

## A Blast From The Past, Interesting Facts About Lutz And Land O' Lakes

*By Karen McBride*

When the early settlers made their homes on this land, they had no idea what it would look like today. In fact, there is little left from long ago. Most of us are familiar with Lutz Junction, the replica built in 2000 of the first train station in Lutz. The original train stop was constructed in 1907 as a means to transport lumber. And, of course, there is the Old Lutz Schoolhouse, built in 1927 by local residents. Designed by Frank A. Winn Jr., the 2-story brick structure is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

You will need to look harder to find other reminders of days gone by. Gone are the old homes and tourist attractions, like Dupree Gardens. J. William Dupree, an attorney in Tampa, was injured in a car accident and he was unable to work. He developed the garden on his 900 acre estate. In 1941, he opened a portion of the 25 acre garden to the public, which included a lodge and gift shop. In 1943, tourism slowed down and the restaurant and gift shop closed. Eventually the boat tours ended and the gardens closed. The lodge later became the home of Fran Hendrix. All that remains of the beautiful Dupree Gardens are the ruins of the old stone ticket booth. The Dupree name can still be seen on street signs and subdivisions, and, of course, Dupree Lake.

Our quaint, country town of Lutz has undergone a transformation in the 20 years since I first moved here. The scent of orange blossoms would fill the air from the beautiful orange groves that lined the streets. The rolling hills of Plantation Palms Golf Course and SuperWalmart were both once orange groves, with rows upon rows of trees, speckled with oranges and, in the spring time, orange blossoms. Many of

the early settlers found orange trees already growing on their land. Mike Riegler, known as the first permanent resident of North Tampa (now Lutz) in 1911, would be disappointed to see that most of the orange trees are now gone. He planted seedlings on his land, currently named Wallace Road, and his grove became the largest in the area. His daughter Elizabeth Riegler MacManus and granddaughter, Susan MacManus wrote *The Lutz Depot and Citrus, Sawmills,*



*This replica of the Lutz Junction was built in 2000.*

*Critters & Crackers.* These books have remarkable pictures and give you a glimpse of what life was like in Lutz in the early years.

C.E. Thomas knew the citrus industry would help many of the early settlers get out of financial trouble (by either working in his groves, or having their own), and his grove became the second largest in the state. The first seven groves were planted on land west of the Lutz United Brethren Church (First United Methodist Church of Lutz).

In addition to furthering the growth of the citrus industry, C.E. Thomas helped the people of Lutz by building the first schoolhouse in 1911. Thirty-five students attended the first year. Sadly, a hurricane in 1921 destroyed it. Thomas had also donated the land for the cemetery, and for all of his community involvement, Lake Thomas was

named in his honor.

Guy Sparlin and his family were among the 1911 settlers. He opened a restaurant near the train depot. Many of his photographs help to keep the history of Lutz alive today. Donna Sparlin was the first baby girl born in the soon-to-be-named area of Lutz on May 1, 1912. You may recognize this name, as you drive down Sparlin Road, which is just north of Sunset. On May 8, of that year, the first boy, named Sydney Goheen was

located across from where the First Baptist Church of Lutz now stands. Lake Stemper is named for the Catholic priest. The colony became smaller in the early 1900s, but later began to grow again when people moved to the area for the turpentine industry and The Stemper Turpentine Company began.

As people began to travel, the Concord Stagecoach traveled between Tampa and Brooksville. It would make a stop near Livingston and Highway 54. This route was known as "20 mile level road" because it was 20 miles from Tampa and the road was level. The stagecoach went out of business when the railroads were built. However, 20 Mile Level Road is still in existence and is still unpaved.

Hillsborough and Pasco counties used to be covered in pine trees. In Land O' Lakes, saw mills kept the people in the area working. The Ehren Pine Company, owned by Frederick Ernest Mueller, was the largest. It employed about 100 workers, who were paid in aluminum coins that could only be used at the saw mill commissary. It was located on what is now called Ehren Cutoff. The employees had homes near the mill and the area was known as the Ehren community. A post office opened in 1890. It burned down several times, but they continued

born. Sydney passed away in 1991 and is buried in the Lutz Cemetery.

In the 1880s, Francis Xavier A. Stemper, a Catholic priest, arrived in Lutz. The settlers were from Luxembourg, but were mistaken for Germans. The area was US 41 south of present day Sunset Lane to DeBuel Road. The colony was

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**Did you ever wonder how 20 Mile Level Rd. got its name?**

to rebuild it, until 1950 when it closed permanently. It was even listed in "Ripley's Believe It or Not" as the smallest post office in the country. By 1910, Ehren had a hotel and school. Ehren Cemetery and Mount Carmel Cemetery, on Ehren Cutoff, are some of the historical sites that remain. Interestingly you will find tombstones with handwritten

names on cement. Another name is connected to nature; Lake Fern was named because of the abundance of wild ferns in the area.

Arthur B. Hale moved to Tampa in 1907 and worked as a mechanical engineer, in refrigeration with the Tampa Ice Co and, later, Hale and Buerke Electric Co. He was appointed to the State Road Board in 1937. He

headed the War Production Board in Tampa during World War II. He died at the age of 54 in 1942. Hale Road, north of Bell Lake and US 41 is named after him.

For a journey back in time, be sure to visit the West Pasco Historical Museum, located at 6431 Circle Boulevard, New Port Richey. The estate of Elizabeth MacManus donated her beloved treasures of our history to the museum. You may want to take a walk around County Line Cemetery, 3800 E. County Line Road in Lutz. You will see graves dating back to 1877 and many familiar family names - Dennison, Ellis, Gillette, and Grantham.

So let's look around at our ever-changing community and see what we can do to preserve the history of our town. I wonder what will still be standing for the future people of Lutz, so that they can see what our life was like way back in the year 2012.

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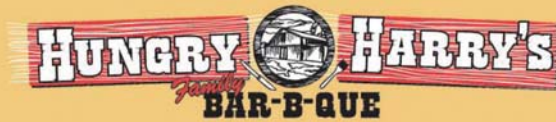


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