

Seven Women Record Indian Rocks History

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INDIAN ROCKS BEACH — "We're seven women who are strong-minded and determined. Yet we never had a cross word between us. We overrode each other's decisions and our meetings were frenzied, but we did it!"

What they did, after 16 months of hard work, was produce a book on the history of Indian Rocks.

It began with election of Betty Rooney to the presidency of the Indian Rocks Homeowners' Association in 1978. Among the appointments that followed was that of Helen Proctor as association historian.

Mrs. Proctor says, "I thought I would just keep the record of the organization's activities for the year. But Betty had a lot more than that in mind."

Mrs. Rooney had an idea for a city history similar to one put out for Phoebus, Va. "It was mostly pictorial and was really interesting. I talked about it with Helen Proctor and she said she'd be willing to make a try."

Mrs. Proctor stood up at the next association meeting and asked for help. "We asked for old pictures, scrapbooks, names of people to interview, anything that might help. And as a result, people began to appear, all volunteering to work with us. Eventually we had a seven-woman committee."

The committee included Betty Rooney, Helen Proctor, Margaret E. Olson, Avril Finke, Dorothy Pape, Zeva Irwin and City Commissioner Emma C. Jackson.

Scrapbooks came in from the Indian Rocks Beach Civic Association, the city (which continued to cooperate with the project), the Holiday Isles Chamber of Commerce (which began life as the Indian Rocks Beach Chamber of Commerce), and American Legion Post 128.

"The whole project began from talk. People kept coming to talk to us. They were simply interested in the community's history, both new and old residents. The community began, you know, with the Anona area on the mainland and grew toward what is now the Intracoastal Waterway. That area was known as Indian Rocks. Then it crossed The Narrows where the old Indian Rocks Bridge used to be, and went right and left along the beaches. It gradually extended to where Indian Pass was (now the Town of South Shore) and northward to what presently takes in Indian Rocks Beach. North of that, now Belleair Beach, was simply undeveloped."

As reports continued to be presented to the Homeowners' Association, the question of financing the book arose. Advisers were asked to serve as a finance committee. At a subsequent meeting, the decision was made to break away from the association and form the Indian Rocks Area Historical Society. The society is governed by a 15-member board of directors, including the seven women involved with the book.

They met at first to talk about people who might possibly have information and pictures to



Staff Photo by JOE WALLIS

The seven-woman committee, from left: Emma C. Jackson, Avril Finke, Dorothy Pape, Helen Proctor, Betty Rooney, Zeva Irwin and Margaret E. Olson.

contribute. Then they began telephoning. Each telephone call produced more names. They began interviewing, taping if they were permitted to do so. "One led to another. But so many of the oldtimers — the ones who were there — were gone. We were too late for a lot of things."

The group decided to set up regular meetings every Monday at 9 a.m. in City Hall. Each of them would bring in what they had gotten that week in the way of pictures, stories, interviews. During the week they pursued the areas in which they were working.

They tried to work in pairs if possible and attempted to double-check all information they acquired.

The entire community was caught up in the project. Frank Brandon, former Indian Rocks Beach postmaster (and his father, Camillus Brandon, postmaster before him), came one day at 11 a.m. and left at 5 p.m.

And local electrician Gerald Harwood, ill at home, had them come back three times for talks about the area in the '40s, the Indian Rocks Volunteer Fire Department, the way people pitched in to help during hurricanes. Harwood died a short time later.

Laura Brown was interviewed. She and her husband developed the Indian Beach subdivision at the north end of Indian Rocks Beach. Joe Knight Jr., whose Tampa family had summered for many years and later became fulltime residents, also contributed information and pictures. Familiar names — Robert Zubrod,

the Snelling family, the Bies, Wilcoxes and Hammonds, to name only a few.

Many trips were made to Tampa where descendants of early residents live. Mary Fain Bolles' father was engineer for the Haven Beach area and she lived in the beach community during those years. She contributed many pictures.

The Largo library was researched. About a dozen fragile copies of the old *Indian Rocks Sentry* turned up there — but, when they returned to look at them again, they could not be found.

Betty Rooney says, "I guess we interviewed about 150 people. We had more than 1,200 pictures. When we began trying to figure what pictures we'd use, we broke it down into categories — churches, schools, the old Indian Rocks Bridge, the years. We might have 12 pictures on one subject and had to narrow that down to one or two."

The seven women did all the layout work and reduced or enlarged pictures, saving a lot of money. Mrs. Rooney had prepared school yearbooks as a teacher and shared her knowledge.

They began making the rounds of local printing firms. "We were laughed at by the printers. They'd look at us and say, 'Seven women? Hal Hal Hal!' We went everywhere. And then we talked to Frank Hurley, who recommended *Great Outdoors Publishing Co.* of St. Petersburg. We went there and they didn't laugh. They were most cooperative and the work

was done to our complete satisfaction."

They had 2,000 copies made up. Some are still on sale at the Chamber of Commerce, the Gulf Beach Art Center, City Hall and the Indian Rocks library at \$6.50 a copy.

The book was at the publishers ready to be printed when a suitcase full of pictures arrived, all of 1925 vintage, featuring the old Indian Rocks Park, the spring and the Haven Beach area. They'd been sent by Bill Brandon of Naples.

They got those into the book, adding pages, and were set to go again. But then the slide of the excursion train that used to come from Tampa to the Indian Rocks Park arrived!

Helen Proctor says, "We had written all the railroads hoping for a picture of the train coming into Indian Rocks. Finally Seaboard Coastline sent a paper copy of the picture. We made several calls after that, requesting the picture be loaned to us. On the day we were to print the book, a slide arrived. We raced out to Great Outdoors Publishing and added another page."

Last minute arrivals such as these added another 20 pages.

The book was ready in time to be sold at the colossal celebration of the city's 25th anniversary June 28.

The seven women are still meeting Monday mornings. Sometimes they are joined by one or more of the other directors, who are Jack Starbuck (president), Jean Case, R. Jan Kahler, George King, Herbert Oppel and Hugh Smith.

Kahler, a young man who spent part of each year as a child in the area and now lives here, explains, "The book had a beginning and an end. With its publication we were at a point where we realized the book was one thing but we wanted the society to continue on, we wanted the book to be just ONE project of the society. In time there may even be another printing. Since its publication, we've more pictures, more interviews, more artifacts."

Kahler says, "People want to donate now. We are considering now the possibility of a small museum, a room to store and display. It would be fine if we could find an older building on the beach that could be donated and then we could move it up here by City Hall and renovate it and have an office and museum."

The society is now selling correspondence notepaper and envelopes featuring reproductions of some of the old scenes in the book. These are available at the same locations as the book.

Current projects include the slow process of perusing stored city records for any helpful historical information, marking the location of the old Indian Rocks on the beach side as well as the mainland, and collecting books on Florida.

City Commissioner Jackson ends the story about the history book. She says, "The stories most interesting were those we couldn't include. Like the location of the stills during Prohibition. There were eight stills on Belleair Beach, three out on the end of Sand Key, which was a jungle of mangroves then. The rumrunners went out from the beach and delivered the stuff."