



JUNO BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

340 Ocean Drive, Juno Beach, FL 33408

A Short History of Juno Beach

It's hard to believe that today's town of 4,000 people was completely unsettled until the 1930s when a somewhat ramshackle tourist camp was built atop oceanside dunes. What's more, it was only in 1953 that its mere 130 year-round residents decided to incorporate the town.

The area's geography is rather unique. Along the Atlantic coast there are barrier islands and peninsulas, such as Singer and Palm Beach Islands, that protect the mainland. Juno Beach, with its relatively high coastal dunes, stands apart as it was naturally connected to the mainland until the digging of the Intracoastal Waterway. Located on the easternmost coast of Florida and so close to the Gulf Stream, the area has more moderate temperatures in both summer and winter.



Figure 1 Perhaps the earliest map of our area, this 1823 map shows the area from Jupiter Inlet south to Lake Worth. Our secondary dunes, which line the west side of Ocean Drive, are here labelled "Groupers Hills". Courtesy Library of Congress

Early History

Native Americans migrated to Florida 12,000-14,000 years ago. Remains of nearby shell-mound settlements of the Jeaga (YAY-ga) Indians in Jupiter and on Singer Island date back at least 5,000 years.



Figure 2 Courtesy Historical Society of Palm Beach County

An expedition led by Juan Ponce de León landed at the Jupiter Inlet in 1519 marking the first European visit to the area. In the following decades, Spanish colonial ships regularly passed the coast as they sailed home from Cuba. Due to a mix of strong Gulf Stream currents, reefs, and sometimes violent storms, numerous wrecks from that era remain in the offshore waters.

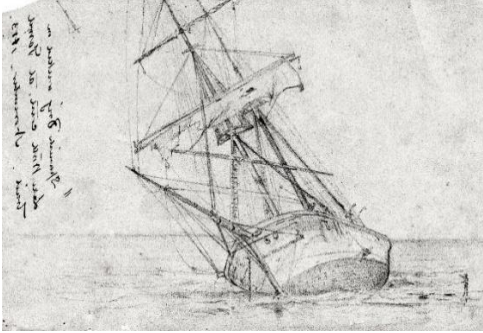
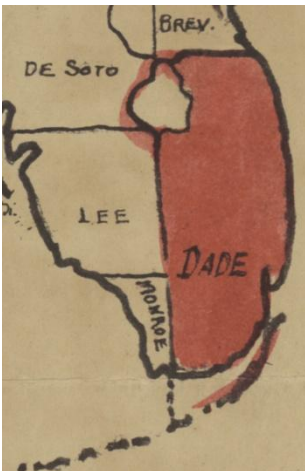


Figure 3 Shipwreck on the Palm Beach shore sketched by George W. Potter. Courtesy: Historical Society of Palm Beach County

European contact that century introduced diseases leading to a dramatic fall in the number of aboriginal peoples. Seminole Indians first came to south Florida in the mid-1800s, seeking refuge as they resisted the U.S government's campaigns to force the Creek nation to evacuate the southeastern states and resettle in Oklahoma.

Palm Beach County before 1880—isolated and unsettled

As late as the 1870 census, there was only a population of 85 non-native people living in enormous Dade County (originally named Mosquito County) that stretched from Stuart south to Miami. That included today's Martin, Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade counties.



Why so few settlers? There were simply no navigable coastal inlets where ships could land—even the mouth of the Loxahatchee River at Jupiter was far too shallow. Lake Worth, which drained the inland Everglades, was an isolated body of fresh water, and only irregularly breached Palm Beach Island to overflow into the ocean.

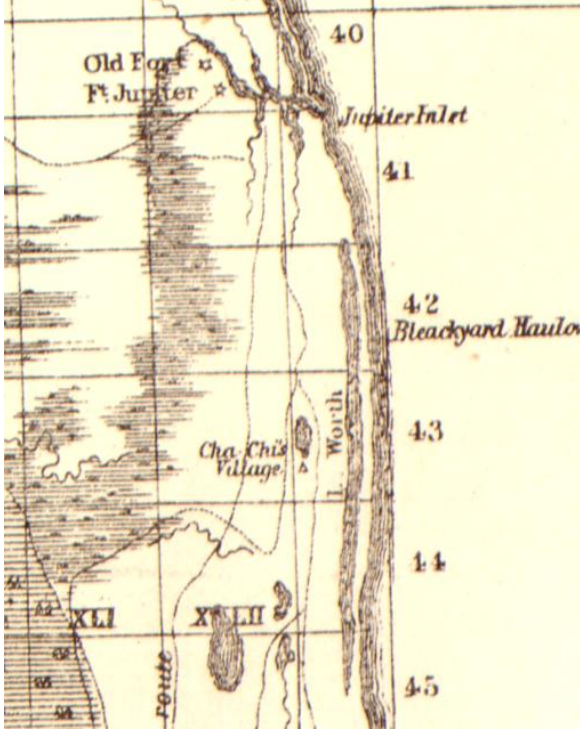


Figure 4 Lake Worth shown to be landlocked in this 1875 Corps of Engineers map. With no inlets along the coast, access was quite limited. Courtesy: Library of Congress

In the two decades following the Civil War, a few dozen homesteaders and settlers came to the Lake Worth area. Some began to offer rooms for adventurous visitors, though there were few. Steamboats could bring visitors down the Indian River Lagoon, but that ends at the site of the Jupiter Lighthouse. South of that, visitors had to rough it!



Figure 5 Early steamboat on the Indian River Lagoon north of Jupiter. Courtesy: Historical Society of Palm Beach County

The Celestial Railroad opens the way and Juno is born

The steamboat company took on the challenge of building a railroad line to connect Jupiter to the alluring Lake Worth and Palm Beach Island region. Beginning with a wharf on the riverbank opposite the Jupiter Lighthouse, the company laid 7½ miles of track in 1889.

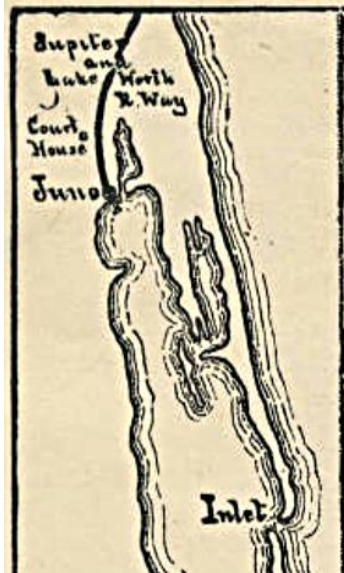


Figure 6 The sole engine of the Celestial Railroad. Having no way to turn around, the train traveled forwards to Juno and backwards on the return trip. Courtesy: Library of Congress

The line's terminus was at the head of Lake Worth and they named it Juno, after the wife of the Roman god Jupiter. That was roughly where US Highway 1 meets Jack Nicklaus Boulevard today, just south of the Publix supermarket. This Jupiter and Lake Worth Railway, nicknamed "The Celestial Railroad" after a popular poem, opened the floodgates to businesses, settlers, and tourists.

People had such high hopes for that new site's future that they voted to move the Dade County seat from Miami to Juno. With that, a courthouse was swiftly built and a regional newspaper, *The Tropical Sun*, began publishing.

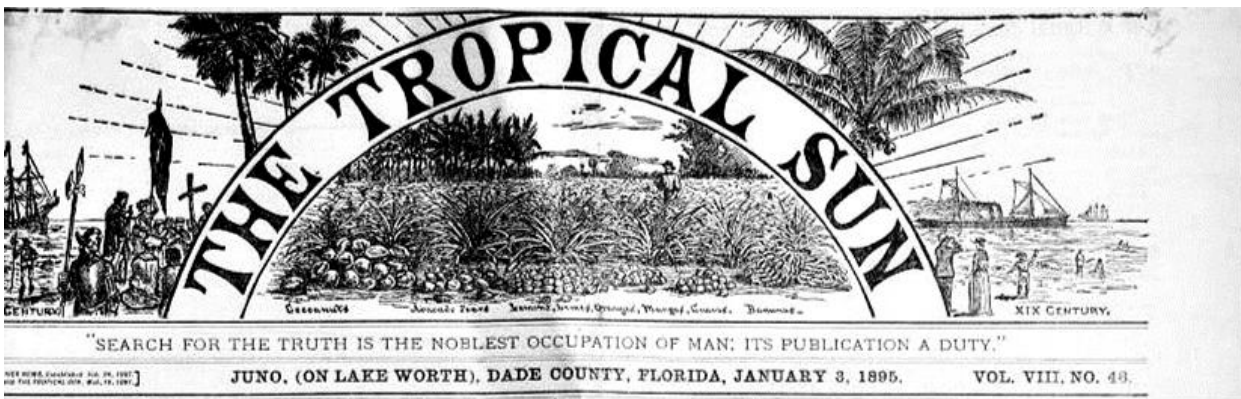


Figure 7 The newspaper was published in Juno until 1895, when the printing press and office moved to the new town of West Palm Beach.

A group of wealthy northern investors were among those with high hopes for future development. They ventured that the northern end of Singer Island, being so close to the train line and the county seat, would soon rival Palm Beach as a resort area. The group offered ocean-to-lake parcels and promoted the area as "Juno Beach". Though the project never got off the ground, the name persisted and was later applied to the stretch of coast to the north.

The 1890s—Juno's star swiftly rises and falls

Among the visitors to exotic Palm Beach Island was tycoon Henry Flagler, whose passion was to open Florida to high-end tourism. He was so smitten by the area's potential that he undertook to build what was to be the largest resort in the world, accommodating up to 2000 guests in his *Royal Poinciana Hotel*.



Figure 8 The railroad bridge crossing Lake Worth to the Royal Poinciana Hotel on Palm Beach Island. Flagler's residence, Whitehall, to the right. Courtesy: Historical Society of Palm Beach County.

Realizing that a posh clientele would only come if there was first-class access, he extended his Florida East Coast Railway southward in 1894, not only to the new town of West Palm Beach, but to the very entrance to the hotel via railroad bridge across Lake Worth. With that, there was no longer demand for slow and stuffy travel by Indian River steamboats and the *Celestial*, which ceased operation several months later.

Without the *Celestial* Railroad, the town of Juno, now only accessible by Lake Worth steamer, was isolated, and voters returned the county seat to Miami. With the final dredging of the Intracoastal Waterway in 1898, the Juno Beach area became a barrier island. By the end of the century, Juno was a ghost town.



Figure 9 Steam-powered dredgers like this connected the Loxahatchee River to Lake Worth, as well as the new and deeper 1920 Palm Beach Inlet. Courtesy Historical Society of Palm Beach County

1900 to the 1930s

In the post-Juno decades, the immediate area was essentially unsettled. A main thoroughfare ran through it, however. State Road 5, later becoming US Highway 1, was the coastal artery running from Maine to Key West.

Financier E.F. Hutton and a group of prominent Palm Beachers opened the exclusive Seminole Golf Club in 1930. Scottish links designer Donald Ross laid out this challenging oceanfront course that integrated dunes and water hazards.

Swedish immigrants Oscar and Hulda Erikson became the first modern residents in what is now Juno Beach, opening rustic cabins they dubbed the *Juno Beach Tourist Camp* on the dunes overlooking the Atlantic Ocean in 1933. Over the next decade, three other hoteliers followed suit.

The 1940s-1970s: The Motel Era

Palm Beach developer Bessemer Properties anticipated a post-War influx of people when it bought a tract of land between the Seminole Golf Club and today's Brigadoon condominium in 1946. Though it was scrubland, Bessemer ambitiously planned to transform the area into a tourist destination, dredging a marsh to create Pelican Lake, and building the 500-foot-long Juno Beach Fishing Pier at the end of Mercury Road today's Town Center. Bessemer then began selling residential plots offering ocean views on the higher land west of Ocean Drive.



Figure 10 Bessemer Properties' Juno Beach concept.



Figure 11 As the Gulf Stream runs so close to the shore in Juno Beach, the Fishing Pier became a favorite destination for anglers.

Although Bessemer had envisioned Juno Beach as largely being a community of private homeowners, the town's development evolved differently. By the 1960s Juno Beach was unique in having as many as 17 oceanfront motels. Why so

many right here? In the days before I-95, this was the only stretch where the Federal Highway ran directly along the ocean. What a great place for a tourist to stop!

The town's roughly 130 year-round residents, mostly motel owners, chose to incorporate Juno Beach in 1953; the aim was to boost business by getting the town's name on the map. The women of the Juno Beach Garden Club, inspired by the town's "celestial" tradition, chose to name the town's new streets by drawing from classical mythology using names such as Mars, Venus, and Olympus.

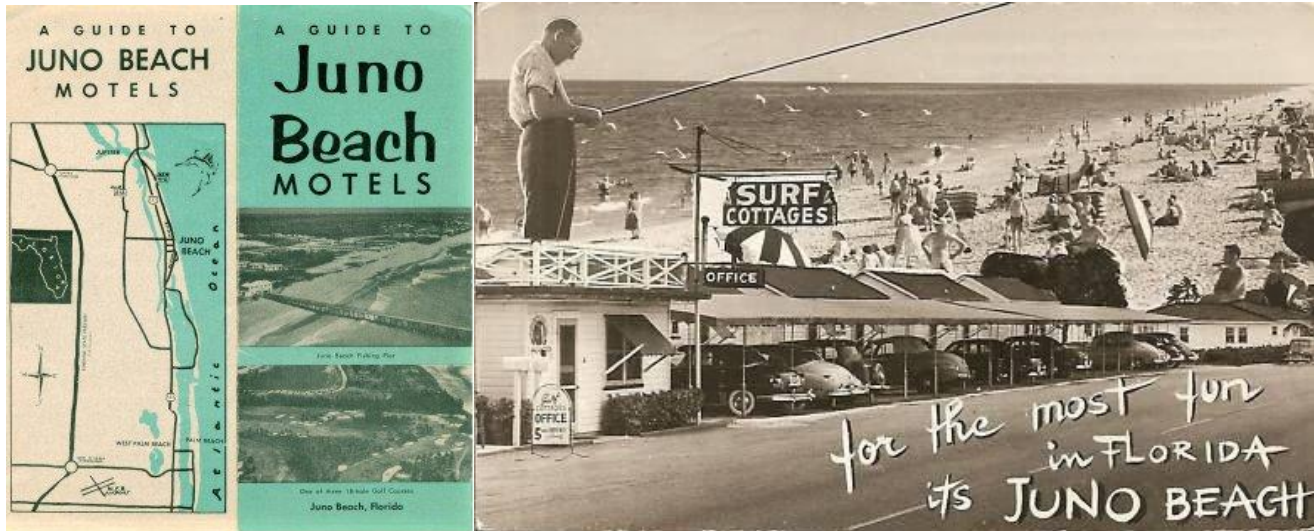


Figure 12 The young town's motel owners were proactive in promoting it as a resort destination.

Fearing that a hurricane could eventually wash out the main highway, the federal government decided in 1957 that a section of US-1 should bypass the coast a quarter mile inland. With that, Ocean Drive was renamed Florida State Road A-1-A.

Town officials soon expanded the town's borders by annexing property to the north. They applied much more liberal zoning regulations to those areas with the vision that hotels might be built there. That's the part of town with high-rise buildings today.

The first condominium, *The Greenbrier*, was built in 1966 and was a sign of a wave to come; the first 12-story condominium, *The Tower*, came in 1972. As the town prospered, the population grew rapidly, tripling from 249 to 747 between 1960 and 1970. A former gas station on Ocean Drive was converted into a makeshift Town Hall and Police Station—the site is today's Town Hall Park.

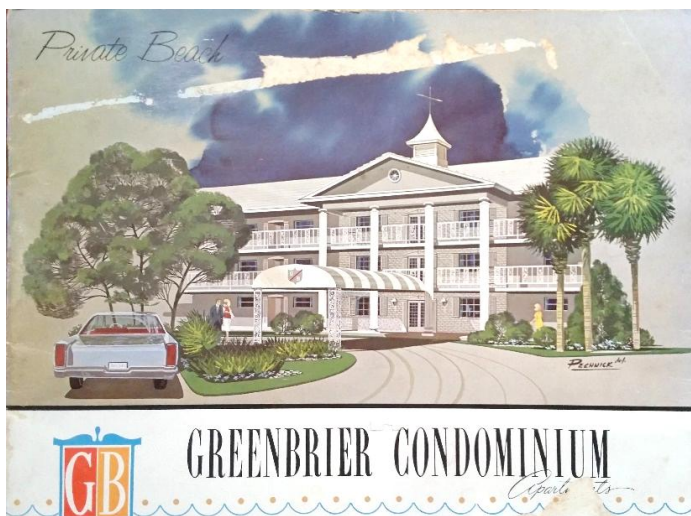


Figure 13 The era of the condo began in 1966 with the Greenbrier on Celestial Way.

The 1980s-1990s— Rapid transformation in the Condo Era

At the beginning of this era, the town government approved a developer's massive project to build twelve 12-story condominium buildings between the ocean and US-1 on what is now the oceanfront tract of our Natural Areas. The project ended up being withdrawn during an economic downturn. Both the state and the county eventually purchased our unique coastal areas and devoted them for conservation.

By the late 1970s, the value of the land on which the largely one-story oceanfront motels stood had increased so much that the owners struggled to meet the staggering rise in property taxes. In 1993, the last of the oceanfront motels was sold to developers.

Enchanted by sea turtles and ocean ecology, Juno Beach resident and realtor Eleanor Fletcher began displaying her collection of beach-gathered curiosities on her condo balcony. Along with her popular nighttime turtle-watching walks, this led her to be known fondly as "The Turtle Lady." She went on to rent an apartment on Mercury Road to create her Juno Beach Children's Museum. This evolved over the years to become the Loggerhead Marinelifelife Center, which was built on the site of what had been the Erikson's Tourist Camp.



Figure 14 Eleanor on the beach, teaching as always. Courtesy Historical Society of Palm Beach County, Palm Beach Post Collection

As more condominiums were built, the town's population grew steadily between 1980 and 2000 from 1100 to 3200. Town government grew in tandem, and the new Town Center was built overlooking Pelican Lake.

The town's boundaries expanded to envelop the Seminole Golf Club, The Waterford, and the offices of the Florida Power and Light Company. The paths and trails of its two Juno Dunes Natural Areas, covering 569 acres and uniquely stretching from the ocean to the Intracoastal Waterway, opened to the public in 2001.

The era ended with Palm Beach County opening the new Juno Beach Pier, taking the role of the original Fishing Pier, which had been destroyed by a storm in 1984.

The town in the 2000s

Juno Beach is a dynamic community that loves to invoke its small-town vibe. This is reflected in its diverse styles of architecture, lush landscaping, parks, and

community spirit. Civil society thrives and comprises many groups, such as the dynamic Civic Association, Ecology Group, Friends of the Arts, and Historical Society, inspiring community events that take place in and around the Town Center. Volunteers are also active at multiple places around town.

Juno Beach residents are enamored with their town, cherishing the uncrowded beaches, its unique Pelican Lake, and unspoiled natural areas that encompass half of the town's land.

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