion of his initial term he served three more terms on the commission.

At the time of Orville's appointment he was a paving contractor. Both he and his father were able to advise the commission on one of its greatest needs at the time – road improvement. While roads now connected much of the county, only a few direct routes had been hard-surfaced. Methods of paving and the cost comparisons needed study.

E.H. Beckett, John Chesnut, Sr., Frank Merrin, W.H. Belcher, and Harris struggled with the budget and the needs to produce not only a balance, but a \$193,000 improvement over the previous (1941) budget.

Harris, born in 1913, was a lifelong resident of St. Petersburg until his death in 1981.



FRANK GARNER MERRIN

In 1941, William J. Christie resigned his Board of County Commissioner's seat to accept the position of postmaster in Dunedin. Governor Spessard Holland appointed Frank Merrin to fill the remainder of Christie's term. Merrin was the owner of a 70-acre citrus grove near Elfers, Florida.

Merrin had attended the University of Florida with Spessard Holland and had served in World War I as a field artillery man with the U.S. Army. He continued his military career in the National Guard, retiring as a major. For 17 years he was a salesman of fertilizer for the Wilson Boomer Company in Pasco and Pinellas counties.

Born in 1897, Frank Merrin grew up in Plant City where his father, Captain Francis William Merrin, published and edited the South Florida Courier. After moving to Dunedin, Frank Merrin was elected to the board of directors of the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce.

Merrin came to the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners at a time when negotiations were underway with Tampa (Hillsborough County) for a proposed tunnel under Tampa Bay. He was appointed by the board to the Fish Hatcheries Committee. It was this board which reported on October 16, 1942 in the St. Petersburg Times one of its ten major achievements of the year, "Through hard work and study the board was able to make a budget for the 1942-1943 year, which is some \$193,000 less than the preceding year."

Photo not available

ANDREW E. POTTER

Andrew Potter came from Mount Norris, Wisconsin to Florida in 1926. He lived in Gulfport and it was not long before he was elected mayor (1934-1935).

In 1947, Potter became a Pinellas County commissioner. He worked to take advantage of the sale of Mullet Key from the U.S. Government War Surplus Department for the fantastic sum of \$26,500. In 1964, the fishing pier at Ft. De Soto on Mullet Key was named in his honor.

Another acquisition from the federal government, this time at no cost to the county, was St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport. The all-Democratic commission worked together to secure the airport. Recreation for the citizens of Pinellas was a priority with Potter. He worked hard for catwalks on the John's Pass Bridge, and the construction of both the Belleair Causeway and the Inland Navigation Canal from Ft. Meyers to Tarpon Springs.

Potter lived from 1892 to 1966.



JOSEPH B. CRAMER



Less than six months after taking office as a county commissioner in January 1949, Joseph Cramer died suddenly of a heart attack while on an outing with the Young Republican Club at Sunset Beach.

Cramer came to Pinellas County in 1938 from New Jersey where he had owned a coal yard. He was a chemical engineer and a graduate in combustion engineering from the Anthracite Institute. He also managed hotels in New Jersey and in Florida. He became a registered representative of the New York Stock Exchange Commission and joined A.M. Kidder Company, security dealers.

In November 1948, Cramer was elected to the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners. He proposed the use of voting machines, and they were used for the first time in the spring of 1949.

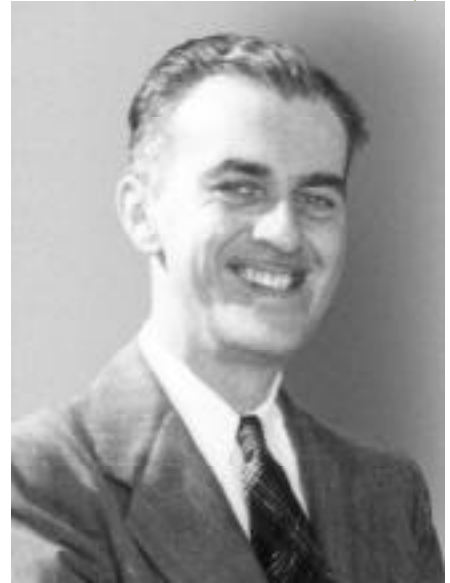
Cramer was born in 1899. Upon his death in 1949, Governor Fuller Warren appointed Andrew Guy McEachern, a Democrat, to serve until the next election.

EDWARD H. LaVOIE

In the post-World War II years, the Board of County Commissioners needed to confirm many of the projects discontinued during the war. LaVoie was elected in 1948 for a four-year term, and was elected again in 1956. From his own long-time experience in construction, he knew the need to consolidate road repair and construction. He fought for centralized purchasing and the establishment of a Department of Public Works.

Born in 1911 in Bridgeport, Connecticut, LaVoie entered the construction business with his parents. He came to St. Petersburg in 1943 and the following year opened his own firm, LaVoie Realty and Insurance Company. He served on the St. Petersburg Board of Realtors and in the Florida Association of Insurance Agents.

LaVoie foresaw the need for an improved water system and fought for it. The present commission continues that fight. LaVoie died in 1985.



ANDREW GUY McEACHERN



Andrew McEachern was appointed to the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners by Governor Fuller Warren in 1949, when Joseph Cramer died while in office. Cramer was a Republican and McEachern a Democrat.

McEachern had been very active in the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce and, while observing government there, he organized a group of 50 to form the Citizens Committee of St. Petersburg. It was McEachern who, by his interest, moved the city of St. Petersburg to form a civil service system of advancement. In 1945, he was asked to implement the system. He served as president of the Florida Association of Civil Service Boards.

McEachern became a member of the state Advisory Council of the Florida Industrial Commission and helped organize the state's Workmen's Compensation laws. In 1952, McEachern ran for state senator from Pinellas County. He was defeated and returned to his insurance business. In his brief two years on the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners, McEachern was highly respected by the other commissioners.

McEachern was born in 1899 and he died in 1981.

1950–1959

Pinellas County experienced a post-war building boom, as did most of the nation. Tourism and industrial growth created a need for a comprehensive approach to managing roads, sewers, and water concerns. The Sunshine Skyway Bridge replaced the outdated Bee Line Ferry Service, and the Gulf Coast Highway (U.S. 19) linked Pinellas and Tallahassee.

COMMISSIONERS' TENURE

Sydney S. Parry,	1951 – 1955
James R. Shoecraft,	1951 – 1954
R. Hosey Wick,	1951 – 1961
Charles R. Fischer,	1953 – 1961
Charles James Wood,	1953 – 1957
Clyde J. Keys, Sr.,	1954 – 1955
Frank R. Hoercher,	1955 – 1959
Evan R. Jenkins,	1955 – 1959
A.L. Anderson,	1959 – 1970
Harry R. Chadwick,	1959 – 1963

SYDNEY S. PARRY

Sydney Parry served one four-year term (1951-1955) on the Board of County Commissioners as a Republican. He served three of those years as vice chairman of the board, chairman of the Belleair Causeway Committee, chairman of the County Patrol, chairman of the Park Board Committee, and chairman of the Merit Board. As a member of the Juvenile Welfare Board he received a commendation award. He became director of the State Association of County Commissioners for three years.

“On a winning team for efficiency and economy...” St. Petersburg Times (April 14, 1954, p.4) quotes this comment by Commissioner Parry, “Pinellas County is growing at an almost unbelievable rate, and with this increase, services and facilities must be increased.”



JAMES R. SHOECRAFT



James Shoecraft first came to the Pinellas area during the Spanish-American War; he never forgot it. In 1914 he returned and settled in Pinellas Park. His affection for the area manifested itself in his repeated service as city commissioner and mayor of Pinellas Park.

Shoecraft was a lifelong lover of plants. Not only was this reflected in his florist business, but also in his service for two terms on the Pinellas Soil and Water Conservation District. He was president of the County Farm Bureau. It is significant that a county fair building and a city park in Pinellas Park were named for him.

Shoecraft was elected to the Board of County Commissioners in 1950 for a four-year term. In a time when drainage of wetlands in the county meant improved health for its residents, Shoecraft fought for the Joe's Creek and Sawgrass Lake drainage projects.

He helped in the creation of Lake Seminole.

James Shoecraft will be remembered for his concerted efforts (both as a city and county commissioner) to extend Park Boulevard so that it tied in with the Gulf Coast Highway (U.S. 19). His concern for the welfare of children is evidenced by his finding time to serve as a trustee in School District 15.

Shoecraft was a Lion, a Mason, American Red Cross member, and member of the chambers of commerce in both Pinellas Park and in St. Petersburg. The Pinellas Republican Club honored him with the Angus Smith Award for public service.

Born in 1883, Shoecraft died in 1954, before the end of his term on the Board of County Commissioners. Charles Fischer said of him, "Jim Shoecraft was one of the most devoted public servants Pinellas County ever had," (editorial, St. Petersburg Times, April 25, 1954).

R. HOSEY WICK

In 1950, Hosey Wick was elected to the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners. He came to the office with excellent experience in business, having managed a brokerage office for Texas oil leases and field supplies. He served as publicity director for the St. Louis (Missouri) Air Board. Wick had owned two hotels in Jackson, Ohio. After coming to St. Petersburg, Florida in 1929, he operated the El Portal Hotel.

Along with Fischer and LaVoie, Wick was determined to break up what he termed the road kingdom and to consolidate the several entities controlling the building of roads into a central department.

Wick was born in 1895 and died in 1983.



CHARLES R. FISCHER



Charles Fischer, whose terms on the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners (1952-1960) coincided with those of Hosey Wick and Edward LaVoie, formed with them the group called the old guard. The three often voted as a block, "consistently outvoting the newcomers," in the words of the St. Petersburg Times, Jan. 6, 1960, p.1B.

Along with LaVoie and Wick, Fischer was particularly proud of forming a new county water system. Water, always a problem in Pinellas, continued to need a revisionary examination as the population grew.

One of Fischer's constant complaints was the need for consolidation of the Road Department from five separate entities into one. With the votes of LaVoie and Wick, he was able to affect a consolidation. Finally, he considered the formation of a central purchasing agency and a modern fiscal and accounting system, a legacy of which he was very proud.

Fischer was born in 1913.

CHARLES JAMES WOOD

Elected to a four-year term on the Board of County Commissioners in 1952, Wood's priority was to reduce taxes. At the time of his election he was president of the Pinellas Young Republicans. One of his goals was to bring unofficial meetings of the board closer to the people and to hold at least two each month.

Wood was opposed to gambling in all forms and, except for bingo in churches and Native American parlors, he was successful in his opposition.

Known as "Jimmie" to all his friends, Wood was born in Cleveland, Ohio. He attended Ohio State University before joining the U.S. Air Force in World War II.

Photo not available

CLYDE J. KEYS, SR.



In 1954, Clyde Keys was appointed to the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners to serve the unexpired term of James Shoecraft, who died while in office. Keys ran for office in November 1954 and was defeated.

A long-time friend of Governor Farris Bryant, Keys was appointed in 1963 to fill the office of Clerk of the Circuit Court when Avery Gilkerson died.

Perhaps of all the commissioners, Keys came to the office with more political and economic power. In a period of time when Democrats in Florida held most offices, he was a powerful member of the Democratic Committee.

Early in his life, Keys had worked as a carpenter and steel worker. In the 1920s he entered the contracting business and set up a concrete plant. His St. Petersburg plant became the largest in the Southeast, obtaining many major government contracts during World War II. He became a millionaire. In 1959, he sold the concrete plants and entered cattle ranching full-time. His ranches were scattered over Pinellas, Hillsborough, Pasco, Manatee, and Jefferson counties.

Keys was born in 1897 and died in 1964.

FRANK R. HOERCHER

Pinellas County Commissioner Frank Hoercher, elected for a single four-year term in 1955, came as a valued county employee. He had served as superintendent of parks for three years. Republicans praised his accomplishments on his job and in his party.

Since Hoercher died in his last year on the commission, his evaluation as a commissioner can be definitive. He was a visionary in his desire to push the board in its plan for growth into a major metropolitan area. As he presented his platform in 1954, improved entertainment for residents and visitors was a priority. An apparent prophet, he felt that freshwater conservation was mandatory. One of his major goals was to establish a graduated scale of wage and salary policies.

Born in 1889, Hoercher died in 1959 while in office.



EVAN R. JENKINS



Evan Jenkins served a four-year term on the Board of County Commissioners, beginning in 1955. He was a strong advocate for the building of the Pinellas Bayway as a relief for traffic on the Corey and Welch causeways. As an aside, he added that it would also contribute to the marketing of St. Petersburg Beach (St. Pete Beach).

Evan Jenkins had been involved in both Ormond Beach and St. Petersburg with hotels before becoming a salesman for an office supply company. His interest in tourism is reflected in his membership on the boards of the State Fair and the Home Show Association. In 1950, Jenkins was elected to the Gulfport City Council.

About the time of Jenkins' service on the Board of County Commissioners, much was being said of the commissioners needing to delegate work to a larger staff and, conversely from its critics, that they were not fulfilling their responsibilities. Jenkins' contention was that the commissioners were not overloaded with work.

Jenkins was born in 1894 and died in 1970.

ALPHONSE LESTER ANDERSON

“Andy,” as Alphonse Anderson was known by one and all, came to Florida in 1946 for rest and to improve his health. A lawyer by profession and a conservationist by choice, he could not stand by for long. He became a commercial fisherman and, in 1954, the mayor of Gulfport.

In 1958, Anderson campaigned for the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners, was elected and re-elected twice. Very soon he was appointed to the Board of County Parks. It was in this position that he would distinguish himself. He was interested particularly in the water routes in and out of Tampa Bay, and the Intracoastal Waterway, promoting the deepening of John’s Pass, the Pass-a-Grille channel, and an alternate channel northerly into Boca Ciega Bay.

As an avid fisherman Anderson saw the need for fishing piers at Ft. De Soto Park, and lobbied the commission for their construction. With the cooperation of the cities of St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg Beach (St. Pete Beach) and Madeira Beach, he promoted the building of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico. He was the recipient in 1966 of the Salt Water Resources Conservation Award. The A.L. Anderson Park in Tarpon Springs honors him.

Providing recreation was not his only concern. Anderson did not believe that youthful offenders of the law should be placed in the same cells as adult offenders. With his persistent pushing, a youth center to study rehabilitation finally was established.

In her obituary of Anderson (St. Petersburg Times, March 11, 1980, p.11B) Romaine Kosharsky quoted Pinellas County Commissioner Charles Rainey as saying, “the fact that Pinellas County isn’t all dredged up and filled in is because of Mr. Anderson.” Rainey continued, as a tribute to Anderson, “He was humble, yet firm, and always had an open mind.”

Anderson lived from 1889 to 1980.



HARRY R. CHADWICK



Photo courtesy of
the St. Petersburg Times

Harry Chadwick sought election to the Board of County Commissioners in 1958, in an effort to build an “expert administrative staff.” He believed the incumbent commission was too involved with minute details, needing to delegate some of its tasks. For instance, he felt that the control of roads should be under the Sheriff’s Office. He believed that good planning could solve major traffic problems. In fact, by 1965, two years after leaving the Board of County Commissioners, Chadwick began a study commission to review all government in Pinellas County and submit recommendations which would not impose on the rights of municipalities. He believed that the findings of the commission and the recommendations might not be popular, and that the commission must have the courage and determination to carry out its mandate.

While serving as chairman of the Board of County Commissioners in 1961, Chadwick resigned the chair in protest, stating that he did not want it recorded that he had been a part of “inequity and mismanagement.” Two of the three commissioners that he denounced were indicted by the grand jury. He spoke out against the Pinellas Bayway bond issue because, as did Alphonse Anderson, Chadwick believed it catered to developers. In this, he was true to his campaign statement of 1958. There he had declared, “I am unalterably opposed to further bond issues” (St. Petersburg Times, Sept. 23, 1958, p.6A). Yet he did urge that a spur road be constructed from the Sunshine Skyway Bridge causeway to Mullet Key so that a toll charge could be used to develop the park.

Upon Chadwick’s resignation as chairman he gave, perhaps, his abiding criticism of Pinellas County Government when he

stated, “God have mercy on the people of Pinellas County” (Dyckman, St. Petersburg Independent, Dec. 17, 1962, p.4A).

In an article written by Martin Dyckman (St. Petersburg Independent, Dec. 17, 1962, p.4A) at the time Harry Chadwick decided not to campaign for re-election, Dyckman stated, “...[his] career [was] born of anger, bred on anger, ends in anger.”

Harry Chadwick was born in 1929.

1960–1969

Space exploration, the Cold War against Communism, and the U.S. presence in Vietnam brought industrial manufacturing growth to Pinellas County. Defense contractors such as Honeywell, Sperry-Rand, Electronic Communications, Inc. (ECI) and General Electric thrived in progressive Pinellas. Road and bridge construction kept pace.

COMMISSIONERS' TENURE

John W. Bonsey,	1961 – 1968
Lloyd B. Hopkins,	1961 – 1964
C. Robert Stuler,	1961 – 1962
Robert A. Freeze,	1962 – 1963
Robert L. Davis,	1963 – 1967
Lewis H. Homer,	1963 – 1964
George Ruppel,	1964 – 1968
Robert L. Weatherly,	1964 – 1968
Charles E. Rainey,	1967 – 1996
George R. Brumfield,	1968 – 1974
William D. Dockerty,	1968 – 1975
W. Edward Taylor,	1968 – 1972

JOHN WILLIAM BONSEY

John Bonsey was only 36 years old when he campaigned in 1960 to become a Pinellas County commissioner. He was elected and in 1964, was re-elected.

Whether it was his youth, or a foresight of needs to come, Bonsey emphasized that, "It is a sacred duty of every elected official to preserve the natural resources that we have today to pass on to future generations."

Bonsey had changed his party affiliation from Republican to Democrat because he was sympathetic to the Democratic Party's social platform. He was active in the Florida Mental Health Association for Retarded Children, the Suncoast Shelter Workshop, and the Pinellas Planning Commission. His own business was the B & B Manufacturing Company (tools and dies). As a younger man he had served in the U.S. Navy submarine fleet during World War II. Born in 1924 in New Jersey near Philadelphia, he grew up on a farm during the Depression.

Bonsey entered the commission at a time when planning and zoning practices were being criticized. He hoped to dispel this criticism by adopting open sessions for decisions on planning and zoning.



LLOYD B. HOPKINS



Lloyd Hopkins campaigned for the position of commissioner on the basis that an honest small businessman could give to the commission good experience in sound financial management (St. Petersburg Times, April 5, 1960, p.16D). At the end of a four-year term, he was praised by that paper (Dec. 23, 1964, p.5B) as “an outstanding citizen who helped lift county government from so-called dark ages to a modern, efficient county government.”

Hopkins was a late comer to Pinellas County. After serving in World War II in Alaska with the U.S. Army Air Corps, he moved to Pinellas Park. As a Republican, he soon became president of the Pinellas Park Republican Club. He was born in Fremont, Michigan in 1921, and had farmed there both before and after the war. In Pinellas, Hopkins established himself as a construction contractor, a much needed business in a rapidly growing community.

C. ROBERT STULER

Born in 1918 in Monongahela, Pennsylvania, Robert Stuler came to Pinellas County in 1945. He had served as a Marine in World War II and became a member of both the Disabled American Veterans and the American Legion.

Stuler established a building and electrical contracting business after moving to Pinellas County. He served as Pinellas Planning and Zoning director before announcing in 1960 that he would campaign for Charles Fischer's seat on the commission, since Fischer was not seeking re-election.

Stuler had served barely a year on the commission when questions were raised about his handling of requests for rezoning. Investigations by a grand jury produced an indictment against him for bribery and solicitation of unauthorized compensation. Governor Farris Bryant, in an unprecedented action, suspended Stuler from the board and appointed Robert Freeze as his replacement. Stuler was tried in 1965 and found innocent of the charges against him, but he was not reinstated as a commissioner.

Stuler died in 1996.



ROBERT A. FREEZE



Robert "Buddy" Freeze was born in Clearwater in 1929. He graduated from Florida Military Academy, Stetson University, and Stetson College of Law in St. Petersburg. He continued his study of law at both the National College of State Judiciary and the National Trial Judges in Nevada. He also organized and was coach of the Clearwater Police Athletic League and was a charter member of the Fraternal Order of Police Association. Although Judge Freeze served as a county commissioner only one year (1962-1963), he gained the respect of all who knew him. In replacing Robert Stulter with Freeze, Governor Farris Bryant had stated the need to infuse trust into the commission for the sake of Pinellas County citizens (St. Petersburg Times, April 24, 1962, p.1B).

Only 48 years of age at the time of his death in 1978, Buddy Freeze had distinguished himself as a lawyer, county commissioner, and judge of the now abolished Civil and Criminal Court of Records. He served as secretary and treasurer of the State Association of Judges of Court Records. Freeze had served as tax examiner in the state comptroller's office, city attorney for the municipalities of Oldsmar, Safety Harbor, and Belleair Beach, as well as board member of the Child Guidance Clinic of Pinellas County.

ROBERT L. DAVIS

Robert Davis was elected to the Board of County Commissioners in 1963, having campaigned for the seat vacated by Harry Chadwick. Davis was re-elected to a second term but died in office in 1967.

A former congressman in Pennsylvania, Davis retired to Pinellas County in 1952. Born in 1893, he had been 25 years with the E.I. DuPont Co. of Philadelphia, then with DuPont Engineering, and finally in real estate and insurance in Ocean City, New Jersey.

After coming to Pinellas, Davis became a county dredge-and-fill inspector and, with his experience in both business and government, decided to run for county commissioner. He often took unpopular stands, for instance, refusing to support a resolution which would have requested that the sheriff simply overlook the playing of bingo and guest games. As a commissioner, he voted against the entire county budget of 1965-1966, believing it required too much in taxes to balance.



LEWIS H. HOMER, JR.



Photo courtesy of
the St. Petersburg Times

In 1963, Governor Farris Bryant appointed Lewis Homer to fill the unexpired term of County Commissioner Robert Freeze. Freeze had just been named a judge of the Civil and Criminal Court of Record. To leave the world a better place when one dies is perhaps the greatest of accomplishments. In their farewell to Homer on August 19, 1981, the editors of the St. Petersburg Times wrote, "The legacy of this man ... is a record of community involvement that can't be easily matched."

Before becoming a county commissioner, Homer had served as mayor of Clearwater, president of the Clearwater Chamber of Commerce, and as a member of its board of governors. In addition to owning and managing Homer Properties, Inc. and Homer Realty Co., he was an active member of almost all of the existing service organizations in Upper Pinellas County.

It was Homer's position as a board member of the Southwest Florida Water Management District which tested his individuality and finally cost him his position on the board. Water use in Pinellas has always presented problems for governing bodies. The county has very limited supplies of freshwater and a growing number of users. Mark Sabelman, in his story of Homer's views on water use (Clearwater Sun, June 4, 1976), said Homer believed strongly in the water crop rule to limit use. The concept of water crop ties the amount of water a user can withdraw to the amount of land he owns. Homer's stand on this issue cost him his position on the Water Management District Board.

Homer did not seek election to the commission after his appointed term, but he left with the respect of those with whom he worked. Lewis Homer lived from 1915 to 1981.

GEORGE RUPPEL

George Ruppel, Democrat, was elected to the Board of County Commissioners in 1964 for a four-year term. He was not re-elected in 1968.

After serving in World War II, Ruppel moved in 1952 to Pinellas Park from Michigan. He established the Modern Tool and Die Company. In 1958, he became president of Pinellas Park's First Park Bank and was, at one time, president of the First Commercial Bank. He was a member of both the Florida Bankers Association and the American Bankers Association.

While serving as chairman of the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in 1966, Ruppel was asked by Governor Haydon Burns to meet in Washington with officials of the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads "for a discussion of the extension of Interstate 4, south to downtown St. Petersburg," (Clearwater Sun, Jan. 12, 1966).

In 1976, Ruppel was appointed by Governor Reuben Askew to both the state Pollution Control Board and to the Southwest Florida Water Management District board.



ROBERT L. WEATHERLY



Robert Weatherly, a Democrat, was elected to the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in 1964. He had previously served two terms as mayor of Clearwater. Weatherly was a member of the Florida League of Municipalities. As a tribute to his capabilities and contributions as mayor, the St. Petersburg Times, on October 15, 1964 stated, "Under his administration Clearwater has built more roads than any other administration." The St. Petersburg Times story continued that the tax line had been held despite many improvements, and that he, Robert Weatherly, believed that his experiences as a city commissioner and a mayor gave him the background needed to work toward good government.

Weatherly left the commission before the end of his four-year term (March 1968) to become the city manager of Safety Harbor.

Weatherly was born in 1919.

CHARLES E. RAINEY

Charles Rainey was appointed to the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in 1967 by Governor Claude Kirk to fill the unexpired term of Robert Davis, who died while in office. He was re-elected without interruption and without opposition through 1994.

After coming to Pinellas County in 1944 from Cleveland, Ohio, where he was born in 1933, Rainey attended the Florida Military Academy, Emory University and the University of Florida. He served two years in the U.S. Army before returning to Pinellas County in 1955.

Rainey became an investment counselor and immediately became active in community affairs. He served as president of the Greater Pinellas County Republican Club, president of the Clearwater Lions Club, chairman of the Upper Pinellas Association for Retarded Children, chairman of the Pinellas County unit of the American Cancer Society, chairman of the Eyesight Seal Fund, and chairman of the 1993-1994 Celebrity Waiter Celebration for the American Heart Association.

In 1964, Rainey was elected to the Florida House of Representatives, where he served until 1967. Rainey served as chairman of the Pinellas County Legislative Delegation, speaker of the house, vice chairman of the Committee on Elections, member of the Committee on State Government Organizations and Efficiency, member of the Judiciary Committee, and vice chairman of the Committee on Ad Valorem Taxation.

Charles Rainey was appointed to additional committees and boards such as the National Urban Affairs Committee of



State Governments (one of four Floridians to serve on this committee), the state Interim Committee on Local Government Efficiency and Organization, a gubernatorial appointment to the Governor's Council of Criminal Justice (Region V Planning Council), member of the West Coast Regional Water Supply Authority, chairman of the Pinellas County Industry Council, chairman of the Tourist Development Council, chairman of the Value Adjustment Board, and chairman of the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in 1969, 1970, 1972, 1974, 1978, 1982, 1986, 1990, and 1993.

On October 17, 1982, the Clearwater Sun, in giving its endorsement for his re-election, stated, "Rainey has been the strongest, smartest, and most politically astute commissioner in recent years ... almost always learning more about what it takes to get and keep the county's business moving."

Rainey retired from a long distinguished career with the Board of County Commissioners in 1996.

GEORGE R. BRUMFIELD

In 1968, Governor Claude Kirk appointed George Brumfield to replace Robert Weatherly, who resigned from the Board of County Commissioners to become city manager of Safety Harbor. Brumfield was, at the time, a Clearwater city commissioner.

Brumfield had been active in youth work for several years, serving as assistant football coach at Clearwater High School, and a leader in the Boy Scouts of America. He was instrumental in the construction of the Bobby Walker Memorial Pool. He was a Mason, a Shriner and a member of the Greater Clearwater Chamber of Commerce. In 1966 he had campaigned unsuccessfully for mayor of Clearwater. He operated a roof coating business and was a real estate salesman.

When Brumfield campaigned for election to the Board of County Commissioners in 1972, an editorial in the Clearwater Sun (Oct. 26, 1972) endorsed him with these words, "...[he] has probably devoted more of his time to county business than any other member of the five-man board." Brumfield served as chairman of the Pinellas Transit Authority and served also on the National Transportation Steering Committee, the Pinellas Traffic Safety Committee, the Pinellas County Planning Board and the County's Tax Adjustment Board.

In September 1974, County Commissioner George Brumfield was indicted and found guilty of taking two \$10,000 zoning payoffs, and admitted taking another \$60,000 to slant his vote on the commission (Steve Kaylor, Clearwater Sun, Aug. 20, 1978). He served 18 months of a seven-year sentence.



WILLIAM D. DOCKERTY



Elected in 1968, taking John Bonsey's seat on the Board of County Commissioners, Bill Dockerty had been an engineer with Honeywell Inc. Dockerty said in his campaign that if elected, he would resign his position or take a leave of absence in order to devote full-time to the commission. Dockerty was active in the St. Petersburg Junior Chamber of Commerce and had served as the legislative chairman of the Young Republican Club of Pinellas.

In 1972, Dockerty was re-elected for a second four-year term on the Board of County Commissioners. It was noted by Ardith Rudinger, in a piece in the *Clearwater Sun*, Sept. 27, 1972, that the Board of County Commissioners had voted, against the advice of its planners, to allow 6,220 living units to be built on 455 acres of undeveloped land, mostly in Largo. This required a vote by the commission to change the zoning from light industrial to residential. Dockerty supported the argument of the developers in this instance.

With George Brumfield and W.E. Taylor, Dockerty became very impatient over the delays in the county's plan to establish a spray irrigation sewer plant north of Palm Harbor. In this plan, the county would buy land "at a reported cost of \$1.5 million" (Bob Prichard, *Clearwater Sun*, April 7, 1972). Improvements to the land would be paid for with federal, state, and local funds.

The two instances were part of a pattern that came under grand jury investigation. Brumfield and Dockerty were indicted for bribery on zoning matters and for accepting bribes to influence the vote of the commission. On October 10, 1975, William Dockerty was convicted of conspiracy to commit bribery. He served less than a year of a two-year sentence.

W. EDWARD TAYLOR

Edward Taylor, born in 1911, was very active in local and national Republican groups, and was elected to the Board of County Commissioners in 1968. He had served as sergeant-at-arms for the 1960 Republican Convention. He was a veteran of World War II and was in the retail jewelry business until 1958. He also served as a board member of Security Federal Savings and Loan Association. Taylor was assistant to U.S. Congressman Bill Cramer for 14 years.

As a proponent of conservation, Taylor opposed dredging and filling waterways under the county's jurisdiction. In 1972, he proposed that requests to vacate county-owned alleys and easements be put in the hands of the Planning and Zoning Department as opposed to the county engineer's office. The commission defeated this proposition.

Almost prophetically, an accusation made in Taylor's re-election bid of 1972 by Patrick Iley, that Taylor had voted for "zoning not in the best interests of the people," was to become fact when, in 1976, Taylor confessed to accepting bribes while he was on the commission (1968-1972). Taylor was never prosecuted because the statute of limitations had expired before his admission of guilt.



1970–1979

Along with commercial growth came residential growth; perhaps most notable was the development of Countryside. As public awareness of the need to balance growth with environmental conservation grew, the county began designating land for use as parks and natural habitat refuges. Heritage Village became a living historical museum.

COMMISSIONERS' TENURE

A. Oliver McEachern,	1970 – 1974
G. Patrick Iley,	1972 – 1976
Clifton A. Stephens,	1974 – 1976
Don M. Jones,	1974 – 1978
Jeanne Malchon,	1975 – 1980
John Chesnut, Jr.,	1976 – 1992
Joseph Wornicki,	1976 – 1980
Bruce Tyndall,	1978 – 1996

ANDREW OLIVER McEACHERN

Oliver and Andrew McEachern became one of the three father-son commission teams to serve in Pinellas County. In 1970, when A.L. Anderson decided not to run for re-election, Oliver McEachern ran and was elected. His father, Andrew, had been appointed in 1949 to the commission and served for two years.

Oliver McEachern came to the commission as a successful banker. He had, sometime earlier, followed his father as chairman of Security Federal Savings and Loan in St. Petersburg, and he continued serving this position during the four years of his term on the commission.

Between 1970 and 1974, much housing development took place in Pinellas County, sometimes to the detriment of the environment. There were warning signs of collusion between developers and some of the members of the commission. Two of the commissioners were indicted for the purchase of their votes on rezoning. As chairman, McEachern had county funds transferred from the bank in which the commission had placed them to banks owned by his friends. He did not seek re-election at the end of his four-year term.

On August 29, 1975, a year after leaving office, Oliver McEachern was arrested for accepting \$1,000 or more for each of five votes favoring the rezoning of land and for lying to the officers who investigated the charges. He accepted a no contest plea, leaving in question his actual guilt. On January 13, 1976, he was sentenced to one year and one day in state prison. He served seven months in Avon Park Correctional Center.

While in prison, McEachern became convinced that he could relieve his guilt only by telling others of the forgiveness offered by God. Upon release he formed a ministry to prisoners, visiting prisons in the United States and Canada.



G. PATRICK ILEY



Having served on the Clearwater Planning and Zoning Board, Patrick Iley felt that growth in Pinellas County must slow down and, that if elected a commissioner, he would work toward reducing population density. He would be a no-growth candidate. In 1972 Iley was elected to replace W.E. Taylor and, in 1974, was elected to the chairmanship of the Board of County Commissioners. Robert Hooker, in his St. Petersburg Times story of Dec. 18, 1974 (p.3B), stated that Iley's stand on lower density "evolved into the commission's managed-growth program." One of Iley's proudest achievements was the effort the commission made to secure the countywide Emergency Medical Services.

In 1976, Patrick Iley announced that he would not seek re-election and, in that announcement, let it be known that when he returned to his real estate and insurance business, he would continue his efforts to control pollution and unbridled growth. On the occasion of his announcement on June 24, 1976, the St. Petersburg Times editorial entitled Keepers of the Trust stated, "He [Iley] has been a stabilizing influence during the commission's stormiest hours, and he is bowing out with the same reputation for integrity and public concern that he brought to the board."

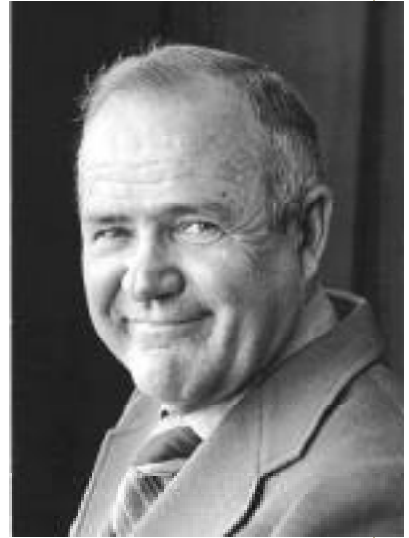
G. Patrick Iley was born in 1938 and died in 1991.

CLIFTON A. STEPHENS

Governor Reuben Askew in 1974 appointed Clifton Stephens to fill the unexpired term of George Brumfield. He was not re-elected in 1976, but received an endorsement by the Clearwater Sun on August 29, 1976 which read in part "...[Stephens] has earned the respect of politicians and non-politicians for his straightforward, if low key, approach to problem solving."

Stephens was born in Tennessee in 1924 and became a teacher and coach in the years before moving to Clearwater. After moving to Clearwater he opened a fuel oil company. He had served on the city commission of Anderson, Tennessee and served three years on the Clearwater City Commission after coming to Pinellas. One achievement he was proud of was the hiring of Merrett Stierheim as county administrator.

Stephens came to the commission after the pay-off scandal which seriously compromised the integrity of county government. Commission minutes indicate that Stephens did not always agree with the majority of the commissioners, and that he sometimes questioned decisions made. However, he retained the respect of all with whom he worked.



DON M. JONES



Don Jones, born in 1926, moved to St. Petersburg in 1956 and established the Don Jones Insurance Agency. By 1963, he was elected to the City Council. He became vice mayor in 1965 and mayor in 1967.

Jones campaigned for a seat on the Board of County Commissioners in 1974. In an editorial dated Sept. 5, 1974, the St. Petersburg Times stated, "In that office [mayor] he gave the city positive and enlightened leadership." As mayor he had been involved in pressing for the development of the Pinellas Bayway. As a county commissioner he was deeply involved in a task force to improve hurricane emergency planning. Community leaders and the news agencies had pointed to this need.

While chairman of the Board of County Commissioners in 1976, Jones informed the municipalities and their officers of the proposed Pinellas County Charter for Home Rule. The charter, if approved, would allow the commission to initiate laws pertaining to its area without first having to go to the Florida Legislature for approval. Although two of the five commissioners were greatly in favor, the charter was opposed by the other three on grounds of bad timing.

JEANNE MALCHON

Born in 1923, in Newark, New Jersey, Jeanne Malchon moved to St. Petersburg in 1952. She was the first woman to serve on the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in the 63 years of its existence. She was appointed to the board by Governor Reuben Askew in April 1975. Governor Askew had twice in nine months appointed Democrats to fill the places of commissioners indicted on charges of corruption. She was elected to her first full term in 1976.

Although Malchon had served 17 years on government advisory groups, this was her first public or elected position in government. In her announcement to run for election to the Board of County Commissioners in 1976, Malchon proposed two solutions to the county's transportation problems: first, upgrading U.S. Highway 19, and second, developing railroad corridors for speed and safety. She also wished to strengthen the managed growth and planning programs.

While on the Board of County Commissioners, Malchon spoke to Steve Kaylor of the Clearwater Sun (March 28, 1979) concerning the Home Rule Charter. "In areas concerning only the county, the municipalities and constitutional officers should take a back seat to the commissioners." With her persuasive participation, Pinellas County voters approved the passage of state legislation providing for a Home Rule Charter.

Jeanne Malchon was elected to the Florida State Senate in 1982 and served until 1992. While there she served as chair of the Select Committee on Aging (1984-1986), chair of the Health Care Committee (1988-1992), chair of the Governmental Operations Committee (1990-1992), chair of the Advisory Council on Intergovernmental Relations (1986, 1990, 1992) and vice chair of the Health and Rehabilitation Services Committee (1988-1992).



She has continued her interest in health care as a member of the State Agency for Health Care Administration Board and as a member of the Pinellas/Pasco Health Planning Council.

Since coming to Florida, Malchon has served as an appointed member of numerous commissions, committees, and councils at the state and national levels, many of which were devoted to health and welfare issues; she sponsored several pieces of legislation and worked for their passage. She has been the recipient of many awards for her selfless work as a volunteer in state and community associations and organizations.

While a member of the Board of Pinellas County Commissioners, Malchon served as chairman (1977), chair of the Affirmative Action Committee (1976-1977), member of the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council (1976-1981), member of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (1975-1980), the Manpower Planning Council (1975-1980), Tampa Bay Regional Transit Authority (1975-1980), the Pinellas/Pasco District Mental Health Board (1975-1980), the West Coast Regional Water Supply Authority (1978-1979), the National Association of County Officials, and chair of the Board of Urban Affairs of the Florida Association of Counties (1978-1980).

JOHN CHESNUT, JR.

To follow in the footsteps of a very capable and charismatic father takes a determined will to be one's own man. John Chesnut, Jr., born in 1926, became just that, an individual without peer.

Chesnut was elected to the Board of County Commissioners in 1976, at a time when the commission was under attack because of the illegal behavior of three of its members. Integrity was a must for the restoration of the public trust. Those who worked with him often used the word trust when describing him. Commissioner Bruce Tyndall said of Chesnut at the time of his death in 1996, "[he was] one of the most predictable and honorable commissioners I've worked with" (Tampa Tribune story by Carlos Moncada, Jan. 10, 1996, p.1, Pinellas).

When Chesnut studied an issue and determined his position, he could not be swayed or deterred. Often, these stands proved to be politically unpopular, as in the case of the county's plan to widen McMullen-Booth Road north of Clearwater. Chesnut was opposed to the building of the Thunderdome (Tropicana Field) in St. Petersburg. He felt fiscally responsible for a bare-bones budget, and believed the taxpayers agreed with him.

During his 16 years on the commission, Chesnut pushed for boating safety procedures, was instrumental in keeping the Coast Guard Rescue Station on Sand Key, and voted to place a temporary ban on fishing and bicycle riding on the bridge of the Belleair Causeway. He also voted to purchase lands in the Gateway area of St. Petersburg so they would not be in danger of development, and voted to clean up the Martin pit and landfill beside the county's Eldridge-Wilde wellfield, among countless other projects of concern.



In the tenor of the times, Chesnut could not win his seat on the commission as a Democrat, so he became a Republican, perhaps lending credence to the argument put forth by some that a commission serving the greater population should be nonpartisan.

JOSEPH WORNICKI

Better communication between the Board of County Commissioners and citizens of Pinellas County was the highlight of Joe Wornicki's years on the commission (1976-1980). In their endorsement of Wornicki for commissioner, the editors of the St. Petersburg Times, in an editorial (Aug. 29, 1976, Sect. F, p.1), said that he "would bring to the commission an aggressive, inquisitive mind which should serve the people well."

As chairman, Wornicki encouraged citizens to call him with their problems. He tried moving the commission meetings to locations away from the courthouse and into communities. He was a proponent of television coverage of meetings before it became a regular event. In a concerted effort to reach the people, he often attended city meetings to learn more about citizens' ideas for government.

Joe Wornicki had been mayor of Pinellas Park and was active on the Pinellas County Council of Mayors. He felt he understood the need for good communication. Perhaps in the same philosophy of government, he pushed for home rule in Pinellas County. He was instrumental in putting together a coalition of community leaders to support home rule.

Wornicki blamed his defeat for re-election in 1980 on his strong stand to outlaw the sale of drug paraphernalia in Pinellas County.



BRUCE TYNDALL



Bruce Tyndall served on the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners for 18 years. Prior to his election to the Board of County Commissioners in 1978, Tyndall served for three years as a Largo city commissioner.

He is a graduate of the University of Florida with a degree in electrical engineering, and is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force. He has an extensive background in management and computerized data processing, having formerly been employed by Honeywell as a design engineer, and by IBM as a systems engineer and marketing representative. In his local business experience, he has owned a computer management firm and a local real estate office.

Tyndall has served on numerous county boards and committees, including the Data Processing Board, the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority, Tampa Bay National Estuary Program Planning Council, Florida Association of Counties, the Judicial Steering Committee, the Public Safety Coordinating Council, the Select Committee on Criminal Justice Reform, the Juvenile Welfare Board and the St. Petersburg/Clearwater Economic Development Council.

1980–1989

Urban growth brought cultural and sporting entities to the county, such as the Salvador Dali Museum, Ruth Eckerd Hall, and the Thunderdome (now Tropicana Field). Environmental education facilities have made Pinellas County an important center for marine science research. Weedon Island, once bustling with activity in the 1920s and 1930s, is now a nature preserve.

COMMISSIONERS' TENURE

Gabriel Cazares,	1980 – 1984
Barbara Sheen Todd,	1980 – 1994;
(see page 105)	1996 – Present
George Greer,	1984 – 1992

GABRIEL CAZARES

Gabe Cazares was born in 1920 of Mexican immigrant parents and grew up in Texas. He could have blended into the background of a multicultural, but decidedly Anglo-Saxon, Pinellas County when he came to this area after serving as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force. Instead, he became a part of the very fabric of the county's life. He still is.

Even before his public service in elective offices, Cazares became known for his concern for people in the community. In 1974, Cazares and his wife were given the David Bilgore Memorial Award for public service. They were lauded for their work in mental health organizations.

Elective office began with Cazares' campaign for mayor of Clearwater. He won his election and served from 1975 to 1978. Not content to aid just the nearby community, he ran for Bill Young's U.S. Senate seat in 1976. He was defeated, so he continued his work as mayor of Clearwater. While mayor, he became concerned over the spread of cults in the nation, and particularly in Clearwater and Pinellas County. For his work in exposing and halting their spread, he was honored with the presentation of the Leo J. Ryan Commemorative Award in 1985.

Cazares was elected to the Board of County Commissioners in 1980, as a Democrat, replacing Joseph Wornicki. He served one four-year term. Although deeply critical of the overly pessimistic reports coming from the Tourist Development Council, he felt it was a very important body and has continued to support the council. In Howard French's article in the Clearwater Sun, June 3, 1983, he quotes Cazares as saying, "Tourism remains our top industry, and more precise data



projections are required so corrective action can be taken to overcome negative trends and patterns.” In the years of his commission duties, Cazares also served on the Florida Commission on Human Relations, the Florida Commission on Hispanic Affairs, and the Governor’s Council on Farmworkers Affairs.

In 1986, Cazares campaigned for the U.S. House of Representatives against Michael Bilirakis and was defeated. When asked in 1996 if he was in retirement, Cazares replied, “No, I am a full-time volunteer.” Besides the boards already mentioned, he is a founding board member of the Deaf Service Center in Pinellas Park and is on the board of the Pinellas Habitat for Humanity. He is a supporting advocate of SHARE, an organization concerned with feeding the needy. In 1955, he received the Advocacy Award from the National Association of Human Rights Workers. He is president of the Tampa Chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens. Throughout these efforts, he has remained on the Educational Standards Commission and is a firm believer in and supporter of the Country-side Lions Club.

With all these honors for humanitarian work, there is a boyish freshness about Cazares’ responses. For instance, he confided that one of his greatest achievements is that he established the national record in 1940 for the junior college two-mile run at Los Angeles City College.

GEORGE GREER

George Greer was elected to the Board of County Commissioners in 1984 when he defeated Gabriel Cazares, a Democrat. In Greer's announcement for the campaign, in a story by Howard French in the Clearwater Sun, June 28, 1984, Greer said, "We must make our beaches more accessible to our citizens. We do not need fences around public parks." This was a project he found important to a growing number of leisure-time athletes, of which he was one.

A runner of marathons, Greer was responsible for planning a run by county officials and others to mark the end of Pinellas County's 75th year Diamond Jubilee Celebration. He personally carried the torch for the first mile.

Greer was born in New York City in 1942, moving with his parents to Pinellas County in 1946. He received his law degree from the University of Florida in 1966 and practiced law in Clearwater.

Very early in his term as commissioner, Greer recorded his anti-stadium stand. In a story by Kelly Carson in the Clearwater Sun, Nov. 28, 1984, Greer said, "I would love to see a stadium, but not with public money ... If we could find something that everyone [on the commission] supports, it would be a 5-0 vote, no question." Greer served as chairman of the commission in 1987 and 1992. In 1992 he retired from his position as county commissioner. He successfully ran and won a seat on the Pinellas-Pasco Circuit Court Bench.



1990–present

Pinellas County continues its commitment to environmental awareness with the dedication of more than 8,000 acres of endangered lands at Brooker Creek Preserve, nationally recognized as an important environmental conservation area. Decades of water wars have spawned the development of alternative sources of water and the creation of regional environmental entities.

COMMISSIONERS' TENURE

Sallie Parks, 1992 – Present
Steven M. Seibert, 1992 – 1999
Robert B. Stewart, 1994 – Present
Calvin D. Harris, 1997 – Present
Karen Williams Seel, 1999 – Present

BARBARA SHEEN TODD

Barbara Sheen Todd was first elected to the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in 1980 and served in that capacity for fourteen years. After a brief interval, she returned to the Pinellas County Commission in 1996 and has served as a commissioner since that time.

Commissioner Todd has held leadership roles, not only with her local board, but also with the Florida Association of Counties, including serving as president, and a member of the state board of directors of the Florida League of Cities. She is past president of the National Association of Counties (the national organization for over 3,000 county governments in the United States). Her local experience encompasses serving on numerous local countywide boards and commissions.

Todd was appointed by three Florida governors to represent county interests in more than a dozen state and national commissions and boards. She was appointed by President Bush to represent America's counties on the U. S. Advisory Council on Intergovernmental Relations. She also served as a member of the Management Advisory Group which advised the National Environmental Protection Agency on water policy issues.

A graduate of Florida State University with bachelor and master degrees, Todd in the past has also chaired the Leon County School Board, worked as an administrator for the Florida Board of Regents, and was the acting assistant secretary for administration in the South Dakota Department of Education.

Commissioner Todd has received numerous awards for her leadership including the John L. Brooks Memorial Conservation Award by the Florida Audubon Society, the Florida



Conservation Association Conservationist of the Year award presented by the Tampa Bay Wildlife Federation, PACE Leadership Award for Advocacy of Children, and was honored as Quality Floridian by the Florida League of Cities. In 1994 Commissioner Todd was designated National County Leader of the Year by the American City and County magazine.

SALLIE PARKS

Sallie Parks was first elected to her position on the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in 1992, and served as its chairman in 1996 and 1999. Prior to that, she was the public relations and marketing director for Mease Health Care. Parks has resided in Pinellas County continually since 1964, except for an extended visit to Japan from 1986 - 1987.

Parks was born in Michigan, where she graduated from Central Michigan University. She has served as the president of the Tampa Bay Chapter of the Florida Public Relations Association and is a past president of the American Heart Association. She is a member and past president of the League of Women Voters as well as a member of numerous other community organizations.

As a county commissioner, Parks has been actively involved on the Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Juvenile Welfare Board, the Pinellas County Arts Council, the West Coast Regional Water Supply Authority (now Tampa Bay Water) and the Tourist Development Council. She also serves on the HRS District 5 Juvenile Justice Board and is a member of the Area Agency on Aging for Pinellas and Pasco Counties. Parks serves on the board of directors of the Florida Association of Counties. She is a graduate of Leadership Pinellas, Leadership Tampa Bay and Leadership Florida.

Parks was appointed by Governor Lawton Chiles to the Work and Gain Economic Self-Sufficiency Program (WAGES), and was one of the founders of Practical Academic and Cultural Education (PACE)/Pinellas. She was appointed to the Florida Greenways Coordinating Council by Jim Scott, president of the Florida Senate.



STEVEN M. SEIBERT



Steven Seibert was elected to the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in 1992, serving as its chairman in 1995. He was re-elected, unopposed, in 1996. In January 1999, he was appointed as secretary of the Florida Department of Community Affairs (DCA) by newly elected Governor Jeb Bush.

With that prestigious appointment, Seibert has come full circle in his career as lawyer, mediator and elected official.

Seibert grew up in Pinellas County and went to Largo High School. He then attended George Washington University (Phi Beta Kappa) where he earned a bachelors degree in philosophy and international affairs. In 1980 he acquired a law degree from the University of Florida. His first job out of law school was as law clerk for the Department of Community Affairs. After serving the DCA in this position, Seibert returned to his Pinellas County roots to work in the County Attorney's office for five years. In 1986, Seibert joined the Johnson, Blakley law firm in Clearwater. He is a certified mediator, having received the statewide Excellence in Mediation Award (1995) presented by the Growth Management Dispute Resolution Consortium, and has gained a reputation for helping solve contentious environmental and land use disputes. Seibert was a member of the Leadership Florida Class XII (1995).

Seibert served as chair of the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council, chair of the Agency on Bay Management and as a member of the Tampa Bay National Estuary Program and Tampa Bay Water Board.

ROBERT B. STEWART

Robert Stewart has been active in Pinellas County, St. Petersburg and Tampa Bay area civic and political affairs for the past 30 years. He was first elected to the Pinellas County Board of Commissioners, District 5, for a two-year term in 1994, and was re-elected in 1996 for a four-year term. Stewart has accepted numerous appointments representing the commission, including serving on the Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Tampa Bay Water Board, the Tampa Bay Community Reinvestment Corporation, the Pinellas Workforce Development Board, the Pinellas WAGES Coalition and the Tampa Bay Partnership.

Stewart served as a member of the St. Petersburg City Council from 1985 until 1994. He served as vice mayor and was elected by the council as the first chair of council under the mayor-council form of government.

Stewart was given the title of “Mr. Baseball” by the council as he was most active in the building of the Thunderdome (Tropicana Field) and the pursuit of a major league baseball team for the Tampa Bay area. He is a past chairman of the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council, former chairman of the Area Agency on Aging, and represented the city of St. Petersburg on the Pinellas Sports Authority, as well as the Tourist Development Council/Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Stewart was president and CEO of the St. Petersburg Family YMCA. For ten years he was vice president of marketing for Landmark Union Trust/C&S National Bank. Prior to these positions, Stewart was vice president for development and college relations at Eckerd College, and held a similar position at Rollins College. Earlier in his career Stewart did news work for WFTV-TV, Channel 9, in Orlando and the Orlando Sentinel-Star.



Stewart is a graduate of Rollins College and the University of Florida. Further community involvement includes president of Citizens for Pier Park, president of the Clutch Hitters Club, founding director and president of the Suncoast Tiger Bay Club, commissioner of the Housing Authority of St. Petersburg, member of the Planning Commission of St. Petersburg, and the first chairman of Abilities Rehabilitation Center Foundation, Inc. He is a past president of the Florida Gulf Coast Symphony and a former director of United Way of Pinellas County.

Because of his leadership and dedication to the community, Robert Stewart has been honored with several special recognition awards from the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce and other civic organizations.

CALVIN D. HARRIS

Calvin Harris was appointed to office on January 28, 1997 by Governor Lawton Chiles to fill the unexpired term of Bruce Tyndall, and was elected to his first full term in office in November of 1998. Harris is the first African-American to serve on the board, and the first Democrat to serve on the commission since 1984.

Harris has lived in Pinellas County for more than 25 years, having grown up in a modest neighborhood off South Greenwood Avenue in Clearwater. He attended Gibbs Junior College and graduated with an Associate of Arts degree in 1965. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of South Florida in 1966. He later attained a master's degree from Northeast Missouri State University in Kirksville, Missouri in 1970 and went on to acquire his doctorate in education from Nova University in South Florida in 1975.

Active in education for the last 33 years, Harris most recently served as provost for Special Programs/International Education at St. Petersburg Junior College. He served as vice president for Human Resources at the college as well.

Harris has been an active member of several boards and councils including the Juvenile Welfare Board, Pinellas Education Foundation, Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority, Public Schools Construction Study Commission and is a member of the United Way board of directors.



KAREN WILLIAMS SEEL



Karen Williams Seel was appointed by Governor Bush in January 1999 to the position of county commissioner, District 1, to fill Steven Seibert's unexpired term until November 2000. In March 1996, she was elected and served as a Clearwater city commissioner until January 1999. Her father, the late Don Williams, served as a Clearwater city commissioner from 1967 to 1975. Seel is proud to follow in a family tradition of public service.

Karen Williams Seel was born and raised in Clearwater. She left for eight years to live, study and work in Gainesville, Florida; Oxford, England; Phoenix, Arizona; Guadalajara, Mexico; Houston, Texas; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Al Khobar, Saudi Arabia. Returning to Clearwater in 1984, she moved to the Countryside area in 1992.

In addition to being on the Board of County Commissioners, Seel is a member of the board of directors for Community Pride, UPARC Foundation, PAC Foundation, Florida Association of Counties, the YWCA Board of Trustees, the Community Traffic Safety Team, Public Technology, Inc, the Clearwater Homeless Intervention Project (CHIP) and Suncoast Tiger Bay. She is also a member of the Metropolitan Planning Organization, Pinellas Planning Council, Pinellas County License Board for Children and Families, Census 2000, Public Technology, Inc., and the Omelette Party fundraiser for UPARC.

Seel is a past president of the Junior League of Clearwater-Dunedin and has also been instrumental in community projects such as the Sunshine Playground at the Long Center, David Mason's Childrens Art Museum at the Dunedin Fine Art Center, Gateway Childrens Shelter at Community Pride Day Care, Education Grants for the public schools, Tampa Bay

Harvest and a Foster Care Recruitment and Parental program.

She holds a master's degree in international management from the American Graduate School of International Management and a bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of Florida.

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