

Gift for Perpetuity?

Sid Taylor
FFS Park Naturalist
September 28, 2012

Chinsegut Hill, Gift for Perpetuity?



Raymond and Margaret Dreier Robins

The original owner of the hilltop, Byrd Pearson (1803-1860) brought his wife and four children from South Carolina in 1845. The 1850 census for Benton County (now Hernando, Pasco and Citrus) shows him as a lawyer and planter, owning 30 slaves. In 1851, a visitor and son of Alabama's Governor Clay wrote home describing “comfortable log cabins and a summit crowned with orange, lemon and fig trees”.



He had 75 acres in corn and 75 sugar cane planted on old Indian fields that sloped down to Lake Lindsey. Later in 1852 he sold his land and moved his family to Jacksonville. One of his daughters married Francis Philip Fleming, Governor of Florida who served from 1889 to 1893.

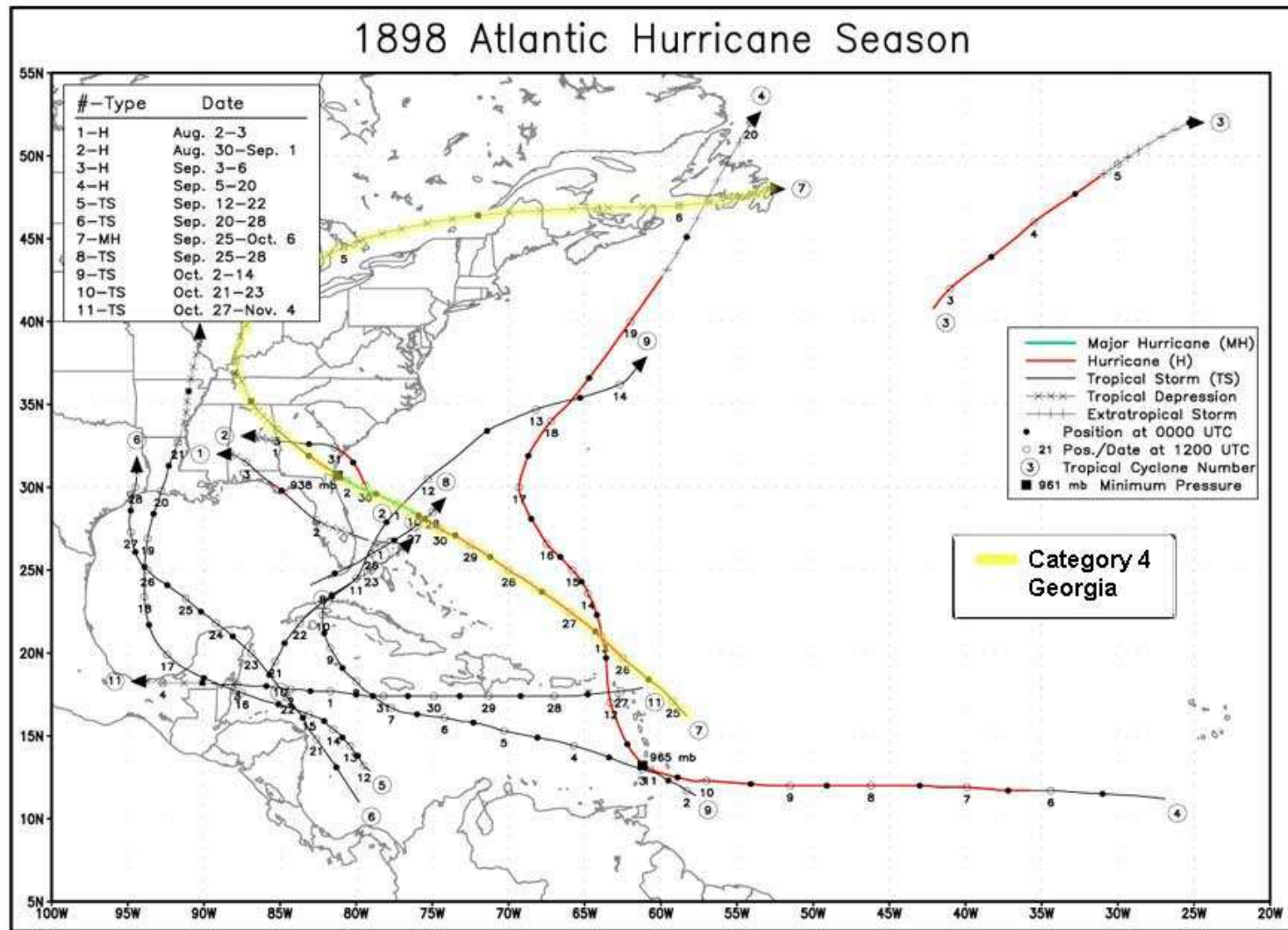


Byrd Pearson sold the hilltop, which he called Mt Airy, to Francis Ederington in 1851. The Ederingtons moved their three daughters, animals, household goods and their slaves down the long wagon trek from South Carolina to Chinsegut Hill. They had an additional eight children before their deaths. The oldest daughter, Charlotte (1846-98) was left to raise her young siblings. She is shown here with her husband Dr J R Snow. The homestead was renamed Snow Hill after their marriage. Many descendants of the Ederington and Snow families still live in the surrounding area!



Snow Hill was used as a plantation house that cultivated citrus and sugarcane. Slaves lived and worked on the site. One of the slaves was Lizzie Washington (left). After the Civil War, the site was used for cotton and other crops, but fell into disrepair in the late 1880s.





The house was moved 6 degrees off its foundation, possibly by [Topical Storm #1 of August 2] 1898.

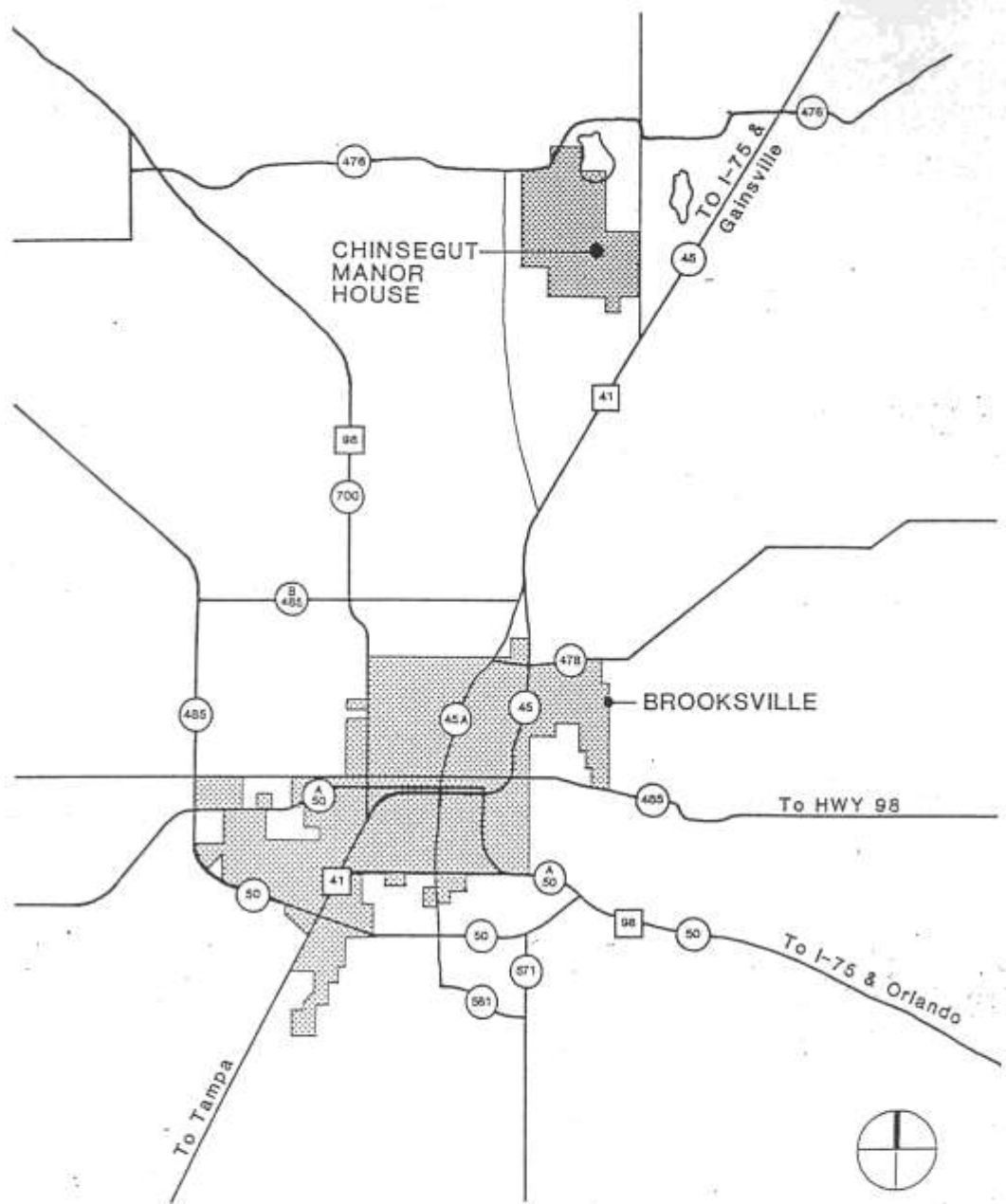
The Manor house as it appeared in 1905 when the Robins first arrived as new owners. A young Raymond Robins (1873-1956) with his long time friend Fielder Harris (1850-1924) are uncrating furniture on this day. Off to the right side is Margaret Dreier Robins. The photo was taken by Elizabeth Robins, Raymond's older sister.



Elizabeth Robins, Raymond's senior by ten years was a British actress, author and photographer. Elizabeth actually funded the purchase of the initial 213 acres - including the manor house. She gave a half interest to Raymond and Elizabeth as a wedding gift in 1905.



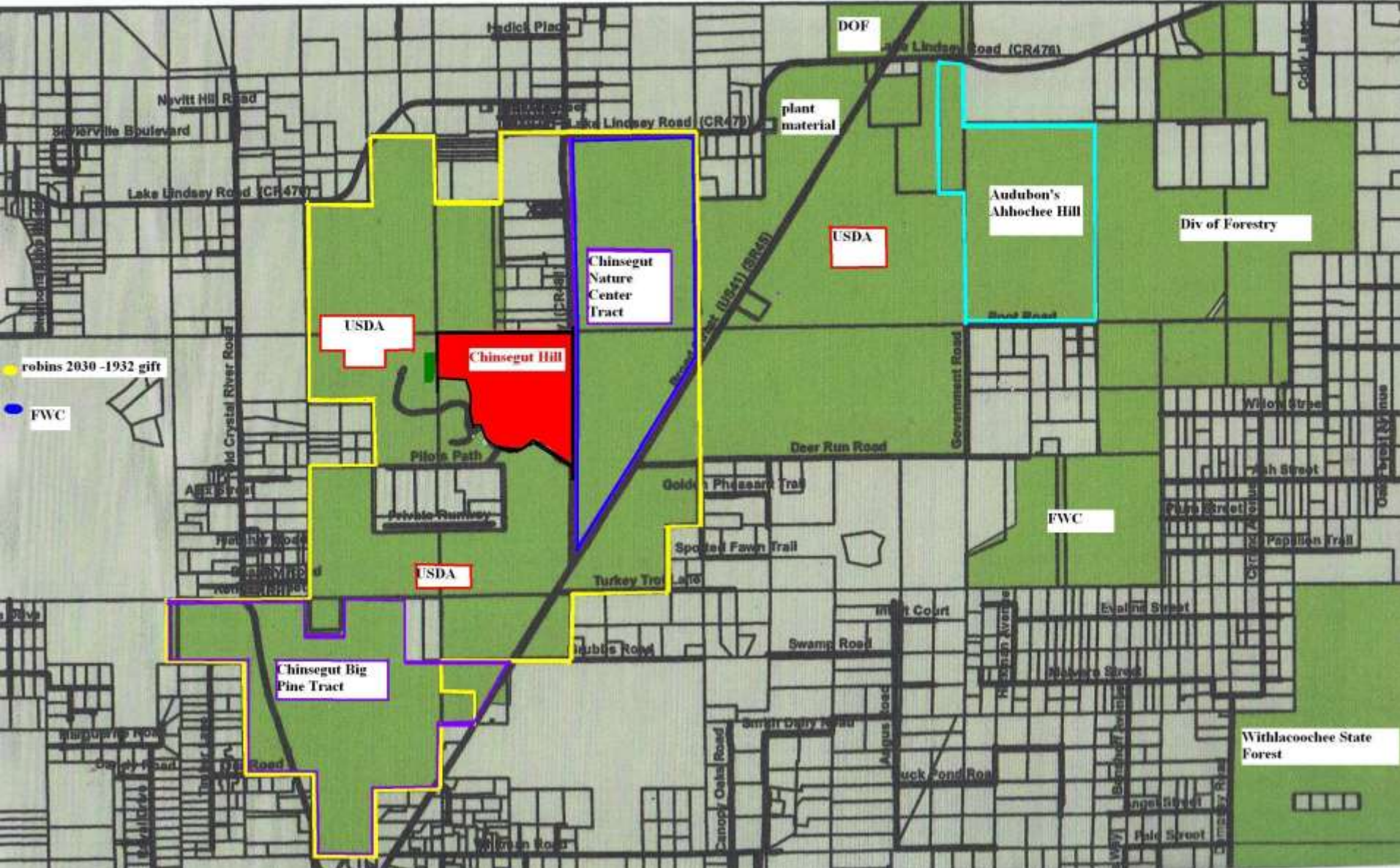
Chinsegut Hill is located north of Brooksville in historic Hernando County.



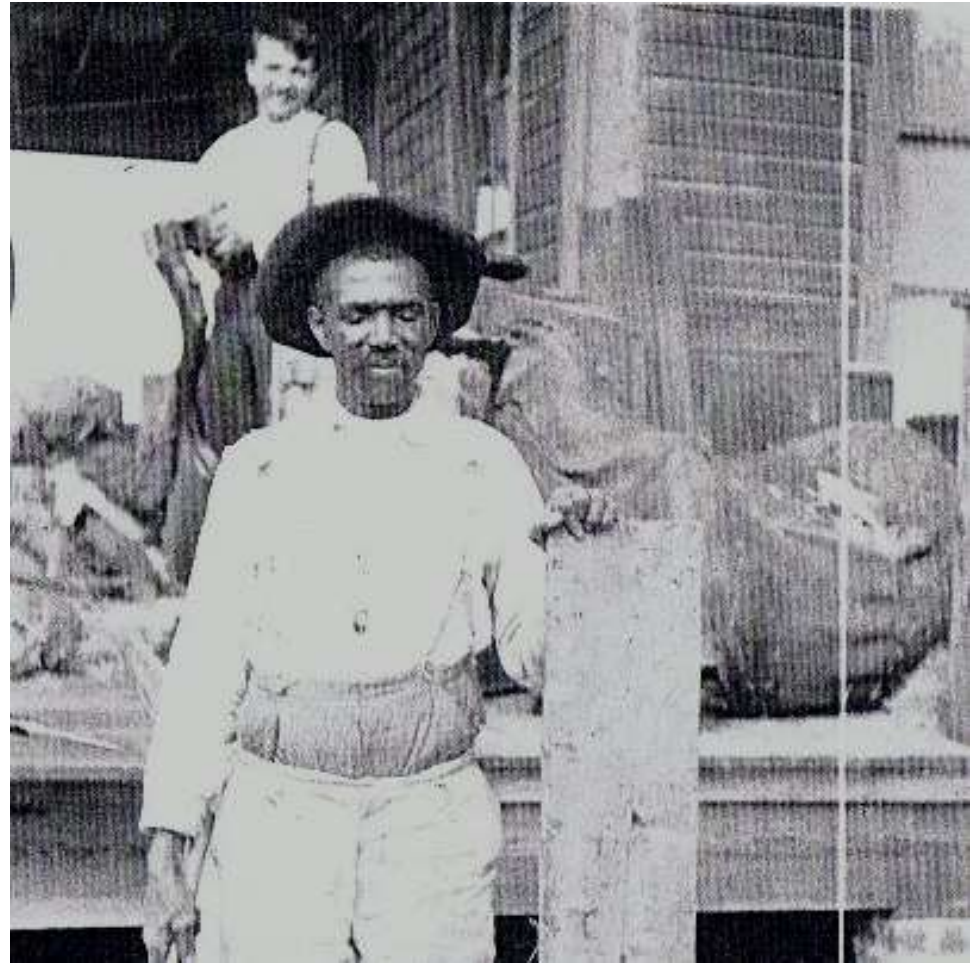
LOCATION MAP

MANOR HOUSE - CHINSEGUT EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTER

Chinsegut Hill Manor Tract Brooksville, Florida



Raymond is standing behind Fielder Harris, who was born a slave in Abbeville County SC, and came here as a freed man in the 1880s. He went to work for relatives of the Robins (McKays on Bodine Grove, now Ahhochee Hill) then for Raymond beginning in 1905 until his death in 1924. He and his family are buried in Lake Lindsey Cemetery.





Fielder Harris in front of Chinsegut Manor house in 1905...

...which was the home of Raymond and Margaret Robins and Lisa Von Borowsky.

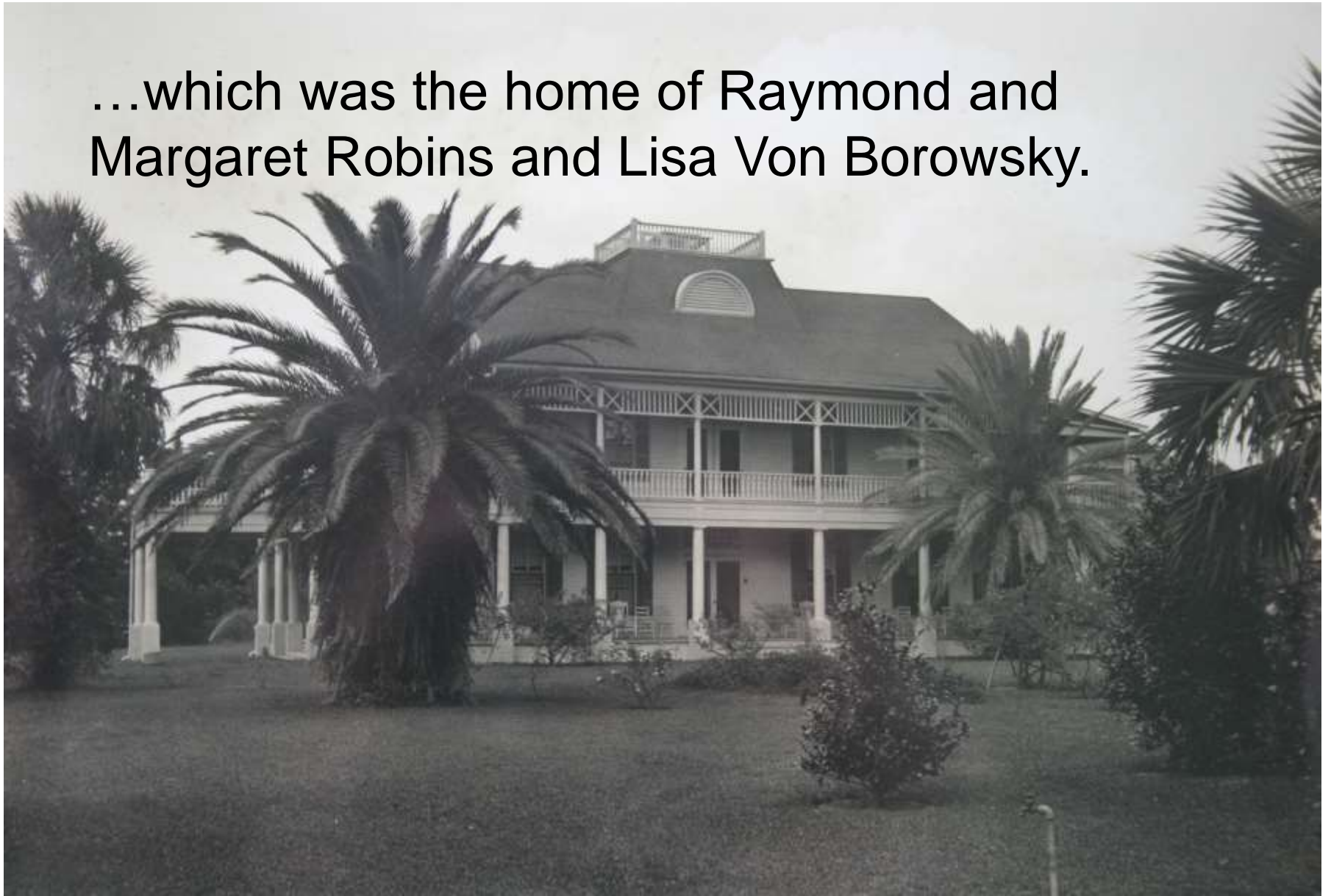


Photo circa 1932

History welcomes you to Chinsegut Hill

A presentation by Andrew Huse, USF, who secured its place on a National Heritage Landmark.



CHINSEGUT HILL

In 1842, South Carolinian Bird M. Pearson staked a claim on 160 acres and called it ~~Mount~~ Mount Airy, one of the few surviving plantations in Florida and one of the oldest houses in Hernando County. Pearson built the manor house's east wing in 1847 and later residents expanded it, beginning in 1852. He raised citrus, cattle, and sugarcane. In 1905 Chicago residents Raymond (1873-1954) and Margaret Dreir (1868-1945) Robins purchased property and named it Chinsegut Hill, an Inuit word meaning "a place where lost things are found." The estate served as a retreat from the couple's tireless activism on behalf of workers, women, and the poor. Guests entertained here included Thomas Edison, Senator and Mrs. Claude Pepper, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, J.C. Penney and Helen Keller. During the Great Depression, the Robinses suffered severe losses and donated Chinsegut to the federal government, collaborating with the Department of Agriculture on an experimental station to benefit Florida farmers. In return, the couple could live there until their deaths. New Deal workers improved the property and built two cabins in 1933. In 1958, the University of South Florida acquired the property for use as a conference center.

A FLORIDA HERITAGE LANDMARK
SPONSORED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA
AND THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF STATE

F-510

2004

Dedicated December 2003

The stately mansion has stood for over 164 years, one of Florida's oldest surviving plantation houses at one of Florida's highest elevations (274 feet) , and the oldest home in Hernando County.



Congress encouraged white settlers to live in the area after the Second Seminole War under the Armed Occupation Act. One such settler was Byrd Murphy Pearson, who purchased the land in 1842 and erected the manor's east wing in 1849. The East Wing housed the kitchen over the years. A kitchen separate from the main house allowed the residence to remain cool in summer and reduced fire risks.



The East Wing,
was built by a
shipbuilder with
wooden pegs. It
also houses
Hernando County's
first basement.



The site's most prominent owner was Colonel Raymond Robins. . (b. Sept. 7, 1873, Staten Island, NY) As a boy on a poor Fl. farm he vowed to own the estate then known as "Snow Hill." When he fulfilled his dream in 1905, he called the hill "Chinsegut," which legend says is an Inuit word for "the place where lost things are found." He picked up the word while working as a gold miner and missionary in Alaska in the late 1890s. For more, read: *Raymond and I* by Elizabeth Robins, 1956.



The Robinses married after a whirlwind romance, June 21, 1905. On the left, they visit with Margaret's sisters shortly after marrying. On the right, the couple pose in the garden, circa 1930.





Mary Dreier, Raymond and Margaret Dreier Robins soon after their wedding, 1905.

The Robinses hired Aunt Lizzie to work for them and she spent the rest of her life at Chinsegut Hill. She is buried at Lake Lindsey Cemetery next to Fielder and his family.

Aunt Lizzie Washington was born in slavery as Elizabeth Carr in 1849 in Abbeville district, SC.

Ederington traded a piece of land for her when he brought her to Chinsegut (when Abe Lincoln was still in the Senate).



Michael Lee Correia wrote of Lizzie in 1998 for the Fall issue of Tampa Bay History:

Lizzie had a dry sense of humor, which may explain why she would charge people 25 cents to enter the gate at the bottom of Chinsegut Hill...Margaret Robins once noted, “she walked as (if) she was The Queen of Sheba!” ...She was also eccentric, outspoken, and assertive with both blacks and whites. Lisa Von Borowsky remembered, “I would drive her to town. Negro men would be sitting by the side of the store and she’d call them over to the car. ‘You go in there and get me some backie (tobacco),’” A granddaughter remembers, “If she didn’t like you, she’d tell you.”



Aunt Lizzie lived to 90 years on Chinsegut Hill. As a midwife she birthed more of the community children (both black and white) than any of the local Doctors. Lisa Von Borowsky said it was unlikely she ever charged for her serves.

She was famous for smoking her corncob pipe and manipulating whomever she could to go to the store and fetch her tobacco.

She owned the car in the background of this photo, but didn't drive and always convinced someone else to chauffeur her.



Lizzie died June 8, 1938.

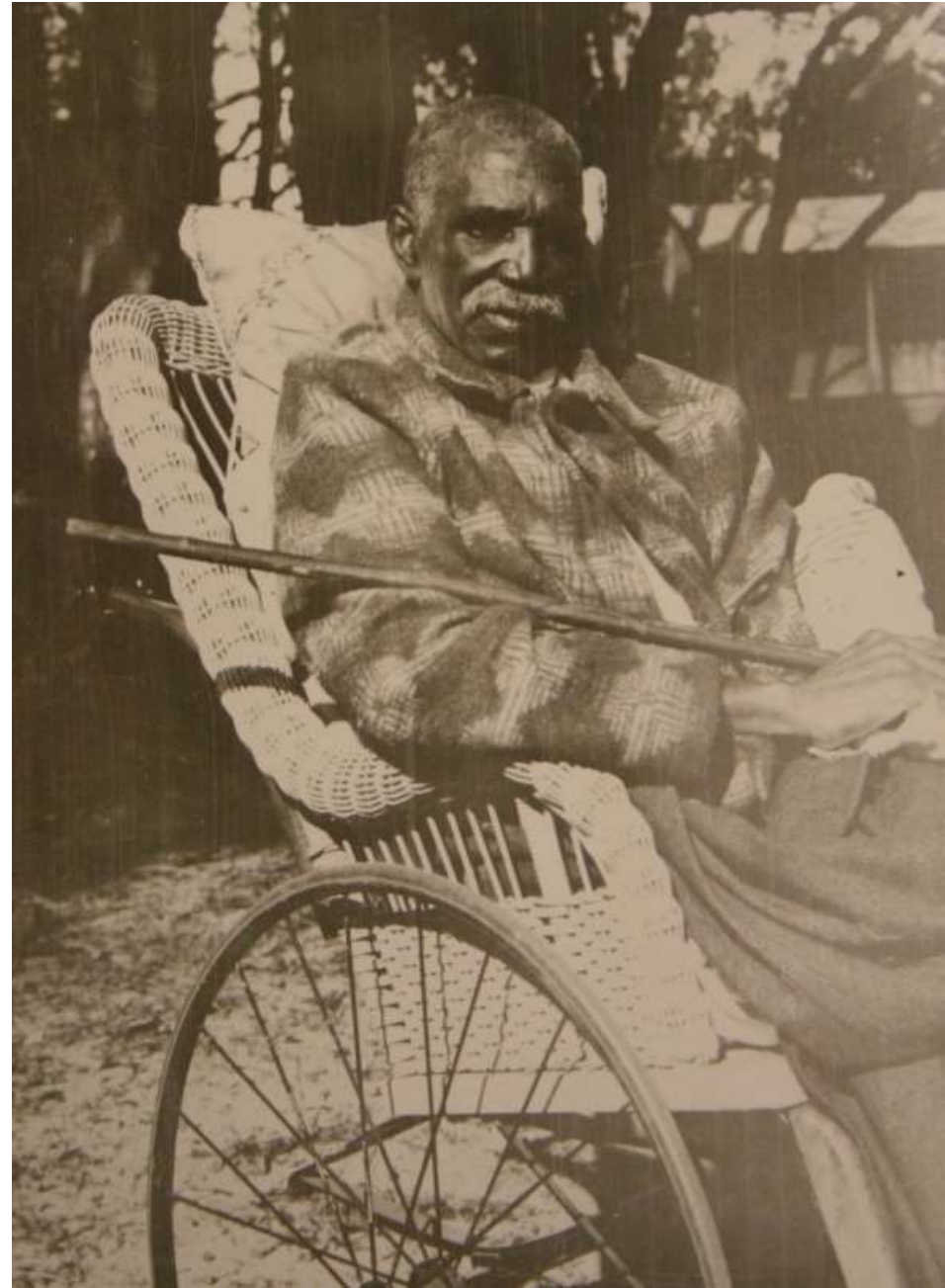
Fielder Harris was another former slave who befriended Raymond and helped raise him as a boy. Robins made him foreman in 1905, making Harris the boss of white and black employees. Actions like this infuriated local segregationists.



Fielder Harris was so close to the Robinses that he named his children after them, Raymond and Margaret. This photo is Fielder with wife, Pet, her daughter and their son, Raymond, 1914.



Raymond said of Fielder in 1924, "Uncle Fielder was during those impressionable years (as a boy at Bodine Grove) my closest associate. Unable to read or write, his mind was filled with immemorial wisdom of the field and farm, forest and stream. A wise fisherman and mighty hunter, he knew the signs and ways of fish, fowl and beast. He fished by the moon's phases; planted crops and trees and killed hogs and hunted deer and bear by the same high wisdom....He was the best axmen, oarsman, runner, wrestler and jumper in the county. He was a master of horsemanship; broke the wildest of mules, tamed range cattle and was altogether my ideal for those seven years."



By all accounts Robins was an interesting man. He worked as a labor organizer, gold miner, lawyer, humanitarian, diplomat, and a political advisor to the five presidents who processed FDR. Though they had different positions, especially on Prohibition, FDR granted Raymond a spontaneous meeting that lasted two hours.



Colonel Raymond Robins was a spiritual man with deep convictions and ideals. His honorary title of Colonel was bestowed upon him when he served in the Red Cross in Russia (June 1917-May 1918). He wrote this to Margaret on 14 April 1918: “For four months I have been the link between the government of Russia and the government of the United States. I am still apparently trusted by both though we have had awful strains...”.



As a Red Cross volunteer Raymond was an unofficial diplomat in Russia during the revolution in 1917-18. When it became apparent that the Bolsheviks would seize power, he met with Lenin in an attempt to keep Russia involved in WWI. Upon his return to the US, he was a tireless advocate of US-Soviet cooperation. FDR recognized the Soviets in 1933 after Raymond visited Russia again. He stands on the left in the group photo.



The couple helped Teddy Roosevelt's ill-fated "Bull Moose" Presidential campaign. Raymond himself became active in politics. Here he is sworn in as chairman of the Illinois Progressive Party with Margaret by his side, Chicago. In 1914, he made an unsuccessful bid for Illinois Senator on the Progressive ticket.



Raymond in action: on the street and at the pulpit. He was a tireless and well-known orator of his day, making frequent speaking tours across America and Europe. He also enjoyed giving sermons on Sundays.



Brooksville and
Hernando County

Presented by the
WMCA

No Copyright

Raymond Robins: Social economist; b. Staten Island, N. Y. Sept. 17, 1873; spent childhood and boyhood in Ky., and Fla. Son of Charles Ephraim and Hannah M. (Crow) R; educated at home and in country schools, Ohio, Ky., Florida. LL.B., Columbian (now George Washington) U., 1896 LL. D., Hillsdale college (Michigan) 1923; married Miss Margaret Dreier, June 21st, 1905. Mem. Chicago Charter conv., also Chicago Board of Education; social service expert the Men and Religion Forward Movement campgn., 1911-12, and world tour, 1913; chm. State Central Com. Prog. Party in Ill.; Prog. Party candidate for U. S. senator, 1914; temporary and permanent chm. Prog. Nat. Conv., 1916. Leader in Nat. Christian Evangelistic Social campgn., in Am. univs. and colls., 1915-16, under International Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. Dep. commr. and maj. U.S.A. in Am. Red Cross mission to Russia, June 1917; promoted commr. and Lt. Col. U.S.A., comdg. Am. Red Cross mission in Russia, Nov. 1917-May 1918. Trans-con. and European tour advocating Outlawry of War, 1923; campaigned Fla. citrus belt for growers coop. control in marketing citrus crop 1931. Conglist. Clubs; City (Chicago and New York); Congressional Country (Washington). Made tour of investigation Soviet Union, 1933. Home; Chinsegut-Hill Sanctuary, Hernando Co. (P. O. Brooksville, Florida.)



Col. Raymond Robins

Margaret Dreier Robins (6 September 1868 – 21 February 1945) was a remarkable person in her own right. She was a long-term activist in women's suffrage, child labor, women's rights, and civil rights. Here she appears beside her beloved flowers, circa 1930. Note the ventilator and widow's walk on the roof.



Chicago, circa 1910. (L) Margaret marches with suffragettes. (R) She confers with workers at a settlement house. Settlement houses served as places for the working poor to get on their feet and educate themselves. Raymond and Margaret were friends of Jane Addams, who started the famous Hull House in Chicago.



Margaret's most notable position was President of the National Women's Trade Union League which she held for over 20 years. From just 1907-1922, the League supported massive strikes with money, food, legal defense, and public education. They also advocated for legislating limited hours, a minimum wage, and safe working conditions.



Margaret was the founder of the International Congress of Working Women (1919-1923) which met in Geneva. Seated third in photo, Robins chaired the first ICWW in 1919, a meeting that gathered representatives from nineteen countries to discuss and promote fair labor standards for women. Among other demands, the Congress called for a universal eight-hour workday and legally binding maternity leave for working women.



Officers of International Congress of Working Women, Geneva 1921
From left to right seated: Interpreter, Margaret Bondfield, Great Britain, Vice-President; Maud Swartz, U. S. A., Vice-President; Margaret D. Robins, U. S. A., President; Jeanne Bouvier, France, Vice-President. Those standing not recorded.

Raymond and Margaret made Chinsegut their year-round residence in 1924, making extensive renovations inside and cultivating the grounds outside. This began a glorious era of upgrades for Chinsegut.



Prominent guests to the manor were common. From left to right: Mrs. Thomas Edison, Margaret Robins, Thomas Edison, Dr. & Mrs. Small, unknown, and overseer of Civilian Conservation Corps workers R.T. Long, Circa 1933.



Large parties and religious ceremonies were commonplace, but as prohibitionists, Raymond and Margaret served nothing stronger than fresh-squeezed orange juice. 497 guests received Jane Addams, March 1932.



Lisa von Borowsky: horticulturalist, caretaker, and “Daughter of Chinsegut Hill” hired by Raymond and Margaret to look after the house and grounds while her employers worked in Chicago and elsewhere.



Borowsky and Robins on a camping expedition, circa 1930.



This tower stored water for year-round use. Note the giant stand of bamboo to the right. Several varieties of bamboo can still be found on the grounds. The Robinses prided themselves on importing plants from all over the world, such as citrus from Algeria.



It was said that one could see the Gulf of Mexico from the water tower on clear days. The rotten structure was demolished in 1969.



The view from the old widow's walk must have been impressive as well. This photo was taken from atop the water tower.



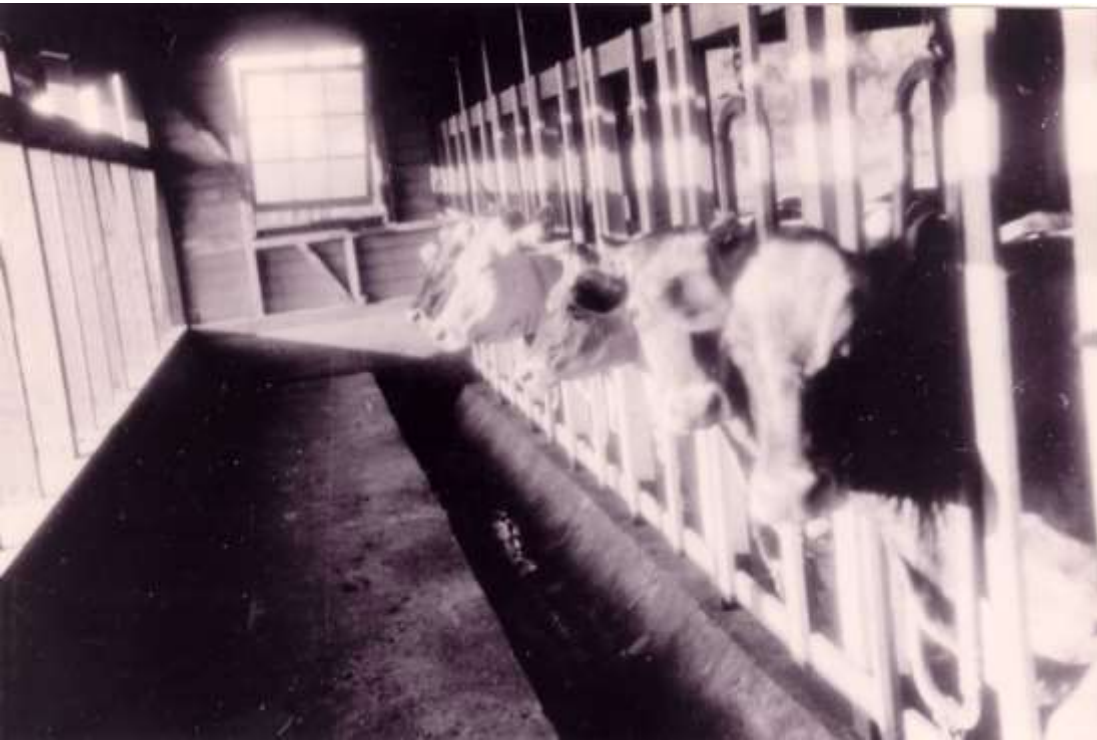
After losing their savings in the Depression, Raymond donated his estate to the federal government as a “Sanctuary.” He wanted to develop ways to help farmers succeed in Florida. Federal agencies such as the Civilian Conservation Corps worked on the site, and the overseer’s cabin still stands today. As a result of their donation, the Robinses could live there tax-free until their deaths.



A great lover of nature, Raymond asked that a large portion of his estate be maintained as a nature preserve. Today, the preserve is a nature center run by Florida Fish and Wildlife.



While owned by the government innovations with cattle were commonplace. Red Poll cows (on the left) in milking stalls; staff extracting a blood sample (on the right). Until 2012 this work was continued by Dept. of Agriculture's Experimental Agricultural Station, which surrounds Chinsegut Hill.





Drought tolerant cattle were breed. Seen here are Brahman.



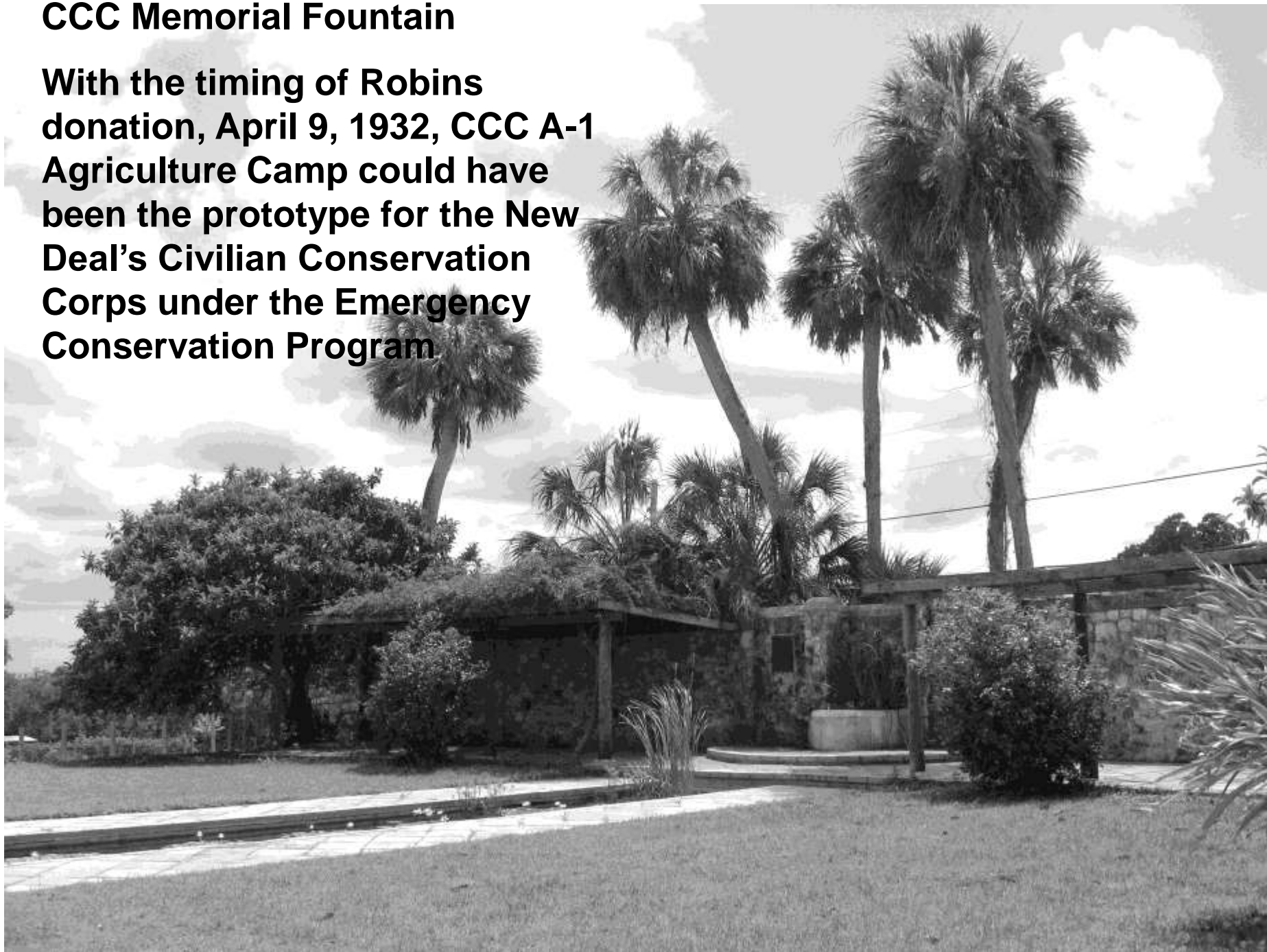
Aerial View from ca. 1932

Civil Works Administration was a temporary agency in the winter of 1933-34 created to get the work of FDR's New Deal underway.



CCC Memorial Fountain

With the timing of Robins donation, April 9, 1932, CCC A-1 Agriculture Camp could have been the prototype for the New Deal's Civilian Conservation Corps under the Emergency Conservation Program



**MEMORIAL
EMERGENCY CONSERVATION WORK**

ROBERT FECHNER, DIRECTOR

THIS RECORD IS TO COMMEMORATE THE WORK
DONE BY CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS
LEADERS AND WORKERS ON CHINSEGUT HILL
SANCTUARY IN CONSTRUCTING RUSTIC BUILD-
INGS, SANCTUARY OFFICE, MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN,
EDUCATIONAL AND RECREATIONAL LODGE, BUS
STATION ETC., ROADS, FENCES, EROSION AND
DRAINAGE CONTROL DITCHES AND TERRACES,
LANDSCAPE BEAUTIFICATION, FIRE LANES AND
REFORESTATION AND CITRUS GROVE CONSERVATION.

C. C. C. CAMP A-1 AGRICULTURE

STANLEY C. ORR, SUPERINTENDENT

PORTER G. REYNOLDS, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

THOMAS W. YOUNG, FORESTER

FOREMEN

S. O. KIMMELL

H. N. HUME

F. A. STENHOLM

W. J. MCCALL

"THE WILDERNESS AND THE SOLITARY PLACE SHALL BE GLAD FOR THEM,
AND THE DESERT SHALL REJOICE AND BLOSSOM AS THE ROSE." - ISAIAH.

CHINSEGUT HILL SANCTUARY

WILLIAM FRANKLIN WARD
FIRST GOVERNMENT SUPERINTENDENT

THESE TWO THOUSAND EIGHTY ACRES COMPRIS-
ING THE PLANTATION, WINTER HOME, GROVES,
FIELDS, PASTURE AND FOREST LANDS OF

RAYMOND ROBINS

AND

MARGARET DREIER ROBINS

WERE DONATED BY THEM IN A DEED DATED 9TH
APRIL, 1982, TO THE UNITED STATES DEPART-
MENT OF AGRICULTURE IN PERPETUITY, FOR THE
MAINTENANCE OF A WILD LIFE REFUGE, FOREST
RESERVE AND EXPERIMENT STATION.

THE DONORS WISH TO HERE RECORD APPRECI-
ATION FOR THE WORK DONE ON THIS PROPERTY
PROMOTING USE, COMFORT AND BEAUTY THROUGH
MANY YEARS PRIOR TO ITS GIFT TO THE
PEOPLE OF THESE UNITED STATES.

R.T. LONG

PLANTATION MANAGER

MELVIN C. CHAPMAN

FOREMAN & MECHANIC

LISA VON BOROWSKY

CURATOR GARDENS

AND WILD LIFE

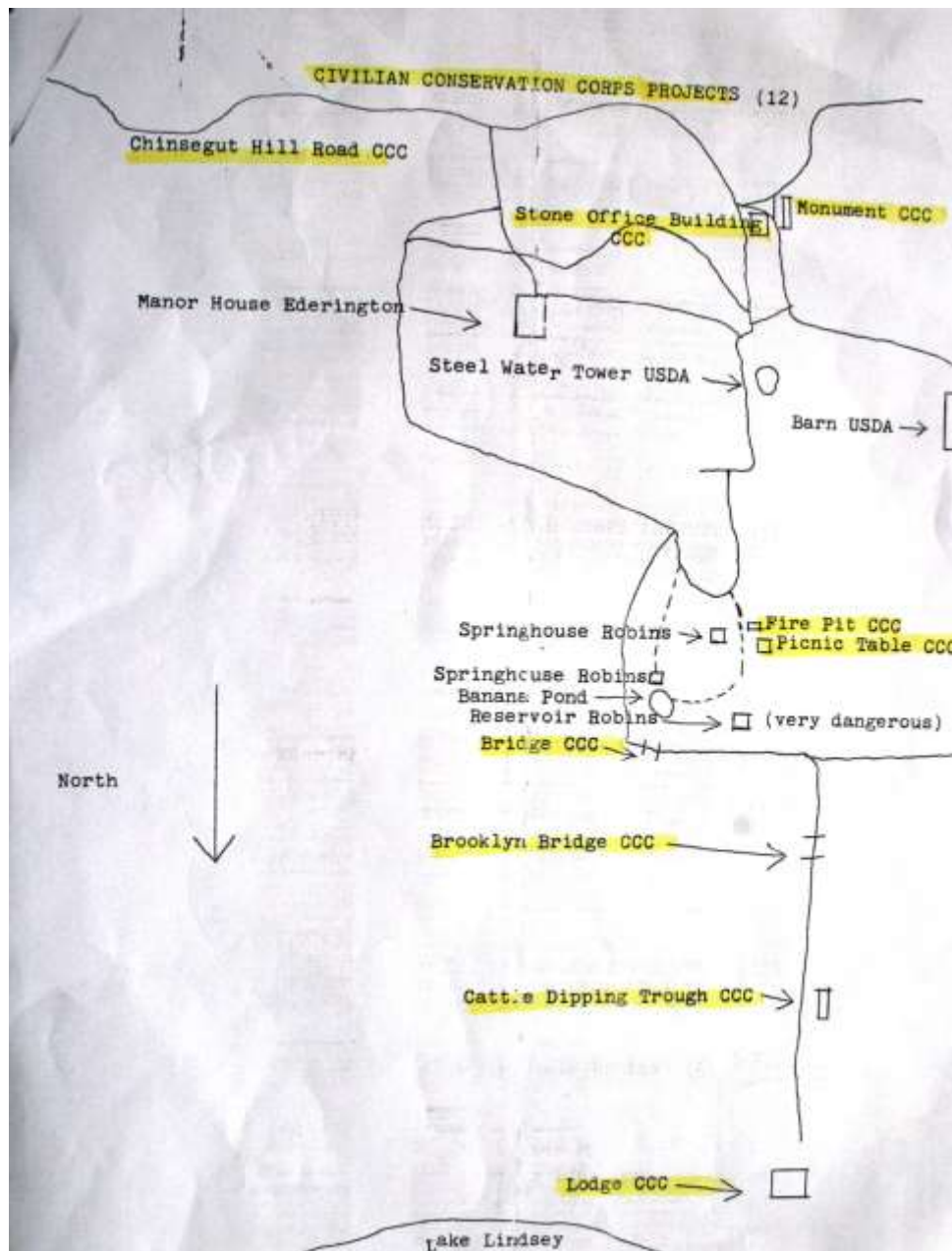
LILLY BRUMMERHOF

KEEPER OF THE FOWLS

FIELDER HARRIS

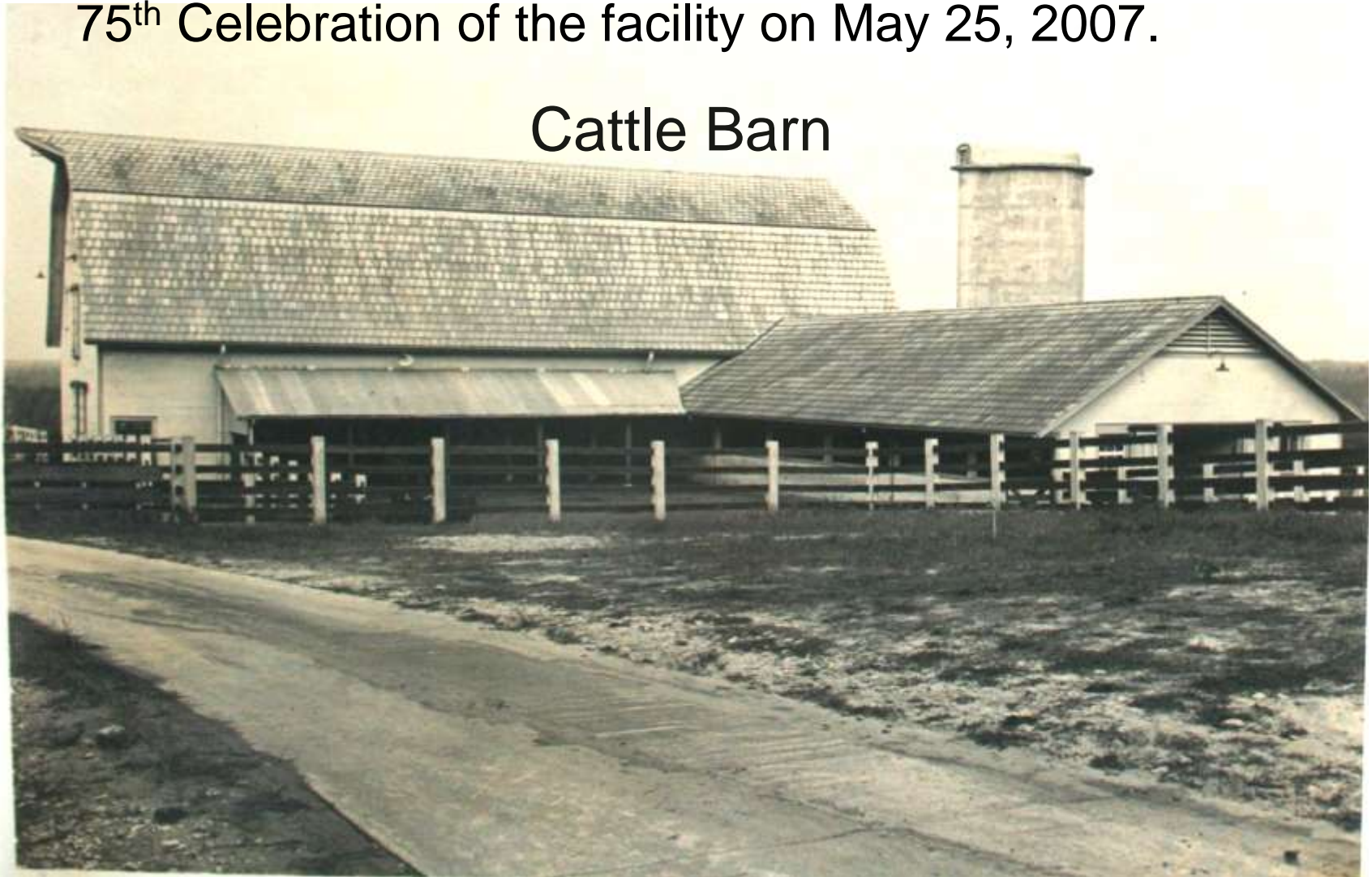
NEGRO LEADER & PLANTER

"AND THEY THAT SHALL BE OF THEE SHALL BUILD THE OLD WASTE
PLACES; THOU SHALT RAISE UP THE FOUNDATIONS OF MANY
GENERATIONS; AND THOU SHALT BE CALLED THE REPAIRER OF
THE BREACH, THE RESTORER OF PATHS TO DWELL IN."—ISAIAH.



The following thirteen slides were all from the archives of USDA Agricultural Experiment Station and shared by their historian, Myra Rooks. They were on display at the 75th Celebration of the facility on May 25, 2007.

Cattle Barn





New Cattle Barn

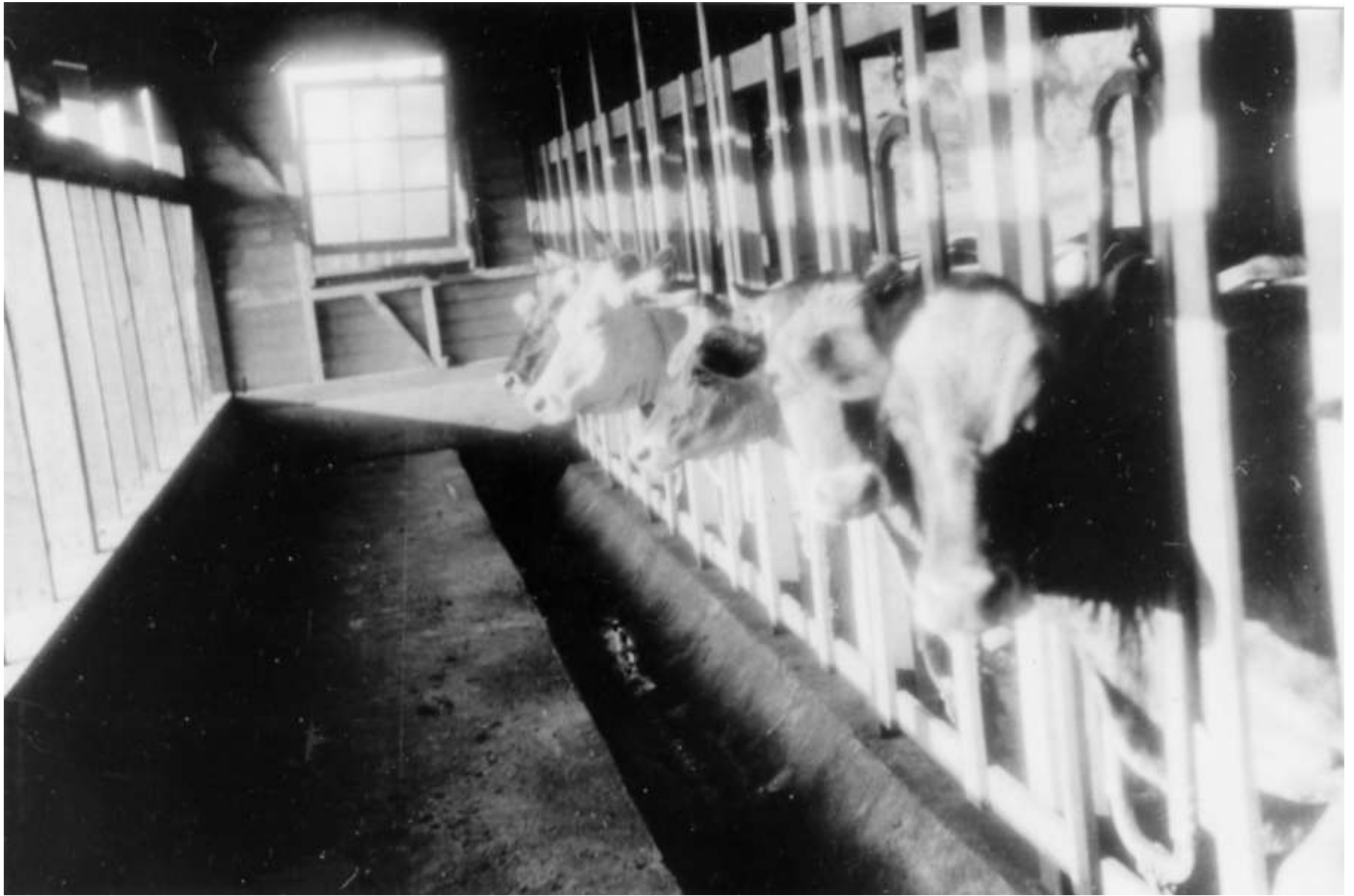


Milk house being constructed near Cattle Barn.
A milking house was built between the two.





Milking Barn



Red Poll Cattle for in their milking stalls.

Foundation for Hen Laying House, August 28, 1932



Old poultry bldg, remodeled for office, chicken killing room and lab with microscope.





Aerial of Poultry production

Concrete-macadam Road Construction, 1934



Road Construction cont'd. (Chinsegut Hill) After the rock is grouted the top is finished off with a richer mixture of cement and sand.



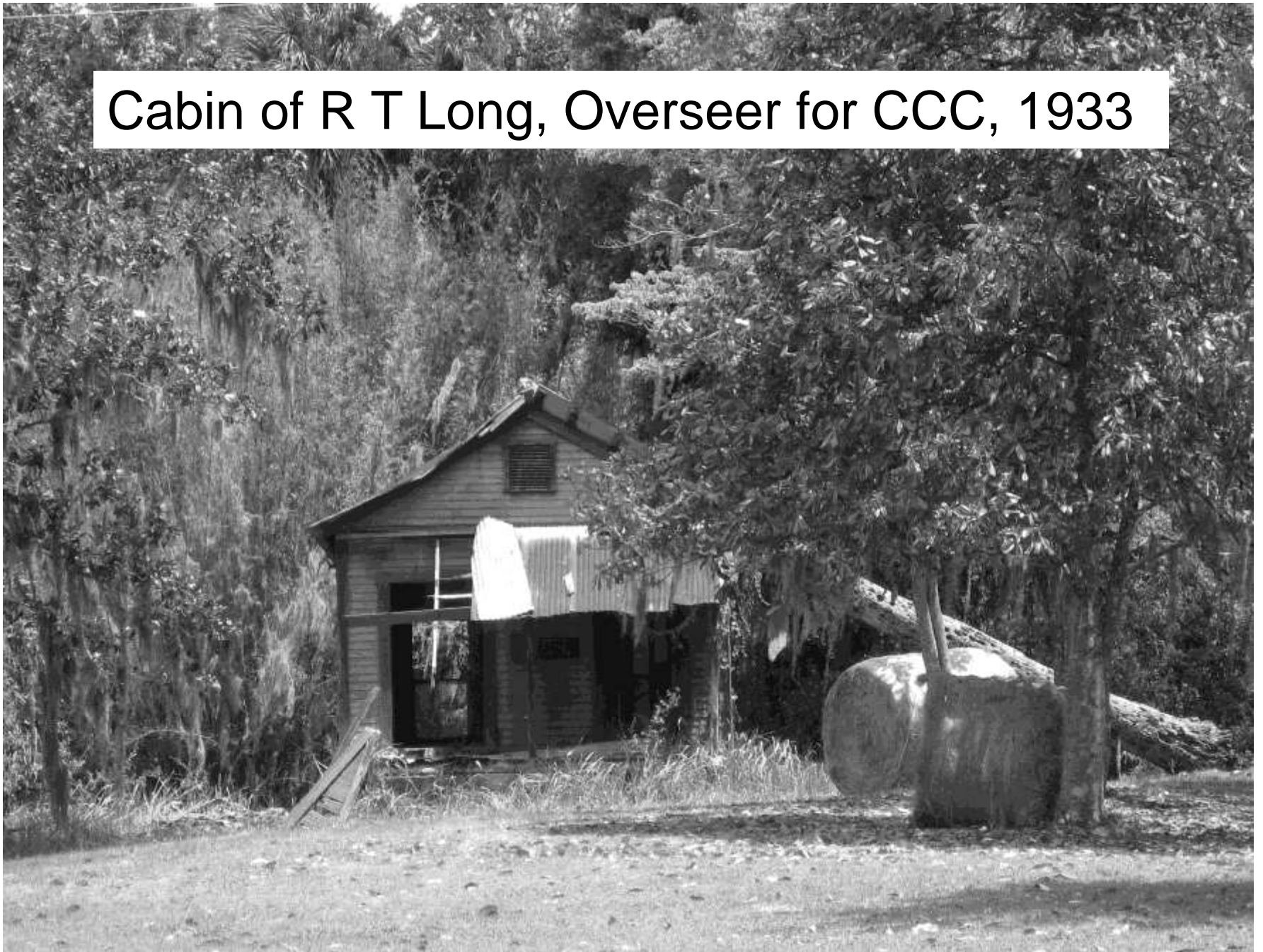
Drilling a 12" drainage well. The well is 360' deep and the water stands 35' below surface of ground. An enormous quantity of water was secured and it is estimated that 5,000 gallons of water could be pumped per minute should it ever be needed for irrigation purposes.



Digging water oak, live oak and holly trees for replanting along roads and entrance to Sanctuary. About 95% of these trees have lived. CWA helpers.



Cabin of R T Long, Overseer for CCC, 1933







CHINSEQUIT LODGE CAMPING CENTER LAKE LINDSAY, 8-1965

The Robinses sponsored Christmas parties for the community here in the Stone Lodge. Margaret also paid for a visiting nurse for the area and sponsored the first library. She and Lisa grew greenhouse plants and sold them to raise the funds.



USDA office built by the CCC



Another view of the USDA office



Robins influenced the construction of a bus stop at now US 41 and Snow Memorial Highway for the convenience his many guests. A phone call from the station to the Manor provided a car for the last mile up the Hill.

Raymond and Hass,
the Great Dane

Raymond was very much involved in the Federal management of the Chinsegut Hill. Many letters still exist that he wrote to the foreman on site and to Washington, DC.





George Cason, Robert Holcombe, Emory Cason and Lisa Von Borowsky planting Cypress on the edge of Lake Lindsay, Dec. 1935



George Cason, Robert Holcombe, Emory Cason and Lisa Von Borowsky probably working as part of the Works Progress Administration efforts per the date:

Dec. 1935



U.S.
**RESETTLEMENT
ADMINISTRATION**

**PROJECT NUMBER LD-FL-3
REGION NUMBER-V
CONSERVING 115,000 ACRES
FOR FOREST, WILDLIFE,
PASTURE AND RECREATION**

**The Federal connection with Chinsegut Hill helped est. Withlacoochee Land
Demonstration Resettlement Project**

Mr. Robins fell while pruning a tree in 1935, but he would not allow paralysis to still his body or spirit. He insisted on remaining mobile in his custom-built walker. He still enjoyed pruning his plants, evidenced by his array of tools at his side.



Raymond continued to enjoy an active lifestyle. Photo at right: in his wheeled pruning chair with University of Florida President, John J. Tigert.



Despite his disability, Raymond insisted on maintaining his bedroom on the second floor. He climbed the stairs himself, aided by his strong arms and a series of handles drilled into the walls, as can be seen in the left of this photo of the east wing staircase.



Most of all, Robins liked to climb his beloved “Ascension Oak,” or “Sunrise Oak.” A small stairway leads up to a platform facing east, where Robins meditated every morning as he watched the sun rise, followed by a cold outside shower.



Margaret died in February 21, 1945, and Raymond followed September 30, 1954, both were buried beside the Altar Oak, where Raymond gave sermons on Sundays. The inscription reads, "Into this Altar Oak on Chinsegut Hill have been absorbed through the good earth the mortal remains of Raymond Robins—Margaret Dreier Robins". The property reverted to the federal government and was held briefly by the University of Florida.



In 1958 the University of South Florida (USF) took over the property from University of Florida and has maintained the manor and the grounds till 2012.



During USF's early years, the site hosted extensive conferences between students, faculty, and administrators. This photo was taken during such a conference in 1964.



Faculty and administrators met to discuss university issues, build team spirit, and relax. In this photo, faculty enjoy a leisurely dinner in the manor house.



The manor house serves as a fine example of frame vernacular architecture, with bricks made from sand quarried at the site.



This chimney is an interesting feature. The third floor three-paneled window was later obstructed by a chimney rising from a first-floor fireplace. A good example of the house's gradual "organic" development.



Many of the house's original furnishings remain today. This picture was taken on the third floor. To the left is the curious chimney/fireplace running through the bay window.



First floor hallway and staircase



First floor dining room with vintage furniture



Use of the facilities is open to the public, and has provided an ideal setting for conferences, retreats, and celebrations.



Aerial View, 1962. Note the old water tower just beyond the manor. The new one stands to the left of it.



When USF first leased the manor house it was valued at less than \$1,000. USF leaders have been wise enough to realize that the property is priceless. Chinsegut Hill serves as a prominent symbol of our to community history, and our colorful traditions.



The final note, symbol and motive which we have hoped would dominate this undertaking is that CHINSEGUT HILL SANCTUARY should be a LIGHT HOUSE on that old HILLTOP, on HOLY GROUND as it were, made such by vision, adventure and hope, the labor and suffering, the daring and the dream, the achievement and the failure of human effort; a LIGHT HOUSE from which ever more shall shine the rays of scientific experimentation, discovery, demonstration - TRUTH shining and pointing out the paths that are more excellent for primary production feeding the life of man; making better the work of hard handed farmers, inspiring the quest and adventure of eager hearted boys and girls from the agricultural schools of our State in which use, comfort and beauty is implicit in its service to mankind. Ever old and ever new, the mighty power of evolution in the knowledge of the mind and the processes of production - never done, ever becoming, moving from one experiment to another, keeping step with the progress of science and life; chemistry, engineering and mechanics used in the solution of the problems of production of field and forest, the whole mystery of seed time, blossom and fruit, of procreation and birth, Nature and the mind of man in wise and vast cooperation unlocking secrets held from man for ages. This should be the continuing revelation from the HOLY GROUND of that OLD HILL, CHINSEGUT HILL SANCTUARY.

For this property while the boom was on, I refused two hundred fifty thousand-dollars, a certified check for twenty five thousand dollars accompanying the offer for its purchase. This was of course refused. We deeded the property to the Government of the United States for the consideration of one dollar.

17th of August 1932

From Raymond
Robins to University
of Florida President,
John J. Tigert



Chinsegut Hill Manor Tract Brooksville, Florida

