

4-1920-1929

LOCAL HISTORY ROOM
WINTER PARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CITY OF WINTER PARK
History of W.P.
1920-1929

6/22/89

6/22/89

In the good old summertime

By DOROTHY SHEPHERD SMITH W.P. OUTLOOK

In the 1920s in the good old summertime, Winter Park was almost deserted. Owners of estates that lined the lakes had left till winter. Hotels were shuttered and every Wednesday afternoon all businesses closed. My father used to say that you could shoot a cannon down Park Ave. and not hit a soul.

Around July 4, every family who could headed for Daytona Beach. In the early 1920s it was more than a half day's ride on a 9-foot brick road, allowing time to get stuck in deep sand ruts when passing a car. It was a long trip for a day, so going to the beach was usually for a stay of a week or more in one of the white frame cottages strung along the shore.

Summer in Winter Park didn't seem as hot as it does now for there were more trees and open spaces and no asphalt roads or parking lots. Wind blew through open cars. Clothes were of natural fibers, mostly cotton. Women and girls wore the minimum and I don't mean shorts or bikinis.

Church was one of the few occasions when men wore coats—then they looked their best in white linen suits and straw hats. Women wore pongee, voile and crisp organdy dresses, silk stockings, hats and white gloves. During the service, cardboard fans fluttered like butterflies and, through open windows, you could hear birds sing.

We accepted the heat of summer and adjusted to it. Dinner was prepared in the cool of the morning and served at noon. Little cooking was done for supper. Business people took time out for a siesta before returning to work for, in the 1920s most residents lived close to Park Ave.

In the evening, parents, perfumed with citronella, sat on front porches while barefoot children played in yards. As they rocked and visited, folks talked about the buying and selling of real estate during the Land Boom and, later on, of the hardships of the Great Depression. We went to bed on breeze-conditioned, screened,

sleeping porches with the smell of jasmine in the air.

Summer was the time for family fun. People picnicked at Palm, Sanlando and Wekiva Springs and swam in lakes with the alligators. I felt comfortable sharing our nook of Lake Osceola with several gators whose heads, like logs, lay on top of the water. When a head disappeared, then I'd swim to shore.

A favorite meeting place for young and old was Gary's Pharmacy with its ceiling fans and wrought-iron ice cream tables. From a marble soda fountain, soda jerks sold Cokes and cones for a nickel. At the grocery next door, the health-minded bought sauerkraut juice for five cents a glass. This was a grown-up drink supposed to be good for what ailed you. After sampling some from the wooden keg, I decided I wasn't old enough for it.

The most exciting place on Saturday night was the Baby Grand Theater. The evening began with a silent movie accompanied by the piano. Then came a serial, each episode ending with the hero hanging from a cliff, the heroine fleeing from the villain or some other desperate situation. Who could resist returning next week to see what happened? The evening ended with a drawing for prizes contributed by local merchants. For the holders of a lucky number, this was the most exciting event of all.

A favorite picnic place for teenagers was wild, uninhabited "Woo Island," now known as the "Isle of Sicily." A sand trail led to the tip of the island where we roasted weiners, toasted marshmallows, slapped mosquitoes, played the ukelele and sang. Riding home in the moonlight with a favorite beau in a rumble seat, I thought that the good old summertime was the very best time of year.

NOTE: Dorothy Shepherd Smith is a local historian and native of Winter Park. She edited and indexed the Loring Chase scrapbooks while in charge of the Rollins Library Floridiana Collection and the Historical Records of Winter Park. She is a published writer.

6/22/89