SANTA ROSA ISLAND—A HISTORY (Part 1)

(Jane Johnson)

While Santa Rosa Island may be thought of by some as a relaxing place to watch the beautiful waters of the Gulf of Mexico and Santa Rosa Sound along with a plethora of birds, fish and other wildlife—not to leave out the beautiful heavens above—the Island has been embroiled in historical upheavals from its very formation to current times. This History is not a scholarly work, but hopefully factual and interesting; it will appear in four or more installments in the Newsletter.

The main sources for this history include *Gulf Islands, The Sands of all Time* by Jesse Earle Bowden (1994); www.uwf.edu/archaeology; Microsoft Encarta 97 Encyclopedia; the original lease of Navarre Beach by Santa Rosa County from Escambia County (1956); excerpts from the 1970 Annual Report of the Okaloosa Island Authority; Chapter 75-456 House Bill No. 2307 abolishing the Okaloosa Island Authority (1975); and the Okaloosa Island Leaseholders Association Newsletter of May 2000.

The very formation of the 45 mile (some say 48 mile) long barrier island from Pensacola Bay to Destin's East Pass must have been a sight to behold. Geologists believe that barrier islands in general began to form during the end of the last Ice Age about 15,000 years ago as glaciers melted and the sea level rose. It is believed that Santa Rosa Island was formed some 4000 to 5000 years ago by quartzite river sediment coming from the Appalachian Mountains via the Choctawhatchee River providing our beautiful white sand. But this must have been a turbulent time at the end of the ice age with the oceans rising as glaciers melted pushing the Gulf Islands toward the west and north and storms likely undoing thousands of years work, only for the process to continue. Finally an island formed and the ecological process began. Basic plants such as sea oats provided habitats for small animal forms leading to the flora and fauna we see today.

Only 21 years after Columbus discovered "America" the Spanish came to Florida, the first being Juan Ponce de Leon in 1513, giving the name "La Florida"—land of the flowers. Only 26 years later Diego Malanado, a captain under Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto, anchored his supply ship in Pensacola Bay during the winter 1539-1540. He was most impressed with this beautiful bay. Now we came very close to making HISTORY: Only 19 years later Tristan de Luna founded the first European settlement in the U.S. near Fort Pickens in 1559. Unfortunately a hurricane in 1561 destroyed the settlement and seven of his ships. One ship was destroyed at Emanuel Point (University of West Florida archeological project) and six others thought to be in Pensacola Bay. They called Pensacola Bay—Bahia de Santa Maria Filepino de Ochuse. Only four years later in 1565, St. Augustine was established as the first permanent European settlement in what is now the U.S. So close was our Island to have this honor! Further exploration of our area was neglected for the next 125 years until 1686.

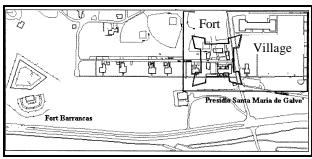
Enrique Barroto's seaman Juan Jordan de Reina rediscovered "Panzacola Bay", an Indian name. But the Spaniards renamed the bay "Bahia de Santa Maria de Galve" in 1693; they also named the Barrancas Coloradas (Red Cliffs) across from the Island as well as the Island: Isle de Santa Rosa (for Saint Rose of Lima) and the west point of Santa Rosa Island, Siguenza Point.

Next the French tried to move in on the Spanish. In 1697 Frenchman Pierre le Moyne de Iberville anchored a five ship expedition off Santa Maria harbor but the Spanish refused entry to the French and the French sailed to Mobile Bay and reconnoitered Dauphin Island off the now Alabama coast, and Petit Bois, Horn and Ship Islands off the Mississippi coast.

The first permanent settlement in Pensacola was established by the Spanish in 1698 at Presidio Santa Maria de Galve which included the building of a wooden fort named Fort San Carlos de Austria. The fortification was built to protect against French intrusion. The site of the first Spanish settlement was unknown until 1986 when Spanish and Indian artifacts were accidentally discovered by electrical contractors on Naval Air Station property. In 1995 the University of West Florida (UWF) Archaeology Institute began the excavation of the Presidio Santa Maria de Galve and Fort San Carlos de Austria.

A small battery was installed at Siguenza Point on Santa Rosa Island in 1719 to further protect against the French, but the French captured the garrison and Spain surrendered. The French transported the Spanish garrison to Havana but a trap there resulted in Spain retaking Panzacola. Spain built a new battery on Point Siguenza named Fort Principe de Austurias and strengthened Fort San Carlos de Austria from land attack. However, the French recaptured the fort. In 1722 a treaty returned Panzacola to Spain but the French blew up the fort and burned

the village before leavde Austria and Santa buried under sand until the artifacts and the UWF. The Spanish Santa Rosa Island, Siguenze some three original from the 1723 the stockade and buildings. A small forwas built on the baywas well for nearly 30



www.uwf.edu/archaeology

ing. Fort San Carlos Maria de Galve were the 1986 discovery of later excavation by built a new fort on Santa Rosa Punta de quarters of a mile Siguenza Point. By town consisted of 35 tification, San Miguel front mainland. All years but in 1752 a

hurricane again struck the Island leaving only two buildings standing. The colony and fort were relocated to the mainland, now to become the Presidio San Miguel de Panzacola. In 1762 another storm washed away what little was left of the Island community.

In 1763 Spain went to war with England but lost Cuba to the British. Under the 1763 Treaty of Paris Spain ransomed Cuba by abandoning Florida, ceding all possessions east of the Mississippi to Britain. Panzacola slowly became Pensacola. The British divided the territory from the Mississippi to the Atlantic into East and West Florida. West Florida spanned from the Mississippi to Apalachicola rivers. The town of Pen-

sacola was shaped around ade, now Seville Square.

During the Revolu-1783) East and West Flor-British. In 1779 the Spandeclaring war against Engond Treaty of Paris ceded back to Spain. Spain ceded

First Spanish	1559-1719; 1722-1763
French	1719-1722
British	1763-1781
Second Spanish	1781-1821

1821-1860

tionary War (1775-ida remained loyal to the ish joined the Americans land. In 1783 the Sec-East and West Florida Louisiana to France. In

the San Miguel stock-

1803 the U.S. purchased the Louisiana Territory from Napoleon and the Spanish fled from the American territory back to Pensacola. However, Florida received little attention from Spain and Andrew Jackson had to invade Pensacola twice due to the Creek Wars. By 1818 President Monroe decreed that Spain either protect and control the Floridas or cede them to the U.S. In an 1819 Transcontinental Treaty (Adams-Onis) Spain renounced claims to West Florida and ceded East Florida to the U.S. (\$5 million). In 1821 Jackson became the American provisional governor; Spanish Florida is now American. (To be continued in February)

Early American

SANTA ROSA ISLAND—A HISTORY (Part 2)

(Jane Johnson)

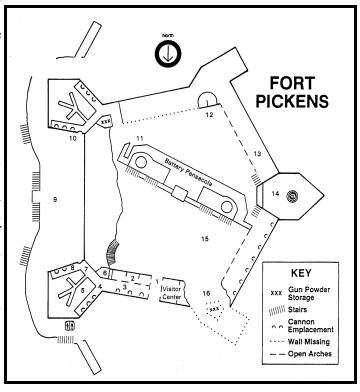
In January we raced you through some 5000 or so years of history from the formation of the Island through possession by the Spanish (three separate periods beginning in 1559 and ending in 1821); by the French and by the British. The Americans took ownership in 1821 installing Andrew Jackson in Pensacola as the provisional governor. (The Territorial Capital was moved to Tallahassee in 1823.)

Soon afterward the people in Pensacola began pressing for a navy yard with the backing of Territorial Governor William Duval. In 1826 Congress authorized the lighthouse and the navy yard installation under Commodore Warrington, the first navy yard commandant. His successor, Commodore Woolsey created two villages, Warrington and Woolsey outside the navy yard for homebuilding.

Jackson among others wanted harbor defenses. Since 1812 the U.S. had relied heavily on forts to deny entry to its harbors by invaders. As a result Captain William Henry Chase of the Army Corp of Engineers was assigned as Chief engineer for the Gulf of Mexico area. He built Fort Pickens on Santa Rosa Island (Siguenza Point) beginning in 1829 and completed it in 1834. He completed Fort McRee on Perdido Key in 1839 and Ft. Barrancas in 1844. The e construction of Fort Pickens was a massive project. To supply most of the 21.5 million bricks, Captain Chase established a brick yard in Pensacola. However, lime, granite, lead and copper were shipped in from Maine, New York, Illinois and Switzerland. The Strong and Underhill Company of New Orleans provided the workforce of skilled slaves. Local slaves were used for unskilled labor. The main entrance to the Fort was reached by a causeway (see diagram below) (1). Officer quarters (2) had fireplaces with marble mantels. Most of the fort consisted of gun emplacements both atop and within the walls. The interior gun rooms (3) are called casemates. Granite semicircles in the floor supported the great weight of the cast iron guns. Vents over the windows dealt with the tremendous amounts of smoke produced by black powder ammunition. Mine chambers (5) were designed to hold about 1,000 pounds of gunpowder each. Three pow-

der magazines (6) held about 250,000 pounds of black powder. The counterscarp wall and dry moat (9) protected the landward face of the fort from direct artillery fire. Bastion A (10) allowed cannon to sweep the dry moat during an assault. This bastion also contains casemates, mine chambers and a magazine. One of two cisterns (12) supplied rain water. To support the weight of the fort on the soft sand of Santa Rosa Island, reversed arches (13) of the foundation spread the weight of the structure. Seven acres of open ground (15) in the center of the fort once provided space to drill and quarter troops.

Changes to the original fort (4, 7, 8, 11, 14 and 16) occurred after the Civil War in reaction to the Spanish American War, a fire, and modernization.



Florida became the 27th state of the Union on March 3, 1845. It seceded from the Union on January 10, 1861. From January 10 to April 12, 1861, Port Pickens played a major role leading up to the outbreak of the Civil War, in the "Fort Sumter or Fort Pickens" drama to see who would start the war. Fort Pickens and Fort Sumter were the only two federal forts in the south remaining under Union control.

Strangely enough, now "Colonel" William Chase, the engineer who built the Pensacola forts would be authorized to seize the forts for the State of Florida. In January 1861 the Federal military presence in Pensacola was minimal; there were small detachments at Fort Barrancas and the navy yard, but Fort McRee had only a sergeant and his wife as caretakers, and Fort Pickens was not garrisoned at all. The only federal army regulars in the area were the men of Company G, 1st U.S. Artillery, stationed at Fort Barrancas. Their commander was First Lieutenant Adam J. Slemmer. Knowing that the seizures of the forts were in the offing, he went to the navy yard on January 7 to talk with Commodore James F. Armstrong, the commandant. While promising to cooperate with Slemmer, Armstrong was under pressure to give up the navy yard to Florida. Slemmer posted guards at Fort Barrancas and shortly before midnight on January 8th, the guards fired warning shots at intruders who ran away. On January 9 Slemmer received orders "to do the utmost in your power to prevent the seizure of either of the forts in Pensacola Harbor by surprise of assault." He and his second in command, Second Lieutenant Jeremiah H. Gilman, evacuated their men to Fort Pickens on January 10th, the day that Florida seceded from the Union. They spiked the guns at Fort Barrancas and destroyed 20,000 pounds of gunpowder at Fort McRee, taking along as much equipment and supplies as his men could transport to Fort Pickens. The men totaled 51 soldiers and 30 sailors detached from the navy yard. The next day southern troops occupied the navy yard. The U.S. flag was lowered and the Florida flag raised. The Union troops at Ft. Pickens were on their own. On January 12 Captain Victor M. Randolph came to the fort demanding surrender. Slemmer refused. On the 15th Colonel Chase made his way to Fort Pickens. Slemmer refused to surrender. The rebels were not eager for the bloodshed of their troops if they attacked the fort. Fort Pickens enjoyed a strong defensive position. Senators Yulee and Mallory agreed and an agreement was struck for a truce as long as the fort was not reinforced. A Federal ship, the U.S.S. Brooklyn arrived off the coast on February 6 but did not land troops. Slemmer was permitted to buy provisions in Pensacola and could use the post office. Slemmer and his troops worked hard to repair the fort and reposition cannon against the "new enemy" across the bay.

On March 4, 1861 Abraham Lincoln was sworn in as the 16th President of the United States. On March 11 the Confederate States of America was formed. On March 12 orders were sent from General Winfield Scott, commanding general of the U.S. Army to Captain Israel Vogdes aboard the Brooklyn to land his Regulars and reinforce Fort Pickens. Vogdes asked Captain Henry A. Adams, senior naval officer, for landing boats, but the captain refused to believe the Pickens truce had been terminated. Had he obeyed, the truce would have ended and this may have started the Civil War at Fort Pickens. However, he requested orders from the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles. A navy courier left Washington for Pensacola with secret orders but a storm delayed their arrival until the day of April 12. And General Beauregard had already fired on Fort Sumter at 4:30 a.m. that morning, starting the Civil War in Charleston Harbor in lieu of Fort Pickens. Fort Sumter was taken by the Confederates on April 14, leaving Fort Pickens as the only Southern coastal fort still in the hands of the Union. (Continued in March).

In addition to the sources that I gave last month, I have also enlisted heavily this month upon the "Fort Pickens Self-guided Tour" Pamphlet and the magazine article in www.britannica.com entitled Civil War Times Illustrated; June 1999, Florida's War of Nerves, by Thomas G. Rodgers.



SANTA ROSA ISLAND—A HISTORY (Part 3)

(Jane Johnson)

Last month we ended with the very start of the Civil War. The war could well have been started on our island had reinforcements been landed at Fort Pickens before the Confederates fired on Fort Sumter. As it was Fort Sum-

ter got the dubious honor of starting the war, only to be taken by the Confederates two days later. Fort Pickens remained the only Southern coastal fort still in the hands of the Union.

Fort Pickens was reinforced by Federal troops on April 12, 1861 and again on April 17 when Colonel Harvey Brown took command of the post. Slemmer and his men remained until May when the exhausted troops were transferred. Reinforcements continued to land and by the end of the summer some 2,000 Union troops were on the island. This included the 6th New York Volunteer Infantry (described as thieves, and plug-uglies gathered from the slums of New York City). Fort Pickens was not only well provisioned, but held a strong defensive position while the forts across the bay were ill provisioned so a standoff continued through the summer. The Confederates now commanded by General Braxton Bragg, suffered measles, jaundice, malaria, and typhoid fever as well as heat, humidity, mosquitoes and bloodthirsty fleas. One incident spurred the Confederates to launch a 1,000 man surprise attack against Fort Pickens in October 1861 (burning the camp of the New Yorkers) but the rebels were soon rebuffed. After a second incident the two sides engaged in an intense artillery duel in November 1861. The Union vessels Richmond and Niagara also took part in the bombardment. The Yankees fired 5,000 rounds of ammunition in two days and suffered very little damage for the 1,000 rounds fired by the Confederates. Fort McRee was badly damaged by the Union and many of the houses in the villages of Warrington and Woolsey were destroyed. There was some damage to Fort Barrancas. Fort Pickens had very little damage and lost two men killed and 13 wounded. Another Union bombardment in January 1862 exploded the powder magazine at Fort McRee making the fort virtually useless. Other buildings onshore and in the navy yard were set afire. In March 1862 General Bragg took some 8000 Confederate troops to western Tennessee (leading to the battle of Shiloh) and the

remaining were evacuated to Mobile on they burned the navy yard and destroyed could. The Federals occupied Pensacola Few civilians remained when the U.S. And at the war's end, Fort Pickens was

But by now the old brick forts rifled artillery developed during the Civil Pickens was reactivated in 1886 to esmall band of Apaches for an 18 month



May 9th. Before leaving Pensacola as many military supplies as they the next day led by the New Yorkers. flag flew once again in Pensacola. still in Union hands.

became obsolete because the new War easily penetrated masonry. Fort ceive prisoner Geronimo and his imprisonment. And in 1898 Battery

Pensacola, a reinforced concrete structure, was constructed in the center of the parade ground of Fort Pickens in anticipation of Pensacola's involvement in the Spanish American War. But Tampa and Guantanamo were used for provisioning instead. And in 1899 a fire in a warehouse area of Fort Pickens reached a magazine containing 8,000 pounds of powder exploding Bastion D. (See diagram in February Newsletter (16)). A hurricane in 1906 erased what little was left of Fort McRee.

In 1890 until the end of World War II Fort Pickens became a U.S. Army Coastal Artillery Post. With the evolution of technology such as rifled artillery and armored warships five reinforced concrete fortifications were built in the Fort Pickens area between 1897 and 1899 and a mine field was prepared for the harbor entrance. But minesweepers and torpedo boats led to the development of rapid-firing cannon. Three such batteries were built between 1898 and 1905. Battery Langdon, finished in 1923 had a massive bunker to protect ammunition for guns which could shoot projectiles 17 miles out to sea. By World War II Langdon's guns were enclosed. However, technology overcame the concept of coastal defense as airplanes, improved sea borne assault tactics, guided missiles and the atomic bomb were developed. Fort Pickens was closed in 1947 after 118 years of service. A navy flying school was established in Pensacola in 1914 and the Pensacola Naval Air Station was born in 1917. (Continued in April).

Until we attended a 30 year anniversary celebration of the Gulf Islands National Seashore at Fort Pickens in January this year I had not discovered how Fort Pickens got its name. Edwin Bearss, former chief historian of the National Park Service was the speaker and told me the fort was named after the Revolutionary War hero, General Andrew Pickens of South Carolina. Fort McRee was named after a Colonel from North Carolina, a hero of the War of 1812.

SANTA ROSA ISLAND—A HISTORY (Part 4)

(Jane Johnson)

THE FIGHT TO PRESERVE THE ISLAND AND THE FORTS OR TO DEVELOP THE BEACHES FOR TOURISM



Another major battle over Santa Rosa Island took place from as early as the 1920's until January 1971 between preservationists and developers. National Park Historians called for preservation of the old forts and the pristine Santa Rosa Island beaches in the 1920s. But the cost of preservation was high, and many also foresaw private development of the beaches to bring in the tourist industry with the building of hotels and amusement parks. While private development occurred at Pensacola and Navarre Beaches and at Okaloosa Island, a Gulf Islands National Seashore was not signed into law until January 1971 by President Nixon, which for Santa Rosa Island included Fort Pickens and seven miles of beach between Pensacola Beach and Navarre Beach. Nearly fifty frustrating years for the preservationists!

The Island was sold by the War Department (with the exception of the Fort Pickens Military Reservation) to Escambia County for \$10,000 in a deed dated April 19, 1929 and amended February 3, 1932. The land was to be used for public purposes, and the county was prohibited from further conveyance of the land except to Florida or the federal government. Prior to Escambia's purchase the island had been U.S. government land since the Adams-Onis treaty transferred Spanish East and West Florida to the U.S. (See January Newsletter, page 7.)

In the late 1920s the age of the automobile was on its way and U.S. 98 was built from Gulf Breeze to St. Marks, 200 miles away. "Camp Walton" (now Fort Walton Beach) leased Tower Beach on the Island from Escambia County for 20 years. Escambia County released three miles of the Island for development at "Pensacola Beach" and by 1931 the first Pensacola Bay Bridge was opened as was the Santa Rosa Sound wooden bridge to the Island; and the Casino opened (at "Casino Beach").

In 1933 the first Brooks Bridge (swing style) was opened in "Fort Walton" (later to become Fort Walton Beach). And in 1934 the Destin East Pass Bridge was opened.

In the late 1930s The National Park Service once again expressed interest in preserving the old Pensacola Harbor Forts. In 1939 Escambia County conveyed the Island (without cost) to the Department of the Interior (except for Fort Pickens) with the intent that the Department would develop the Island as a park and preserve the Pensacola Harbor fortifications. Some clumsy WPA work was actually attempted to preserve the Spanish Water Battery at Fort Barrancus. In 1939 the Santa Rosa National Monument was proclaimed by President Roosevelt. But due to lack of funding and then World War II, nothing was done.

In the early 1940s Florida First District Congressman Robert Sikes (Crestview) became frustrated by the lack of action by the Park Service and because of pressure, accommodated private development of Pensacola Beach and Tower Beach.

In 1941 the Department of the Interior permitted the War Department temporary use of the eastern half of the Island as part of Eglin Field. The U.S. Army Air Corp used the field for early rocket and missile applications and tested a "copy" of the German V-1. The first launch over the Gulf from Range 64 on the Island occurred in October 1944. In 1945 this area was assigned permanently to the War Department.

In 1946 Congress abolished the Santa Rosa National Monument. Congressman Sikes was totally dissatisfied with the National Park Service and he proposed a congressional act to allow the area to be reconveyed to Escambia County and a portion to Okaloosa County, with concurrence of Escambia County.

Thanks to Dennis Mills of the Eglin Air Armaments Center Office of History for researching the dates associated with the turn over of part of the Island to Eglin Field.

THE GULF ISLANDS NATIONAL SEASHORE (GINS)

In 1949 Fort Pickens was put under the jurisdiction of the Florida Board of Parks and the other Forts were under jurisdiction of the Navy. By 1960 Fort Pickens was becoming a ruin. The campgrounds were popular but the structures were crumbling. Another mighty battle was to rage over preservation of the island and the forts.

The scope of the National Park Service was enlarged by the federal government in the 1960s and it seemed appropriate once again to fight for preservation. The Pensacola Heritage Foundation Committee took up the fight along with others. One very important member of this committee was J. Earle Bowden, editor and cartoonist/illustrator for the Pensacola News Journal and author. He said he called Ed Bearss, (who would become chief historian for the National Park Service) and asked "Ed, how do you get a National Park?" As they talked the concept of a National Seashore which would include the historic forts came into being. Congressman Sikes read about the concept and called Mr. Bowden to say he liked the idea. He brought in National Parks Service personnel to study the Pensacola, Mississippi and Louisiana coastal areas. The concept was endorsed by the Pensacola City Council, the Pensacola Historical Society and the Pensacola Heritage Foundation. At first the Pensacola Area Chamber of Commerce approved

of the concept, but were soon overtheir position. Congressman Sikes Mississippi was trying to save Fort that Congressman William M. Colcampaign. However, the anti-forces velopment and some who were just Bowden recently put it, there were pro-Navy and totally anti-federal.) Escambia County Commission and

taken by those opposed and reversed later found that M. James Stevens of Massachusetts on Ship Island and mer of Mississippi would join the were out there too, some wanting deanti-federal government. (As Mr. people in Pensacola who were totally Opposition consisted mainly of the the Santa Rosa Island Authority, nei-

ther of which wanted to part with Santa Rosa Island acreage. J. McCarthy Miller, owner of radio station WOCA was opposed. Even the State of Florida baulked at giving up their campsites at Fort Pickens. Finally the fight was over how much of Santa Rosa Island would be included. Representative Sikes asked for 8 miles; he said only 4.5 miles would kill the bill. In June 1969 the Escambia County Commissioners finally voted 3 to 2 to include 7.5 miles of Santa Rosa Island in the bill. In September 1969 Hurricane Camille severed Ship Island and the state of Mississippi was busy rebuilding their properties. However, the Colmer-Sikes bill passed in the House in September 1970 and in the Senate in December 1970 and President Nixon signed it on January 8, 1971. In the November 1970 general election Escambia County voters overwhelmingly voted for transfer of 7.5 miles of Santa Rosa Island to the National Seashore. Included in the Gulf Islands National Seashore are West and East Ship Island, Horn Island, Petit Bois Island and Davis Bayou (Ocean Springs area) in Mississippi. The latter contains the William M. Colmer Visitor Center. In Florida the eastern Perdido Key Area from the Rosamond Johnson Beach to the site of the old Fort McRee; Pensacola Naval Air Station (NAS) Area that includes Fort Barrancas, the Advanced Redoubt, the Coast Guard Station and Battery San Antonio; Fort Pickens; the Naval Live Oaks Area and Visitor Center (Park Headquarters); the Santa Rosa Area (seven miles between the area given to the University of West Florida in 1967 and Navarre Beach), and a small area on Okaloosa Island. Unfortunately the Lighthouse at NAS was not included, but the current superintendent of GINS, Mr. Jerry Eubanks, intends to fix that one day. He also has his eyes on Cat Island in Mississippi which is currently privately owned. And all the old forts were restored within 10 years with appropriations from Congress.

SANTA ROSA ISLAND-A HISTORY (Part 5)

(Jane Johnson)

OKALOOSA ISLAND

In 1946 the three mile strip on Okaloosa Island (Old Tower Beach and Holiday Isle—the old eastern most piece of Santa Rosa Island) was deeded to Okaloosa County for \$4,000. In



making the transfer of title the Federal Government retained the following restrictions and limitations on the Okaloosa Island property:

- 1. Use of the land by the County or its lessees only for public recreational purposes.
- 2. Right of the U.S. to use the property in the event of a national emergency without rental or other payments to Okaloosa County but subject to existing private rights and payment of just compensation for taking control over improvements on the property.

Excepted and reserved from the conveyance were perpetual easement interests for air space and access right of way.

In 1953 the Okaloosa Island Authority was created as an instrumentality of the County and vested with administrative authority over the portion of the Santa Rosa Island owned by Okaloosa County.

Later Congressman Sikes got the federal legislature to remove the Okaloosa Island restrictions: "Because of the limitation and restrictions held by the Federal Government in the original deed to the Island, financing was difficult for both commercial and residential construction." U.S. Public Law 87-860 which was approved in 1962 removed these restrictions. As a result of this law, it was necessary for the Federal Government, through the Corps of Engineers to survey the Island and determine price. In 1963, the new Quitclaim Deed was delivered by the Corps of Engineers to the Okaloosa Island Authority. In turn the Authority presented the Corps with a check for \$55,000. This transaction removed the limitations and restrictions on the property except for a 75 foot aerial easement.

In 1975 legislation was passed by the State of Florida which abolished the Okaloosa Island Authority and transferred the duties and responsibilities of the Authority to the County Commissioners of Okaloosa County. This legislation also authorized the levying of ad valorem taxes on real and personal property on the Island and confirmed that all valid, existing restrictive cownants, easement, and zoning, previously established by the Authority shall remain in full force unless and until they are amended by the County Commissioners in the manner provided by law.

However, it wasn't until 1995 that the Okaloosa County Commissioners allowed leaseholders to obtain fee simple title to their property.



ESCAMBIA AND SANTA ROSA COUNTIES



The Department of Interior reverted the portion of Santa Rosa Island (from Fort Pickens to Navarre Beach) back to Escambia County, in 1947. The Deed of Conveyance specified: "...that the above described land shall be retained by the said Escambia County and be used by it for such purposes as it shall deem to be in the public interest or be **leased** by it from time to time in whole or in part or parts to such persons and for such purposes as it shall deem to be in the public interest and upon such terms and conditions as it shall fix and always be subject to regulation by said county whether leased or not leased, but never to be otherwise disposed of or conveyed by it;..."

In Escambia County the Santa Rosa Island Authority was formed in 1947, an outgrowth of the island advisory board formed in 1946.

On February 11, 1956 Santa Rosa County began leasing Navarre Beach from Escambia County. The lease was for 99 years at the rate of \$100 per year. A provision that a second bridge be built by Santa Rosa County to the Island was included in the Lease Agreement: "It will complete a steel and concrete bridge, comparable to the present Sound bridge, at a place in the vicinity of Navarre, within a half mile of a line bisecting the "Y" of State Road 87 projected southerly to Santa Rosa Island parallel to the east boundary of said Santa Rosa County..." A second provision stated that Santa Rosa County would "...complete a standard highway in accordance with specifications of, and acceptable to, the State Road Department of Florida from said new bridge to the west line of the demised premises as a part of a proposed road connecting the two bridges."

Construction of the Navarre Causeway Bridge began in 1960; in 1961 Santa Rosa County spent \$250,000 for a water and sewer plant; the "Avenue of States" was completed as well as an 800 foot public pier. In 1965 the Navarre Pass was opened between the Gulf and Sound on Navarre Beach, but was only open for two months before hurricane Betsy filled it back up with sand.

In 1975 ad valorem taxes were imposed on all personal property of Pensacola Beach leaseholders. Several court cases ensued but in 1987 it was deemed by the Florida First District Court of Appeal that the Escambia county tax assessor erroneously taxed island leasehold of 99 years or less at the real property rate instead of the intangible property rate, contrary to 1985 Laws of Florida, Chapter 85-342, Fla. Stat. Section 196.199(2)(b). See Bell v. Bryan. *The law suits that pertain to this issue may be found on the Pensacola Beach Residents and Leaseholders Association WEB site: http://members.nbci.com/pbrla; or use the "hot button" on the NBLRA site: www.navarrebeach.org.*

Congressman Bo Johnson introduced legislation in the Florida Legislature that would allow Navarre Beach to become part of Santa Rosa County in 1987, 1990 and 1991. The 1991 effort was finally successful. (Chapter 91-310 S.B. No. 1092).

Section 3 of the above document states: "Santa Rosa County shall be liable for such proportion of the liabilities of Escambia County existing on the effective date of sections 1 and 2 of this act

as is required by Section I of Article VIII of the State Constitution. The total amount of public debt of Escambia County assumed by Santa Rosa County shall be limited to and satisfied by the continued imposition of the tourist development tax enacted and imposed by Escambia County ..." (e.g. 1% of the bed tax collected from Navarre Beach is retained by Escambia County to pay for the bond on the Civic Center.)

Section 5 states: "A navigable waterway or channel may not be constructed on any part of Santa Rosa Island that is leased to Santa Rosa County by Escambia County or made a part of Santa Rosa County by this act unless it is specifically approved by resolution of the Board of County Commissioners of Escambia County and by resolution of the Board of County Commissioners of Santa Rosa County."

Section 9 states: "All current licenses issued by the State for establishments located on that portion of Santa Rosa Island leased to Santa Rosa County shall remain unaffected by this act and shall remain in full force and effect." (e.g. liquor licenses).

In 1994 U.S. Congressman Earl Hutto introduced a bill that would transfer ownership of Navarre Beach from Escambia County to Santa Rosa County, but the bill got bogged down in committee.

So, a question frequently asked at our NBLRA Meetings is: "Who owns Navarre Beach, the Federal Government, or Escambia County or Santa Rosa County?" From the above I believe it is clear that Escambia County owns Navarre Beach. It is rented and administered by Santa Rosa County. However, the restrictions placed on Escambia County by the Federal Government that are quoted in paragraph one of this section remain in place.

The book: *Gulf Islands, The Sands of All Time* by Jesse Earle Bowden may be purchased for \$5.95 at the Gulf Islands Naval Live Oaks Area Visitor Center or at Ft. Pickens. A copy is also available in the Navarre Library.

(The End)