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Florida Historical Society Essay Contest for High School Students

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FLORIDA HISTORICAL SOCIETY ESSAY CONTEST FOR
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

First Prize to Sandra Lewis, Dan McCarty High School, White City.

HISTORY OF WHITE CITY, FLORIDA

In 1893, White City was first settled by a man named Pio, who was Danish, and his assistant, Mr. Myers, and they named it. Pio originally got the name from the World's Fair City in Chicago in 1892. The Florida East Coast Railroad was coming through at that time and they advertised in Northern papers for people to settle along the route. The railroad paid each family five dollars and each bachelor three dollars to settle there.

Mr. Myers then laid out White City and they had a big celebration the first of May in 1893 and advertised to sell the land. Pio died in June and Myers skipped out with the money that belonged to the settlers. The Railroad Company store in St. Augustine then gave the people credit. They used coupon books to get groceries. The first store was built by an Englishman on the bank of the St. Lucie River. The supplies were shipped down the river on the steamboat "Lillian". The captain was Mr. Madison and the pilot was Mr. Schutz. They got their supplies from Titusville and went all the way to Stuart. The Railroad then took over the store and furnished the fertilizer, seeds, and tools for farming. They also gave credit for two or three years. The crops were good but between Christmas and New Year's of 1893 it turned cold and all the crops died. Many settlers left but a few returned and brought their families with them.

White City was then a wilderness and to build or farm they had to clear a place. The woods were full of wild life such as deer, turkey, whooping cranes and other game birds. It then took two hours to go to Fort Pierce. The people took a hoe and shovel with them when they went to make a way through the underbrush. There were only a few trails and in most cases you made your own trail.

The back country was the cattle land. They let their hogs and cattle run wild, and they built fences to keep them out of their gardens. In fact, when the early settlers first saw White City, it seemed to be all sand, forest, snakes, and mosquitoes. The Railroad men were not paying them any more and the only way they could get money was to farm. The main crop was pineapples and they took them in to Fort Pierce, which at the time, had only two stores.

The people officially celebrated White City's first birthday on the sixteenth of December, 1894, on the east bank of the St. Lucie River. They had a large pavilion and picnic grounds where they danced and had fun. There were between 150 and 200 people in White City at that time. The river overflowed every fall and flooded the grounds until they got tired of fixing it afterwards. It had so many bends in it, the water could not get out fast enough, and it all backed up and flooded most of the people on the east side. Finally, the river was straightened some, and it does not run over any more.

The Indians spent a great deal of time here and often camped by the river. They gave no trouble and the whites traded with them. One of the Indian chief's name was Tom Tiger.

They had a ferry across the river that they pulled back and forth by ropes. There was one for foot passengers, and one for horses and wagons. The first boy born in White City was N. W. Jorgensen, our county commissioner in 1953. The first girl was Anna Larson.

In those days there wasn't much money and the women made their clothes from calico. Calico was then only five cents a yard. They made palmetto hats with flowers on them and were considered dressed-up. The men wore about the same as they do now but they did not have as much or as good clothes as we do.

The first school was held in the old restaurant that was built during the boom by a Mr. Spencer. They used the restaurant tables and benches. During the second term they were able to get seats, blackboards, maps, and charts from Brevard County. White City was in Brevard County at that time. Mrs. Little was the first teacher and later the school was moved to her front porch. The second term Clairia Sogaard taught.

The first school house in 1898 had only two rooms that were always full. It included the first through the eighth grades. After the eighth grade, the children went to Fort Pierce. They walked, or rode a pony. Another teacher in White City was Mr. Smallwood. They ran out of room in that school and had to build a new one, which is the present school in White City. Mr. C. E. Cahow built it in 1927, the architects were Hatcher and Funke. The Board of Public Instruction were: A. M. Sample, Chairman, J. E. Seese, Murray E. Hall, Mrs. Edgar Lewis, Superintendent. A little later, the old school house burned down. In case of fire then all they could do was to get a pail of water and try to put out the fire the best they could.

The first Post Office was run by Mr. Olson. The postman sometimes walked with the mail to Ankona, about five miles, though some did ride on a horse or in a horse and buggy. Some of the first mail carriers were Mr. Bell, Mr. Sorensen, and Mr. Pomeroy. The Post Office was in the Englishman's store.

The White City Presbyterian Church was organized on June 4, 1924 and called "The Dutton Memorial Church". Originally, it was the W. C. Union Church, sponsored first by Rev. George E. Dutton, who started by having Sunday School services in 1893, but it was not regular until 1898. Among the ministers who volunteered their services during the past years are as follows: Rev. Blanchard, Baptist; Rev. Chapman, Methodist; and Rev. McCombs, Presbyterian. Originally, services were held in the local school house, but in 1915, with the citizens cooperating with the Ladies Aid Society and the Presbyterian Board, they were able to build the present church building. The Charter members were: Rev. H. W. McCombs, Mrs. Dutton, Mrs. Platts, Mrs. Jorgensen, Ross, and Miss Dorothy Platts, Helen R. Rowe, Mr. Jorgensen and Mr. Harris.

The first doctor was Dr. Platts, and his nurse was Mrs. Jorgensen.

There were two trains going by every day then. One went to Ankona and the other to Jacksonville.

The first car belonged to Mr. Hammon from Boston. It was a Ford. Mr. Sorensen then got a truck and Mr. Stretcher of New York, a car. Mr. Sorensen also built the present day White City Store.

St. Lucie County was organized in 1907 and White City was part of the County, with Fort Pierce as the county seat

For entertainment, there were suppers and dancing in the club house. If anyone was even suspected of drinking they were thrown out. The music they had to dance by a violin, accordion and piano. They had one motor boat to which they fastened other boats and went up the St. Lucie River for supper, telling stories, and having other fun.

White City is the only pioneer colony of Florida that is still in existence, and it is still growing.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Personal interviews with the following: Mrs. N. C. Jorgensen, Mrs. Clair Christensen, Mrs. John Waldron, Mrs. Helen Waldron.

For other winners see *Minutes of the Annual Meeting* (post). There were 54 papers entered from 13 Florida high schools.