
WALKING TOUR OF HISTORIC CHOKOLOSKEE

**SATURDAY, MARCH 8, 2014
at 10:30 a.m.**

**Chokoloskee Church of God Parking Lot
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photo courtesy of Florida State Archives

Notes About the History of Chokoloskee

The first permanent white settlers on Chokoloskee in the early 1870s were the Santini family who had originally come from Corsica. They lived on a mound near the present Smallwood Store and may have established a little cemetery there. By the time they left in 1899, other families had arrived: McKinney, Smallwood, Brown, to name a few.

Farming (vegetables, fruit) was the primary occupation but fishing and hunting also helped the economy. Plume hunting was lucrative but made illegal in 1901; alligator hides and raccoon pelts were valuable commercial commodities.

Transportation to the island was by water. In fact, youngsters took the school boat (*photo above*) to Everglades if they wanted higher education. In 1935 the County started a road to Half-Way Creek (now Plantation Parkway outside of Everglades City), thanks in part to pressure from Mamie Smallwood, but work stopped during World War II. A new route was planned in 1948 and eventually the causeway opened in 1955.

A new era began as tourists could more easily reach Chokoloskee. Campgrounds were established; fishing guides offered their services to anglers. And, island residents began developing businesses on the mainland in Everglades. Children took the bus, rather than the boat, to school and did not have to row their boats to see the films in the Everglades Club.

To learn more, read *The Story of Chokoloskee Bay Country* by historian Charlton W. Tebeau. The book was published in 1955 to coincide with the causeway opening and contains reminiscences of Ted Smallwood.

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Historical Photos of Chokoloskee



Old Santini house, later the Smallwood home.
photo courtesy of Marci Hallock, Santini granddaughter



Seminole Indians at the Smallwood Store.
photo courtesy of Florida State Archives



The boat basin near the Smallwood Store also sold gas. The large structure to the left is where A.C. Hancock built many of the Chokoloskee Cruisers and other craft.
photo courtesy of Florida State Archives



Ernest Coe, granddaddy of Everglades National Park, talks to Ted Small in the Store.
photo courtesy of Florida State Archives



The Post Office at the Smallwood Store.
photo courtesy of Florida State Archives

Chokoloskee Church of God

①



Chokoloskee was settled in the 1870s-1880s and many of the original families still live on the island or nearby.

In 1913 a revival was held on the shore in which 40 people were converted and baptized. A permanent Pentecostal congregation was established. It was served by circuit riders who came on the mail boats until the Tamiami Trail was completed in 1928.

The first church was built before 1928 but was destroyed by a hurricane. A new wooden church replaced it. That was taken down in 1960 and the present concrete structure was completed in 1961 after much fundraising.

Members of the church come from Chokoloskee, Everglades City, and the surrounding area. The church celebrated its 100th Anniversary in 2013.

The Chokoloskee Church of God is the third oldest of this denomination in Florida.

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②

JT's



The original structure built in the 1920s was moved from Everglades City after the causeway was completed in 1955. It has been operated since then as a store by a number of local families (Brown, Hamilton, Weeks, Kelley, and Wells). It was renamed “JT’s” after John Tiffit bought the property in 1989.

The business had been founded by G.C. McKinney, the “Daddy of Chokoloskee” who established a Post Office for the island in 1891. He was an erudite and amusing correspondent for the *American Eagle* newspaper, reporting on activities in the little remote community.

The current owner conducts eco-tours from the building which has a small gift shop inside.

The name “Chokoloskee” means “Big House or “Old Home” in Native American language. There are also many ancient shell mounds from the Calusa period which ended when the Spanish left the territory of Florida in 1763.

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Chokoloskee Island Park

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photo courtesy of Florida State Archives



The Ernest Hamilton Stone Crab Company started here and thrived when the local delicacy became popular in Miami. Ernest bought the adjacent land from his father Frank and converted it into an RV Park in 1964 which has since changed hands and expanded with a marina ship's store. The Park has sites for visiting RVs and tent camping.

Parkway RV Park, Motel & Marina

4

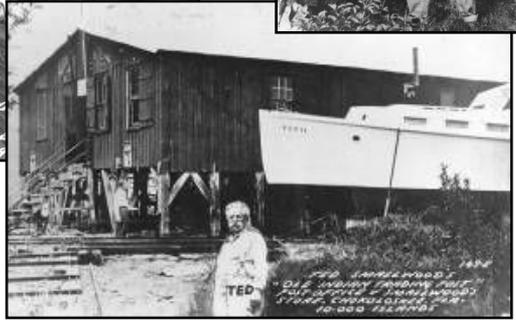


This property belonged to Ted & Mamie Smallwood's son Robert (Bob) who built the cottage on it, thought to be a converted barge ("lighter"), and the motel. When Bob died in 1985, it passed to his daughter Iris and was eventually sold to the present owners in 2005. There is a full-service marina and a tackle shop in the office.

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Smallwood Store & Museum



photos courtesy of Florida State Archives

C.S. (Ted) Smallwood was born in 1873 in northern Florida. In 1896 he worked on Turner River with D.D. House and married young Mamie House. They moved to Chokoloskee in 1897 where they bought the Santini home and some land.

Ted was appointed Postmaster in 1906 and in 1917 built the present store. He traded with the local Indians and spoke their language. He and Mamie had 6 children, some descendants of whom are still in the area.

The store ceased trading in 1982 and the Smallwood granddaughter Lynn McMillan converted it into a Museum, retaining many of the old artifacts that remind us of the past.

The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

The adjacent property was also part of the family's holding and contained the Blue Heron Motel, café, marina, and camping ground. It is currently owned by a development company but, at time of printing, plans for the property are not known.

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Smallwood Cemetery

⑥



The oldest gravestone dates from 1916 commemorating Daniel David House who was born in 1849 and settled in this area. House and his wife Ida Blanche, who passed away in 1957 at age 98, were the parents of Mamie Smallwood.

The next oldest memorial is for Charles McKinney (the “Sage of Chokoloskee”) who died in 1926 while rowing his boat after a hurricane to the Storter Store in Everglades to get supplies. His wife Susan, who died in 1949, shares the stone. They were leaders in the community. Their daughter Alice married J.J. Brown; the Brown’s son Loren wrote his memoirs *Totch; A Life in the Everglades*, which was published just 3 years before he died in 1996. Estelle, Totch’s wife since 1938 and love of his life, predeceased him by less than a year. They are commemorated here.

Among the Smallwoods, Charles Sherod (“Ted”) and Mamie are both buried here as well as some of their children and in-laws. Alton Carton (“A.C.”) Hancock married Nancy Smallwood and was a well-known boat builder as well as a County Commissioner. The most recent grave is that of Iris Smallwood, granddaughter of Ted & Mamie, a talented artist who died in 2011 at age 82.

Other names to be found in this private cemetery are Hamilton, Thompson, Demere, Wells, Raffield, and Dykes.

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Chokoloskee Mall



Thelma Smallwood, who had taken over as Postmaster from her father Ted in 1941, passed away in 1973. The position was taken by Mrs. Lois Green and the Post Office was in a trailer opposite JT's store. In 1984 the current building was completed and the Post Office moved into it. There was a breezeway between the left and right sides. On the right side, there was a Laundromat but the breezeway was soon closed up and in about 1986 a tackle shop was established.

The property was bought in 2003 by Carlos & Dulcie Valdes who remodeled the right side and opened Havana Café in August 2005. It became so popular that the garden and porch were developed to accommodate more people.

Above the Café on the right is a shell mound containing the small Lopez cemetery where Gregorio Lopez and his wife Lovie are buried along with other family members. He was born in Spain in 1848 and settled in the islands here where the Lopez River is named after him. At one time, there was a prosperous Lopez home on the mound which stretched further back.

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Outdoor Resorts

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photo courtesy of Florida State Archives



In 1930, William & Rosa Brown settled down on Chokoloskee Island building their home on two acres of land at the left frontal side on the Bay, raising a family of 4 sons and 3 daughters. Mr. Brown was a fisherman, life was good.

In 1955, Angler's Motel, Marina and Bait/Tackle Shop was built and family owned. Two sons settled down on the family's homestead building their own homes in 1960. William & Rosa's home was relocated on the property and Bayview RV Resort was built in 1969. The Brown family purchased more land adding up to 21 acres.

In 1983, the two sons sold out to ORA which included land on the right side of County Road #29 where Sunset Cove is located today. Outdoor Resort of America was the first innovators of RV Condomiums and developed 15 such RV Condomiums around state of Florida.

In 1993, the Brown Family obtained ownership of the property from ORA including the Marina, Bait/Tackle Shop, Motel, and Business Office at ORA entrance. Today the Business is owned by William & Rosa Brown's grandson.

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EVERGLADES SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Dedicated to our Unique History

P O Box 46, Everglades City, FL, 34139

www.evergladeshistorical.org

Welcome to our fifth annual Historic Tour!
We hope you enjoy learning about our Unique History.

ESHP was founded in 2004 and is a 501(c)(3) non-for-profit corporation. Its mission is to preserve all historic sites, structures, documents, artifacts, and memories within the greater Everglades area. Our Historical Library in Everglades City Hall keeps safe old books, photos, and documents.

Our events include Educational Talks about historical subjects, Nostalgia Nights for sharing memories, and Old-Fashioned Movie Nights (with free popcorn) to view films made in the area.

Profit from these annual Historic Tours is helping to fund Historical Signage. We have provided oval plaques on about 20 cracker homes in the City and have ordered upright signs for the front of public buildings.

You can keep up with our activities in our newsletter, which is emailed to members, and on our website www.evergladeshistorical.org.



ESHP WOULD LIKE TO THANK
– the owners who have welcomed us
– the advertisers who have supported this booklet
– the leaders & docents who have volunteered their time

The Everglades Society for Historic Preservation, Inc., the owners of the buildings on this tour, and the members, agents, or employees of either shall not be responsible for any injury, loss, or damage sustained during or in connection with this tour and shall have no liability for loss or damage.

NO SMOKING, NO PETS

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WALKING TOUR OF HISTORIC CHOKOLOSKEE

Saturday, March 8, 2014

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City Seafood (695-4700):
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6:00 am – 10:00 pm; Thurs thru Sun
Fish Market also open

Everglades Seafood Depot (695-0075):
10:30 am - 9:00 pm; daily

Glades Haven Deli (695-2091):
6:00 am – 9:00 pm; daily

Havana Café (695-2214):
7:00 am – 3:00 pm; Sun thru Thurs
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Island Café (695-0003):
6:00 am – 9:00 pm; daily

Ivey House (695-3299):
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Continental breakfast, box lunches

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Oyster House Restaurant (695-2073):
11:00 am – 9:00 pm; Sun thru Thurs
11:00 am – 10:00 pm; Fri, Sat

Rod & Gun (695-2101):
11:30 am - 9:00 pm; daily

Subway at Gator Express (695-3937):
7:00 am – 7:00 pm; daily

Sweet Mayberry's Café (695-0092):
8:00 am - 10:00 pm; daily (WiFi)

Triad Seafood (695-2662):
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Fish Market also open

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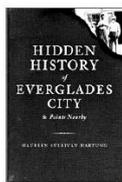
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