

## **The Friendly Island**

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We affectionately call our island "The Friendly Island." But in the past it was not an island nor was it probably friendly. Over the years the island has been owned by several would be developers some with grand ideas. In 1923 the outcropping of land into Tampa Bay which is now Coquina Key was converted into an island by dredging a channel from Big Bayou south to Little Bayou. A rickety bridge was built at 45<sup>th</sup> Avenue South. With the implementation of Prohibition, the island isolated by a single bridge, mostly undeveloped, and with a natural harbor became a "Port of Call" for the rum-runners from the sugar rich non-Prohibition island of Cuba. Additionally, the island's use by moonshiners likely made it an unfriendly place.

An early developer, Edson "Ed" T. Lewis, a general store owner and banker, purchased the then peninsula in 1910 with the intention to develop an elegant subdivision called Lewiston and sell lots.

In the late 1800's, although the area was not an island, it was called "Goat Island." With the dredging of the channel, the name was changed to Lewis Island. According to a 1902 map, some of the earlier owners included W.B. Henderson and S. Armistead.

Not much happened on the Island and by the late 1940's there were only a few houses on the island and the Florida Power Employees Club which is now the Coquina Key Park. The oldest house still on the Island was built in 1925 and is located at the west end of Dolphin Avenue SE.

In 1952 a portion of the Island was purchased by William Goldman with the intention to develop a "City Within a City." He was unsuccessful.

In 1955, the middle of the dredge and fill "finger frenzy," the Mackle family developers purchased most of the Island and received a permit to dredge and fill around the Island. The dredge and fill operation constructed seawalls in low lying areas and then dredged from the water side to fill in behind the seawalls. The house on Dolphin Avenue which is lower than its neighbors with a yard that gently slopes to the non-sea walled water's edge gives us a idea of what the Island was like before the finger frenzy. Before the dredge and fill operations, the Island ended where Beach Drive is.

The bridge on 39<sup>th</sup> Avenue South was built by the Mackle developers and is placarded on the railing with the date 1955. The development plan included a shopping center, school and park.

In 1957, the Mackle holdings were sold to Irving Green who decide to rename the Island with a contest to select the name. There were almost 20,000 entries with, as we know, the winning name is Coquina Key.

In 1973, the City purchased the Florida Power Employees Club and converted into the park. In 1972 and 1979 the Mahaffey family developers constructed the Coquina Key Arms apartments which in more recent years have become the Waterside Townhouses.