

20th Century Land Ownership History of St Augustine South

In 1902, Albert Lewis, the wealthy master of a lumber empire and owner of an ice company in Bear Creek, Pennsylvania bought land, about 500 acres on the north side of Moultrie Creek—today's St Augustine South. Albert Lewis died in December 1923.

Lewis Point Properties Inc., of Jacksonville acquired the tract of land owned then by Lily Lewis Seneff, inherited from Albert and Lily Lewis in 1950. Lewis Point Properties expanded its land holdings from the north bank of Moultrie Creek to almost where SR 312 passes, now. This began the push to develop our neighborhood from the marsh-front forest that bordered the Matanzas River.

The St Augustine South acreage was purchased and platted by Florida Speaks Corp. of St Petersburg in 1954. The subdivision roads were wide with 60 foot right of ways, except for St Augustine South Drive and Shore Drive with 70 foot right of ways.

In 1954, "all roads, rights-of-ways, parks and easements" were ***irrevocably dedicated*** (i.e., conveyed) by the owner, Florida Speaks Corporation, to St Johns County. The dedications occurred in four batches:

Units 1-5 in July; Units 6-8 and Units 9-14 both in August; and Units 15-22 in October. **All four were approved by the BOCC and signed by then Chairman, Dan Mickler.**

The Florida Speaks Corporation then began subdividing its land holdings and selling off chunks of property to speculators and corporate entities, including to St Augustine South Inc., the developer of St Augustine South.

Photographs from 1954 show bulldozing and digging. The developers, St Augustine South Inc., wrote in November 1955 that they had completed 8 miles of roads and had under construction a further 8 miles.

The St. Augustine South Improvement Association (SASIA) was officially incorporated on December 11, 1957 with 55 members.

In 1958, a major divisive issue in The South, was where the “Community Club House” should be sited. Two sites along Shore Drive were suggested in discussion with SAS Inc., the developer. One site seems to have been just to the north of the current Douglas Crane Park, and the other site was at Lewis Point, likely where or near where the parking lot is now. All the negative energy expended was unfortunate as the Florida Speaks Corp. had already transferred ownership of the greenway along Shore Drive to the County, and the County would have to deed back ownership to the developer or SASIA for construction of a clubhouse. The SAS Corporation issued a quit-claim deed to SASIA of "all the right, title, interest, claim and demand" it had in the Park areas as well as 9 specific 60-foot wide easements between Shore Dr and the mean high water line ***so as to not lay claim to the land should the County agree to transfer ownership to SASIA.*** However, the County was not interested in transferring the land to SASIA.

- A quit claim deed does not transfer property ownership, it only indicates the issuer has no claim on ownership of the property. It makes no promises!

Recognizing that the clubhouse could not be constructed on the greenway, ***in 1959 SAS Corporation executed a warranty deed to SASIA for 5 lots on Royal Rd*** that are now part of the clubhouse property. [SASIA Purchased a further 5 lots.]

- A Warranty deed transfers property ownership. It is a promise to the buyer/grantee that the seller/grantor has good title to the property.