

# Southwest Florida History

Dr Paul Pacter  
www.PaulVisits.com

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## Course: Southwest Florida History

### Course Objectives:

- Learn about the history of Naples and surrounding area.
- Identify places of historical interest available to visit .
- Identify some resources for further study.

**Instructor:** Paul Pacter, PhD, CPA  
www.PaulVisits.com, ppacter@gmail.com

- Accountant by background.
- Corporate financial reporting and international accounting.
- Prof at MBA programs of New York Univ and Univ of Conn, 10 years.
- Commissioner of Finance, City of Stamford, CT for 7 years.

### Procedures:

- I will present a historical discussion at each session, with PowerPoints.
  - Class participants encouraged to comment or ask questions any time.
  - No required reading.
  - No exams or grades.
  - Post PowerPoints on website after class.
- [www.PaulVisits.com](http://www.PaulVisits.com)
- Please silence your phones during class.

# Class 1 Syllabus and Historical Overview

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## Six class meetings

- **Class 1** Historical Overview
- **Class 2** History City of Naples
- **Class 3** South and East of Naples
- **Class 4** Major Parks & Preserves
- **Class 5** North of Naples
- **Class 6** *A Land Remembered* by Patrick Smith & Other Resources

Moved to Naples late 2019.  
But visiting family since 2002.

## Presentations through June 30, 2026:

Collier County Public Library	102
Baker Senior Center	35
The Commons (Estero)	10
Naples Italian Amer Foundation	6
Collier County Public Sch Approx	20
Others	3

## Scope of Our Course

**Primary:** Naples and Collier County.

Collier is Florida's largest county.

**Some:** Lee County.

**Occasional:** Others.



## 12,500 BC: Earliest Humans in Florida.

**How do we know?** Stone tools, butchered mastodon bones, other artefacts found and dated.

Nomadic, used spears and stone tools, cooked in leather bags with heated stones.

**Map shows main sites where they lived.**



## Can you imagine? Mastodons living and hunted in Florida until around 8,000 BC. Lots of evidence!



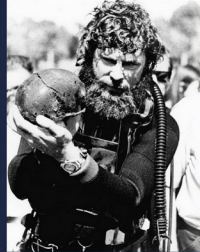
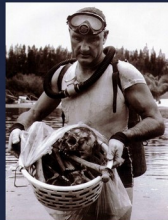
Mastodon bone with human evidence found near Tallahassee.



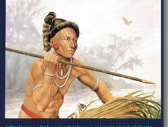
## Closest to Naples: 55 mi Warm Mineral Springs. Near Venice.

– Evidence of prehistoric man (skulls with brain matter, skeletons), sloths, mastodons, saber-toothed tigers, camels.

- Date back 10,000 years!
- Now a North Port public park. \$20 swim (85°), explore.



## Earliest Indians in SW Florida: 12,500–7500 BC: Paleo-Indians. Nomadic hunters.



## 7500–500 BC: Archaic Period. Unnamed peoples. Used tools. Fished and harvested shellfish.

Semi-permanent settlements.

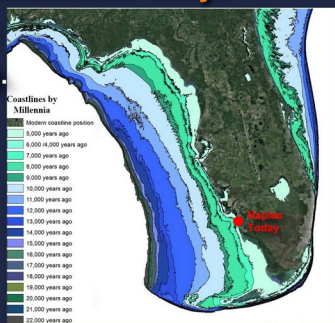
**500 BC to 1700s AD: Calusa** were the dominant indigenous tribe in SW Florida for over 2,000 years.

## During the Paleoindian period (12500-7500 BC) present-day Naples, Florida, would have been located approximately 100 to 140 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico shoreline. Why?

– Sea levels were 300-400 lower than today. Lingering effect of Ice Age.

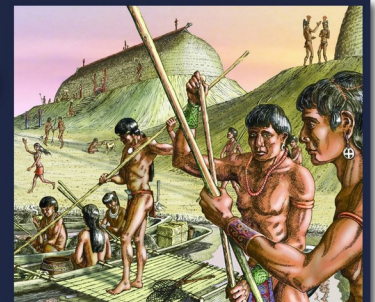
– This extended Florida's coastline significantly westward.

– Florida's size was double today's size.



## The Calusa: 500 BC to 1700s AD

- Powerful kingdom.
- Centered around Estero Bay and Charlotte Harbor.
- Built shell mounds, canals, and large wooden structures.
- Non-agricultural. Fishing and shellfish.
- Resisted Spanish colonization 200 years.
- Succumbed to disease, displacement.



## 1513: Florida's written history begins.

Juan Ponce de León explores Florida's east coast. Then up SW coast, likely near Charlotte Harbor. Landed, but no attempt to settle.



**1521:** Ponce returns with settlers, livestock, supplies. Failed to establish a colony due to strong resistance from the Calusa. Ponce mortally wounded.

**1539:** Hernando de Soto lands on Florida's west coast (likely near Tampa Bay) and begins a multi-year expedition through the Southeast. (Not in Naples area.)

**1565–1763:** Spain establishes permanent settlements on East Coast of Florida. SW Florida remains uncolonized due to

1. Strong Calusa resistance.
2. Geographic challenges: Swamps, dense mangroves, terrain, no water.
3. Other priorities.

**Where was the first European settlement in US? Florida, not Plymouth Rock!**

**1620:** English settlers on Mayflower land at Plymouth Rock, Mass. *This is what I was taught.*

**1607:** Earlier English settlement of Jamestown, VA was then discovered.

**1565:** Spanish settlement of St Augustine, FL was known but not taught.

**1559:** The Spanish brought 1,500 settlers from Mexico in 11 ships to Pensacola FL in 1559. After settlement, a hurricane wiped them out.

<https://www.visitpensacola.com/americas-1st-settlement-trail/1st-settlement/>

**1500-1700:** Creek Indians (later renamed Seminoles) arrive from Georgia and Alabama. Seminoles not SW FL natives.



**1500-1700:** Spanish settlements grew. Fighting among Spanish, Calusa (defeated 18th C), and Seminoles.

**1816-1858:** 3 Seminole Wars. US goal to move Seminoles away from settlers' farms and ranches and onto large reservations in middle of FL or out west.

**1821:** Spain cedes Florida to US because it was too costly to maintain. Florida becomes US Territory.

At that time, Naples and Everglades City were probably uninhabited.



**1823:** Monroe County formed. Southern third of Florida peninsula, including what's now Collier and Lee Counties.

**1845:** Florida becomes 27th US state.

**So, was there ever a 27-star US flag? YES and NO.**



- Florida became 27th state March 3, 1845.
- New star is added to the flag on the July 4th following admission.
- But expecting admission of Texas later in 1845, 27-star flag was never adopted.
- Some flag makers and US citizens produced 27-star flags to reflect Florida's admission. But it was not official.

**1850:** US Govt gave the "swamp land" that is now Lee, Collier, and Monroe Counties to the State. But SW Florida remains virtually uninhabited until after the Civil War.

**1850:** Army builds a fort on the Caloosahatchee River and names it Fort Myers. Purpose: defend against Seminole attacks. Fort was abandoned 1858 after Third Seminole War, but the town of Fort Myers remained.

**1861-1865: Southwest Florida During the Civil War**

- Florida seceded from Union 1861. Joined Confederacy.
- Florida was a key source of beef for Confederate Army.
- Union Army tried to stop this.
- Fort Myers was a Union Army fort.
- Battle of Fort Myers (southernmost land battle of the Civil War) occurred on Feb 20, 1865.



- Confederate general with 275 men from near LaBelle approached Ft Myers. Demanded that Union troops surrender. Union troops (about 300 men) refused.
- Confederates opened fire. Union defenders held firm.
- Confederates retreated.
- Result: Union 1 dead 3 wounded. Confederates 1 wounded.

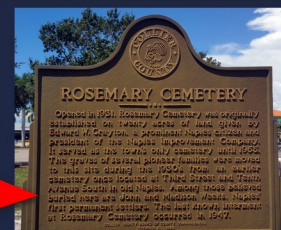
**1870s-80s:** Small settlements along coast north and south of Naples. Hunting and fishing camps.

**1870:** First permanent settler in Everglades City was **William Smith Allen**.

**1874:** First settlers in Naples were **Roger Gordon** (Gordon Drive, Gordon Pass, Gordon River) and **Joe Wiggins** (Wiggins Pass), but they did not live year-round and so are not considered permanent settlers.

*They ran hunting and fishing camps.*

**1876:** First permanent settlers in Naples were **John and Madison Weeks** and their families. They claimed the land by squatter's rights. Began hunting, fishing, and small farming at what is now Gordon Pass.



**1886:** First permanent settler in Chokoloskee **C G McKinney**.



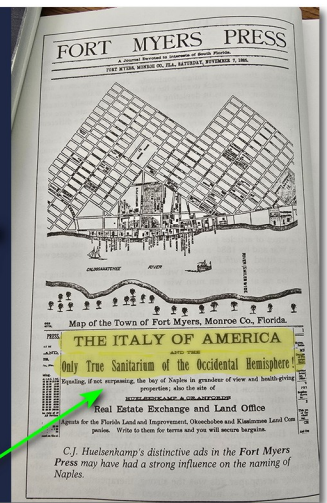
**1880s:** First land sales and development boom in Florida. (Second was 1920s.) Spurred by railroads moving into Florida and promotions. Mostly East Coast.

**1884:** Book published: *South Florida: The Italy of America*. Promotional guide to encourage settlement and development in Charlotte Harbor region. Sparked considerable interest.



**1885:** A Ft Myers developer began advertising land *Italy of America: The Only True Sanitarium of the Occidental Hemisphere*. Health promises.

**1885:** Group of investors in Tallahassee wanted to capitalize on boom and on the concept of S Florida being like Italy. 10 people formed Naples Town Improvement Company of Tallahassee. They used the word Naples to suggest Italy. Acquired land in Ft Myers area. *"Surpassing the bay of Naples"*

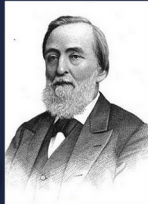


**1886:** Acquired more land - Naples bay area.

**1887:** Property was surveyed and platted. Sales began. 1,500 plats sold for small sums. But no construction started.

**1887:** Company renamed The Naples Co. Two Kentucky investors took controlling interests:

Walter Newman Haldeman (left)  
Gen John Stuart Williams CSA (right)



**1888:** Still almost no construction, just promotion ("America's Italy"), some property sales. Company purchased a steamship to bring people from Ft Myers. Built 20-room Naples Hotel.

**1888:** Naples Pier (T-shaped, 600 feet) first built by The Naples Co. Several homes built for company investors. A few dirt roads built. Small store built. Investors kept putting in money. No profits.

**1888:** Naples Hotel built by The Naples Co. 20 rooms. Lured visitors from North.



1906 with Walkway from Pier

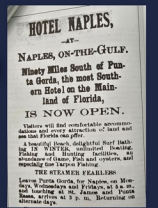
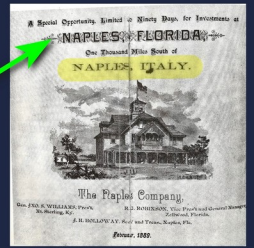
Naples Hotel 1900

Naples Hotel 1929 Demolished 1950s



**1889:** Promotional booklet referred to Naples, Florida.

**1890** The construction pace of town improvements and lack of sales exhausted the Naples Co's capital. They mortgaged all their properties. Banks foreclosed when loans were not repaid. **Naples Co. went bankrupt.** Assets acquired by Walter Haldeman personally.



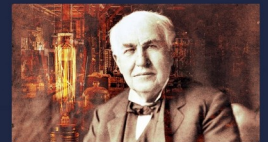
**1895:** Haldeman, now sole owner of The Naples Co., continues selling homesites in Naples, Florida.

Aside: In 1902, he is hit and killed by a streetcar in his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky.

**1895:** Haldeman builds Palm Cottage (now Naples Historical Society) as an annex to the Naples Hotel. Today it is Naples' oldest house.



**1886:** Thomas Edison built his winter home in Fort Myers.



**1893:** Koreshan Unity, religious sect of about 200 people, moved to Estero. Settlement based on communal living and strange beliefs. Now a State Park.



**1900-1919:** Nine-foot wide, sand grade road was cleared and covered with shell from Naples to Fort Myers via Bonita Springs. Very difficult for motor vehicles to navigate due to sand, mud, and water.



**1910:** Hurricane destroyed Naples Pier. Rebuilt to 1,000 foot length.

**1911 Barron G. Collier** buys over a million acres of land in the area, starting near Fort Myers, then Naples, Marco Island, Everglades City, and much of what today is Collier County.

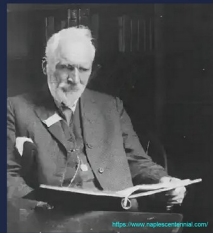


*By 1899 age 25 he had made \$1 million in street lighting, then printing and advertising. Collier's million acres cost him between 12 cents and 30 cents an acre.*

**1916: Henry Ford** bought a home in Fort Myers next to his good friend Thomas Edison's.



**1919:** Caribbean Gardens established by **Dr. Henry Nehrling**. Today part of Naples Zoo.



**1923:** May 8 Collier County established (split off from Lee). County seat Everglades City.



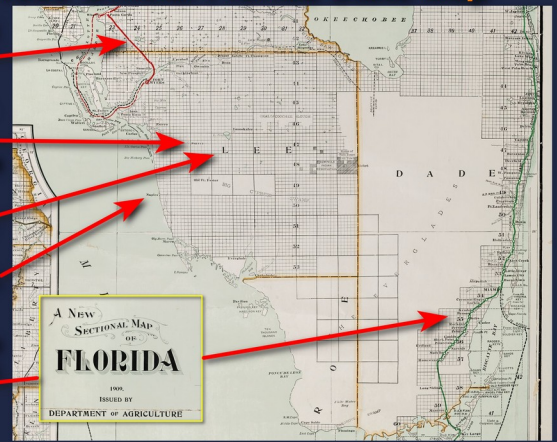
*Gov Hardee and Barron Collier sign Tamiami Trail agreement*

**1923:** Barron Collier starts building Tamiami Trail Naples-Dade County.

**1923:** Barron Collier starts building a planned town in Everglades City.

**Excerpt: 1909 Official Florida State Map**

Railroad in Fort Myers 1904. Finally got to Naples in 1927. Survey is old name for Bonita Springs. No Collier Cnty until 1923. Naples isolated. SE coast well developed Palm Beach to Miami. Not so the SW coast.



**1913: E W "Ed" Crayton** acquired most of downtown Naples land from the family of Walter Haldeman. For 25 years he continued residential and commercial development with his "Naples Improvement Company".



Because he owned so much property, he controlled the town. He chaired Naples Town Council 1923-1938.

**1920-1933: Naples During Prohibition**  
Quiet defiance, not strict enforcement. "Prohibition in Florida was more or less a suggestion".



Collier County Museum: "By the mid-1920s Southwest Florida was one of the "wettest" spots in the nation and a major pipeline in the illegal liquor business."

Convenient for rum-runners from Bahamas and Cuba. Naples' civic leaders were more focused on development and land promotion than moral reform, and bootlegging was often overlooked.

**1923:** Dec 1 Town of Naples was incorporated.

**1926:** First electric power lines installed. But scope was limited until after WW2.

**1927:** Train service arrives in Naples. Jan 7 Seaboard Air Line Railway. Then Jan 18 Atlantic Coast Line arrived. Up to now Naples is only accessible by boat.

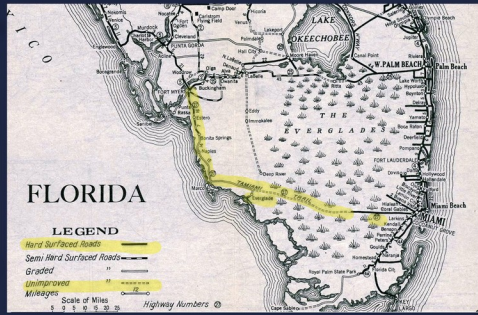


*Naples Depot - Now a Museum*

**1926:** No "hard surface" (paved) road from Naples to Fort Myers or to Marco.  
 – Tamiami Trail: "Unimproved".  
 – Notice Route No. is 27, not 41.  
 – "Everglade".



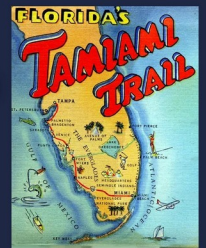
1926 Ford Model T



**1927:** Ed Frank opens first garage and car dealership. 5th Ave.  
 He invented the swamp buggy.



**1928:** Tamiami Trail Naples to Miami completed. Naples now accessible by car.  
 We will look at the building of the Tamiami Trail in Class 3.



**1930:** Naples population 391.  
**1933:** Seaboard Air Line stops passenger service. Freight only.

**1938:**  
 Wynn's Market and Back Bay Hotel.



**1940:** Naples pop 1,253.  
**1940:** Town of Naples and Collier County jointly start Naples Army Air Field for WWII training. Became today's Naples Airport.



**1942:** Seaboard Air Line RR ends freight train service to Naples.

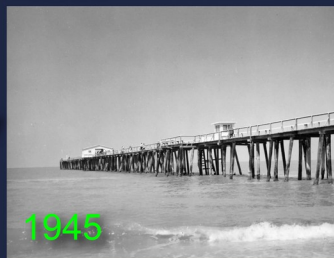


**1944:** Naples Pier destroyed by hurricane.



1944

**1945:** Naples Pier rebuilt and reopened.



1945

When will Naples Pier reopen (2027?) after 2022 destruction?

**1948:** Cambier Park opened. \$ raised from public donations.



Cambier Park 1948

**1949:** Aqualane Shores development started (Port Royal area). Naples' first housing subdivision.

**1949:** Bank of Naples opened. Residents no longer had to travel to Fort Myers to do banking.



Clarence and Maude Tooke First Presidents

**1947:** Everglades National Park dedicated.  
 President Truman arriving at Naples Airport for the dedication.



**1948:**  
 "Downtown" Naples centered around the Pier, not 5th Avenue.

Naples Hotel



**1949:** George Washington Carver School opened. Naples' public school for black children until 1968.

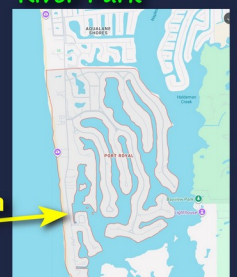


George Washington Carver School  
 10th St North  
 River Park

**1950:** Naples population 1,465.

**1950s-1970s:** Port Royal area developed, mainly by a developer named John Glenn Sample.

Gordon Drive



**1946:** Naples Beach Club Hotel opens. This photo c. 1954. Replacement now under construction.



**Early 1950s:** The city began paving streets, installing streetlights, and expanding utilities – infrastructure that laid the foundation for growth.

**1952:** Julius “Junkie” Fleischmann, who had inherited the Fleischmann’s Yeast fortune at age 24, acquired Nehrling’s Caribbean Gardens, added animals, and started what’s now Naples Zoo.



Junkie: World traveler and amateur anthropologist

**1955:** Naples’ first radio station WNOG founded by Richard Goodlette (Goodlette-Frank Road). Radio Rd named for first WNOG location.



**1956:** Fifth Avenue South, Naples’ new downtown



**1962:** City of Naples purchased the Naples Pier from private owners.

**1960:** Naples Own Airline PBA was founded 1949 to fly between Provincetown and Boston, MA.



Douglas DC-3

To balance seasonal demand, in 1960 PBA formed Naples Airlines:

- To/from Naples Municipal Airport.
- Lockheed 10E Electra and Douglas DC-3.
- Miami, Key West, and other Florida destinations.
- Ceased operations in 1989.



**1962:** Fifth Avenue South

Naples’ city center had clearly moved to Fifth Ave South from the Pier area.



**1956:** Naples Community Hospital opened.



The First NCH

**1960:** Naples Pier destroyed by Hurricane Donna. Rebuilt.



Naples Pier after Donna

**1960:** Naples population 4,656.

**1962:** County seat moved from Everglades City to East Naples.

**1963:** Collier County Public Library Opened on Central Avenue. Still there.

**1968:** Collier County Schools integrated. Up to then there were separate schools for African-American students in Naples and Immokalee.

**1970:** Naples population 12,042.

**1969:** Naples Pier. Since 1888. Historic. Iconic.



**Oct 4, 2022:** Naples Pier right after Hurricane Ian.



**1969:** Sign for Jungle Larry's Caribbean Gardens - now Naples Zoo.



**2025:** Sign damaged in hurricane. Toucan now rescued (my funding).



**There's no end date for history. But in this course we won't look at many events after 1970. Let me just list a few worth remembering:**

**1971:** Passenger train service ended.

**1976:** Coastland Center Mall opened.

**1977:** County inaugurated emergency "911" telephone service.

**1980 c:** Naples first Publix – Neapolitan Way (now being rebuilt).



**1980:** Completion of I-75 through Collier County, improving access and accelerating growth.



**1980:** Naples population 17,851.

**1981:** Freight train service ended.

**1984:** Veterans' War Memorial Monument built at Cambier Park



**1990:** Naples population 19,505.

**1992:** Opening of Naples Municipal Airport terminal, enhancing regional air travel.

**2000:** Baker Museum Opened.

**2000:** Naples population 20,976.

**2005:** Hurricane Wilma. Widespread damage.

**2017:** Hurricane Irma direct hit Category 3.



**2020:** Naples population 20,981.

**2021:** Naples Beach Hotel closed. To be replaced by Four Seasons.

**2022:** Hurricane Ian.

Naples Beach Four Seasons Resort & Residences



**I don't know how to assign a year to this:** But the explosive ongoing residential growth east of I-75 surely has to be a major event in SW Florida history.

### Historical Census Population

#### City of Naples

#### Collier County

Year	Pop.	% Change
1930	391	—
1940	1,253	220.5%
1950	1,465	16.9%
1960	4,656	217.8%
1970	12,042	158.6%
1980	17,581	46.0%
1990	19,508	11.0%
2000	20,981	7.6%
2010	19,539	-6.9%
2020	19,115	-2.2%

Year	Pop.	% Change
1930	2,883	—
1940	5,102	77.0%
1950	6,488	27.2%
1960	15,753	142.8%
1970	38,040	141.5%
1980	85,971	126.0%
1990	152,099	76.9%
2000	251,377	65.3%
2010	321,520	27.9%
2020	375,752	16.9%

<https://data.census.gov/>

### Historical Census Population

#### Marco Island

#### Immokalee

Year	Pop.	% Change
1980	4,694	—
1990	9,493	102.2%
2000	14,879	56.7%
2010	16,413	10.3%
2020	15,760	-4.0%

Year	Pop.	% Change
1960	3,224	—
1970	3,764	16.7%
1980	11,038	193.3%
1990	14,120	27.9%
2000	19,763	40.0%
2010	24,154	22.2%
2020	24,557	1.7%

<https://data.census.gov/>

### Historical Census Population

#### Everglades City

#### Chokoloskee

Year	Pop.	% Change
1930	172	—
1940	518	201.2%
1950	625	20.7%
1960	552	-11.7%
1970	462	-16.3%
1980	524	13.4%
1990	321	-38.7%
2000	479	49.2%
2010	400	-16.5%
2020	352	-12.0%

Year	Pop.	% Change
2000	404	—
2010	359	-11.1%
2020	346	-3.6%

**Well... that's a lot of information for just our first class.**

If you want to review any of it, a PDF of all of the slides is available for free download on my website:

[www.PaulVisits.com](http://www.PaulVisits.com)

Then click PRESENTATIONS.

## Coming Up:

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## End of Class 1

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Paul Pacter

[ppacter@gmail.com](mailto:ppacter@gmail.com)

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