

2020

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Recommended Citation

Walters, Lori C. (2020) "Beyond the Cape: An Examination of Cape Canaveral's Influence on the City of Cocoa Beach 1950-1963," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 87: No. 2, Article 8.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol87/iss2/8>

Beyond the Cape: An Examination of Cape Canaveral's Influence on the City of Cocoa Beach, 1950-1963

By Lori C. Walters

A drive down A1A through the City of Cocoa Beach reveals meager clues to this municipality's former life as "Missileland, USA." Few businesses sport missile oriented names as they did during the Space-Age boom of the 1950s and 1960s. Reporters no longer troll the missile worker watering holes in hopes of securing information regarding the next launch from the Cape. The number of tourists seeking out Major Anthony Nelson's house decreases each year. Today's visitors find a community whose lifeblood stems more from its broad sandy shores than from its proximity to Cape Canaveral Air Force Station or the Kennedy Space Center. But looking behind the surf shops and time shares, the legacy of Missileland, USA survives in the solid infrastructure developed during the city's Space-Age heyday.

On 24 July 1950, at 0929 hours, a handful of scientists and technicians gathered to launch the first ballistic missile from Cape Canaveral. Bumper-8, a two-stage hybrid missile consisting of a captured German V-2 and a WAC Corporal, traveled a mere 200 miles down range. The creation of a missile test facility at Cape Canaveral spawned two worlds, the tethered wilderness where

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gantry towers rose from virgin sand dunes and the economically dependent surrounding communities. To Brevard County, Bumper-8 was the Florida equivalent of Sutter's discovery of gold. While engineers and scientists from around the nation began a 20-year sojourn to the Cape, their trek is divided into three distinct periods of growth – military missile development, reaction to the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik and the race to the lunar surface. Through an examination of municipal and county records, this article will address the first two periods of missile/space industry induced development on the City of Cocoa Beach.

The influence of Cape Canaveral and the Cape's administrative headquarters at Patrick Air Force Base (PAFB) quickly fashioned the Town of Cocoa Beach into a textbook satellite community. With a population of 246 in 1950, Cocoa Beach possessed a microscopic economy that had experienced only slight gains during its first 25 years of existence. The rapid expansion of the community throughout the coming decade stemmed solely from its location between the two Air Force facilities – Cape Canaveral to its north and Patrick Air Force Base to the south. While the population and positive financial fallout from Cape activities extended to the mainland cities of Cocoa and Melbourne, they possessed established economies that the missile monies initially augmented. Constant workforce increases at the centers eventually overwhelmed and replaced the county's traditional economic backbone of agriculture. This is evident as the agricultural workforce remained stagnant between 1950 and 1960 even with an overall county population increase of 87,790.¹

An examination of the Cape/PAFB workforce is necessary to fully understand housing demands during this initial period of military missile related growth. Military personnel comprised a full 20% of all those included in missile workforce numbers.² Because they were on definite assigned tours of duty, home ownership in the local community was often impractical and on-base

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1. 1950, 1960 US Census; Brevard County, Florida, Division of Health and Social Services, "Compilation of Social Indicators: Brevard County, Florida," April 1982, 4; *Economic Impact of Manned Space Flight Program*, NASA, April 1967, 59.
 2. United States Air Force, Patrick Air Force Base, *Operations Analysis Working Paper TR-59-8, A Housing Market Study of Brevard County for AFMTC Employees*, April 1959, 15; John F. Lietz, *Consolidation Report of Cocoa Ocean Beaches Area for the Town of Cocoa Beach*, (Orlando: Appraisal Associates, 1957), 3.

housing facilities were utilized by many in this sector of the workforce.³ The USAF continued to increase the capacity of base housing throughout the 1950s; located south of PAFB, the Cape Hart housing project provided military families a traditional subdivision setting.

Civilian Cape/PAFB employees, including missile contractors and range support personnel from Pan American Airways and RCA, were the primary seekers of housing within the surrounding communities. Like their military counterparts, some in this pool were transferred to the region for a predetermined period of time; a Glenn L. Martin engineer might arrive to test a specific phase of a Matador cruise missile; once the missile was operational, the engineer would return to the company's home base.⁴ Other workers in this category included those in construction who labored on the growing number of launch complexes at the Cape and the myriad of buildings at PAFB. The typical Florida tourist was a rare sight at a Cocoa Beach motel during this period; anyone wishing to enjoy the area beaches competed with missile contractors, military officials and newsmen who snapped up every available room. The small independent apartment-style motels with names like Casa Minella, Sea Lawn, Silver Sands, Surf Studio, and Tinker-by-the-Sea, were well-suited for such short-term purposes. Cape Canaveral provided motel owners with a consistently high occupancy rate, even during traditional Florida off-season periods. Missile contractor Ramo-Wooldridge went so far as to purchase the Tides Motel for the exclusive use of their employees.⁵

Modern motels, pioneered by Holiday Inn, began to proliferate just north of the town limits in an area known as "Motel Row" or "the Strip." Unlike the older apartment-style motel units, these new motel rooms offered little more than a place to sleep. Designed primarily as overnight accommodations, the lack of more suitable short-term rentals pressed many of these units into service as homes. Traditional long term rental property was needed for civilian missile employees who could not afford or did not desire to purchase housing within the community, the overflow of military personnel that on-base housing could not accommodate, and the construction and service sector workers needed to support

3. *Operations Analysis Working Paper TR-59-8*, 3.

4. *Action Report of the Brevard County Task Force*, 6 March 1958, 18-19.

5. *Cocoa Tribune*, 8 August 1958.

an area in a period of rapid expansion. A rise in rental property construction occurred in Cocoa Beach between 1950 and 1953; most of the nine new complexes were single level structures situated on the ocean.⁶ A lack of building permit activity of this nature in 1954 and 1955 coincided with a stabilization of the Cape/ PAFB work force numbers during these years. (See Table 1). A resurgence of apartment building permits in 1956 and a rapid rise in workforce numbers in the same year also suggests a definite relationship between missile center growth and construction within Cocoa Beach.

Cocoa Beach required the construction of even the most rudimentary shopping facilities. Residents found it necessary to travel to the City of Cocoa nine miles to the west for groceries prior to the opening of Rudland's Market in 1950.⁷ That same year the town acquired its first service station, Sinclair Oil. An examination of building permits between 1950 and 1954 reveals a steady increase in essential business construction—food, hardware, and clothing stores—with a small business district developing along the intersections of Atlantic and Orlando Avenues with Cocoa Avenue.⁸ The town's population was still unable to support the accessory and recreational businesses—jewelers, florists, pet shops, bowling alleys—found in more developed communities. Furthermore, Cocoa Beach lacked essential communal elements such as schools, medical facilities and banks. This suggests that, despite the influence of growth by missile activities on Cocoa Beach, long term investors still had concerns.

Dwight D. Eisenhower's election to the presidency in 1952 brought the "New Look" policy to the military.⁹ A reevaluation of the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile program was instituted under Trevor Gardner, Special Assistant for Research and Development to Secretary of the Air Force Harold E. Talbott. A panel of scien-

6. Town of Cocoa Beach Building Permits, 1950-1956. These apartments include Bal-Ray, Beachcombers, Bon-Aire, Cocoa-Cabanas, Johnston's Beach Apartments, and Spray Beach Apartments.

7. Oliver Haisten interview by author, tape recording, Cocoa Beach, Florida, 24 November 1990; Town of Cocoa Beach Building Permits, 1950.

8. Cocoa Avenue is now known as Minuteman Causeway. During this period Ray Hoppe's Hardware, Kirby Gift and Beauty and a Southern Bell new customer service center all began operation.

9. Spearheaded by Secretary of State Charles E. Wilson, the "New Look" defense policy sought to limit defense spending through reliance on nuclear rather than conventional weapons.

Table 1. Incorporated Town of Cocoa Beach Building Permit Activity and Cape/PAFB Workforce

	Cocoa Beach Permit Values	Cape/PAFB Workforce
1949	\$166,950	820
1950	\$223,750	1,570
1951	\$422,030	5,615
1952	\$203,869	7,192
1953	\$209,712	7,219
1954	\$137,101	7,115
1955	\$337,185	8,639
1956	\$590,214	12,056
1957	\$349,550	14,546

Source: Town of Cocoa Beach Building Permits; Compilation of Social Indicators, Brevard County, Florida, 1982.

tists and engineers appointed by Gardner, the Von Neumann Committee, concluded that recent technological breakthroughs in thermonuclear weapons had made the ICBM concept a reality. The success of the Operation Castle nuclear tests in spring 1954 ended one of the ICBM's primary shortcomings, concern over its ability to deliver weighty hydrogen bombs. The Castle generation was not only significantly lighter, its destructive capacity was one thousand fold greater than the atomic bomb, making accuracy and delivery less a matter of contention.¹⁰

Intelligence data filtering into Washington suggested that the Soviet Union was well under way in developing its own ICBM.¹¹ This coupled with the successful explosion of a Soviet hydrogen bomb in August 1953 created national security concerns within Congress and the administration. Eisenhower appointed a committee under the direction of MIT President James Killian to investigate the nation's vulnerability to the perceived Soviet threat. The Killian Report urged the immediate development of Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBM), these missiles could be ready years before the longer ranged and more complex ICBM.¹² In light of

10. Robert A. Devine, *The Sputnik Challenge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 22.

11. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Press, 1963), 456.

12. IRBM Range 3,000-5499km, ICBM range 5,500km or greater.

both the Von Neumann and Killian Reports, facing mounting political pressure within Congress, Eisenhower ordered the IRBM and ICBM be given the “highest national priority.”¹³

During the first half of the decade there was still a notable absence of aerospace industry investment—off-base plants and offices—in surrounding communities. Aircraft and missile contractors were uncertain as to the permanency of Cape Canaveral; the government failed to formally recognize the facility as a permanent installation until 30 March 1955.¹⁴ Without assurances as to the longevity of the base, companies were less willing to make such investments than were commercial and housing developers.

The 1955 acceleration of ICBM and IRBM programs ultimately led to significant increases in activities at Cape Canaveral. The workforce surged from 8,639 in 1955 to 14,456 by 1957 to support the new Atlas, Thor, and Jupiter missile programs.¹⁵ The “Rush to battle the Soviets for dominion over the heavens” transformed missiles into permanent residents of Brevard County.¹⁶ A correlation between the growth of missile workforce increases and building permit activity was once again apparent. Between 1955 and 1957, 18 commercial projects expanded the Cocoa Beach Central Business District.¹⁷ Two financial institutions—the Cocoa Beach State Bank and a branch of the First Federal Savings and Loan of Cocoa—opened their doors in 1956. The arrival of Dr. Von Thron’s medical clinic, also in 1956, served the community’s basic medical needs. Although Wuesthoff Memorial, the nearest hospital, still required a journey across the Banana and Indian Rivers to Rockledge, these additions fostered a greater sense of communal independence, allowing Cocoa Beach residents to conduct many forms of day-to-day business within town limits.

That same year, Convair Corporation, the Atlas missile contractor, acquired 40 acres of property adjacent to the 1956 Cocoa Beach northwest town limits, and began constructing Convair Cove, a community of 130 homogenous homes available on a rental-pur-

13. Eisenhower, *Mandate*, 457; Devine, *Sputnik*, 23.

14. Senator George Smathers, Washington, DC to John F. Lietz, Cocoa Beach, 9 April 1957, City of Cocoa Beach Archives; Major General Joe E. Kelley, Washington, DC, to A.S. Herlong, Jr., Washington, DC, no date, City of Cocoa Beach Archives.

15. *Compilation of Social Indicators: Brevard County Florida*, 43.

16. Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980), 138.

17. Town of Cocoa Beach Building Permits, 1955-1957.



Looking north on A1A, this 1957 aerial image of Cocoa Beach reveals the Loveridge subdivision just north of State Road 520 and a large undeveloped area that would fill with modern motels. *Image held by Florida Space Coast History Project, University of Central Florida.*

chase option to employees of the Convair Corporation. Harborview, a development of 35 houses located on the Banana River, followed immediately. A pattern of tract housing construction outside existing town limits with later incorporation into the town was common during this period, with all major subdivisions subscribing to this method. North of the 520 Causeway, Loveridge was a capacious development laid out on a traditional gridiron pattern. More importantly, Loveridge marked the beginning of a population shift on the beach. As property zoned for single family residences became limited in “old” Cocoa Beach, developers naturally migrated northward outside the Cocoa Beach Town Limits. To serve the needs of these residents an auxiliary business district developed near the intersection of A1A and State Road 520.

The natural geographic limitations of Cocoa Beach led a 1958 PAFB socioeconomic study to forecast that the population of the

town would level off at 7,500 in 1963 as available lands became developed.¹⁸ The report failed to take into consideration the creation of buildable land from the marsh areas west of the town along the Banana River: the Thousand Islands. Once housing demands increased to a level sufficient to recoup dredging costs, efforts began. The River Isles and Cocoa Isles developments were two expansive reclamation undertakings. Developers F. Burton Smith and Troutman Jenks sought to re-create in Cocoa Beach the canal-front home concept that had become popular in Fort Lauderdale. Fingers of land were dredged from the Thousand Islands, creating an elaborate maze of water front homes on curvilinear drives. This Venice of the Space Age atmosphere would later make Cocoa Beach highly desirable to retirees after the post Apollo recession.

River Isles consisted of 263 houses on nine fingers, developed in five phases, spurring off Cocoa Avenue. Sales brochures emphasized, "Your home will be only five minutes from Patrick Air Force Base; just 15 minutes from Cape Canaveral."¹⁹ Prices in the communities ranged from \$18,500 to \$26,100.²⁰ But contemporary newspapers, citing a PAFB impact study, suggested River Isles home prices were not within the reach of the majority of missilemen, 68% of whom sought a purchase price below \$12,000.²¹ The original master plan for Cocoa Isles called for 2000 dwellings on 46 planned waterways. "Nationally famous" landscape architect Eugene R. Martini devised an entire community of homes, "boatels," shopping centers, playgrounds and an 18-hole championship golf course.²² Sales brochures touted Cocoa Isles as the "ultimate in Florida living," with *Better Homes and Gardens* selecting one of the development's models as their ideal home for 1958.²³ Like River Isles, the three and four bedroom units, priced in the \$19,000 to \$27,000 range, transformed Cocoa Beach into the home of engineers and upper management rather than Cape technicians.²⁴

18. United States Air Force, Patrick Air Force Base, *Operations Analysis Working Paper, 58-6, Brevard County Socio-Economic-Population, 1950-1958*, October 1958, 13.

19. 1958 River Isles Sales Brochure.

20. Town of Cocoa Beach Building Permits, 1957-1958; 1958 River Isles Sales Brochure.

21. Karl Hunziker, "New Homes Boost the Building Boom," *Orlando Sentinel*, 24 January 1960.

22. *Cocoa Tribune*, 24 August 1958.

23. 1958 River Isles Sales Brochure.

24. Town/City of Cocoa Beach building permits, 1957-1958.

In December 1957, Florida Governor LeRoy Collins created the Brevard County Task Force (BCTF) to study the impact of the missile activities in Brevard. The task force report emphasized the need for affordable rental properties, noting, "The most troublesome problem concerning housing is the lack of rental properties, particularly a suitable rental for middle-class workers with an income of about \$100 per week."²⁵ Using a standard guideline of one week's salary for monthly housing costs, the BCTF determined that the standard rental rates for the beach areas were prohibitive for the average missile worker.

As this initial period of missile-oriented growth came to a close, the organization of town hall changed dramatically. No longer a tight-knit surfside village of 246 residents, the Town of Cocoa Beach formally adopted the name City of Cocoa Beach in June 1957.²⁶ Citizens went to the polls for the first time to directly elect their mayor, with Sidney Fischer winning the election. Previously, the mayoral position had been filled by a town commissioner elected by a majority vote within the town council, not an uncommon practice within smaller municipalities.

Eight years earlier, geography had ordained the destiny of Cocoa Beach, launching it into an orbit of dependency on Cold War politics. Cocoa Beach acquired many crucial communal elements and laid a solid foundation aimed at alleviating the housing shortage as waves of engineers and technicians headed to the Cape to support military operations. The orbiting of the world's first artificial satellite, Sputnik, by the Soviet Union ushered in the Space Age and with it the City of Cocoa Beach would find itself in the midst of another burgeoning period of expansion.

The faint incessant beeps of Sputnik on 4 October 1957 startled the American public. The Soviet Union, widely believed to be technologically inferior to the United States, had placed a 184-pound satellite into orbit as Americans waited for their own Vanguard rockets to launch from the Cape. Future NASA Administrator James E. Webb remarked, "The realization that the Russians were not just a bunch of Tartars riding around on horseback out of the Siberian Steppes was brought home vividly."²⁷ The

25. *Action Report of the Brevard County Task Force*, 18-19; *Operations Analysis Working Paper TR-59-8*, 28.

26. State of Florida, Chapter 57-1234, House Bill No. 2098.

27. John Barbour, *Footprints on the Moon* (Associated Press, 1969), 3.

Soviet news agency TASS boasted, that artificial satellites would pave the way for space travel and that the world's peoples would witness how the labor "of the people of the new Socialist society turns even the most daring of man's dreams into a reality."²⁸ The role of the United States as a leader in science and technology was directly challenged.

Eisenhower sought to alleviate anxiety, reminding the American public the Soviets had not separated their satellite program from the military as the United States had. He stressed, "our satellite program has never been conducted as a race with other nations," and declared that Project Vanguard was on schedule for its International Geophysical Year launch date in March 1958.²⁹ Such reassurances by the President did little to calm the American public, as a blanket of paranoia and self-doubt spread across the nation. The launch of Sputnik II on November 3 placed further pressures on Eisenhower to direct additional dollars to space. Sputnik II weighed an incredible 1,110 pounds and contained a living passenger, a dog named Laika. Scientists estimated a booster capable of hurling a satellite of this magnitude into Earth orbit had a thrust of at least 500,000 pounds.³⁰

With the launching of two Soviet satellites only one month apart, the White House ordered an acceleration of Project Vanguard's timetable to attempt a December 1957 launch, four months ahead of schedule.³¹ With the nation's eyes on Cape Canaveral, the pencil-like Vanguard rose four feet, dropped, and burst into a pyrotechnic display of brilliant orange and white flames. Reaction in Cocoa Beach was described in a *New York Times* article, "Down Highway A1A, the staffs of the luxury motels—places with indicative names, such as the Sea Missile, the Starlite and the Vanguard—stop smiling. It was as if the region's pride had been deflated by the disaster."³²

28. Harry Schwartz, "A Propaganda Triumph," *New York Times*, 6 October 1957.

29. Loyd S. Swenson, Jr., James M. Grimwood and Charles C. Alexander, *This New Ocean: A History of Project Mercury* (Washington, DC: NASA, 1966), 28.

30. Devine, 43.

31. The 9 October 1957 White House press release stated the United States would launch a satellite bearing "test vehicle." It purposefully failed to contain the word "orbit" lessening the negative public fallout in the case of a failed orbit. If the vehicle simply launched it could be stated the objective was met.

32. Milton Bracker, "Vanguard Rocket Burns on Beach; Failure to Launch Test Satellite assailed as Blow to US Prestige," *New York Times*, 7 December 1957.

Less than a month later, during his 1958 State of the Union Address, the President called for \$1.3 billion in supplemental defense spending for fiscal year 1958 and "increased expenditures for missiles" in the 1959 budget.³³ Additional monies translated into heightened activities at Cape Canaveral. Testing of existing ICBM and IRBM programs continued, while development of second generation ICBMs accelerated rapidly: the solid fueled Minuteman. National prestige would from that point on be measured by a series of firsts in this new Space Age. In April 1958, the USAF unveiled plans for a military man in space program. The President promptly rejected the concept, calling instead for the creation of a civilian space agency to "promote the peaceful use of space and to utilize the new knowledge obtainable from space science and technology for the benefit of all mankind."³⁴ The National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958, signed by Eisenhower on 29 July 1958, formally established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

Conditions at the Cape—heat, intense humidity and mosquito swarms—bordered on the intolerable for the new arrivals. Brevard County laid claim to one of the largest mosquito control problems in the state; a marshland terrain covered with dense underbrush provided the annoying insect with an ideal breeding ground. Locals joked, "The mosquitoes were so big you could use them for transfusions."³⁵ Tests conducted by the government revealed the "landing rate" in some areas reached as high as 500 mosquitoes on the human test subject per minute.³⁶ Missile contractors went so far as to provide hardship pay for those workers transferred to the area to make the assignment more attractive. Not only a serious health risk, mosquitoes jeopardized launch deadlines as the construction of facilities slowed down and engineers continually threatened to leave.³⁷ To manage the problem, the government

33. Dwight D. Eisenhower, "State of the Union, 1958," <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=11162>, (accessed 15 June 2008); Devine 81.

34. President's Science Advisory Committee, "Introduction to Outer Space," 26 March 1958, available from <http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/pao/History/sputnik/16.html>, (accessed 18 June 2008).

35. Haisten Interview.

36. Charles D. Benson and William Barnaby Faherty, *Moonport: A History of Apollo Launch Facilities*, (Washington, DC: NASA SP-4204, 1978), <http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/pao/History/SP-4204/ch12-2.html> (accessed 20 June 2008).

37. Joe E. Wickham, Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners, Brevard County, Florida to Governor Farris Bryant, Tallahassee, 28 May 1964. Letter in City of Cocoa Beach Archives.

initiated an extensive regimen of insecticide spraying combined with an elaborate plan of diking and flooding breeding areas. Flooding the marshland increased the minnow population that in turn decreased mosquito larvae. This strategy proved to be of great assistance as the county developed its tourist industry in the following years.

Inadequate roadways posed virtually as large an annoyance for Cape workers as did mosquitoes. The Brevard County Task Force appointed by Governor Collins stated "In 1950, most of the roads within Brevard County were adequate to serve existing traffic; by 1956 most of the roads were at or near capacity."³⁸ Automobile volume at State Road 520 and A1A nearly tripled from 5,425 cars per day in 1955 to 14,520 cars per day by 1961.³⁹ The two-lane State Road 520 causeway connecting Cocoa Beach to the mainland was reduced to little more than a huge parking lot during rush hour. The causeway's series of swing bridges further exacerbated traffic problems, stopping the flow of cars to permit the passage of the river transportation. County officials suspended two-way traffic at peak hours in a futile attempt to alleviate the gridlock.

The task force declared increasing the capacity of US-1 on the mainland and A1A from Indialantic to Cape Canaveral to be the region's highest priority. Expansion of the State Road 520 causeway was not recommended to ease east and west traffic congestion. Instead the task force called for the construction of a new bridge from City Point, three miles north of Cocoa, to Port Canaveral.⁴⁰ The Emory L. Bennett Causeway opened on 10 October 1963. Renovation to the outdated 520 Causeway began in September 1962 with the construction of new high hump bridges that permitted the continual flow of river traffic without impeding ground transportation.

Although the pre-Sputnik period of growth had brought to Cocoa Beach an expanded business district and the construction of many single-family residential units, the city had only the most essential municipal services and facilities. As it set out on its second period of missile-related growth, there was little infrastructure beneath its "Venice of the Space Age" veneer of glittering new

38. *Action Report of the Brevard County Task Force* to Governor Leroy Collins, 6 March 1958, 7.

39. *Land Development Plan*, City of Cocoa Beach, 1965, figure 2.

40. *Action Report of the Brevard County Task Force*, 8.

homes and bustling businesses. The city possessed a new water distribution system, but lacked central sewage recovery. Paved roads were a luxury; the 1961 city comprehensive plan revealed A1A, Cocoa Avenue and State Road 520 to be the sole paved arteries not affiliated with a housing development.⁴¹ City Hall was little more than a four-room shack (50'-8"x 26'). Beyond a handful of small playgrounds and the beach, the city failed to furnish any recreational facilities. Of greater significance, no school, library or civilian hospital existed within the Cocoa Beach city limits.

To alleviate the shortcomings, the city commission proposed a General Obligation Bond to finance the necessary improvements. A special bond election on 8 March 1960 was comprised of four individual bond proposals: \$600,000 for street improvements; \$300,000 for the construction of new municipal buildings; \$50,000 for improvement of public parks; and \$50,000 to establish and construct the library.⁴² While the electorate defeated each bond referendum, a reorganized bond prospectus was approved during the 28 November 1961 election. The new proposal not only incorporated the four previous issues, but also included provisions for off-street parking facilities and the purchase of oceanfront properties by the city.

Site selection for the new municipal complex, consisting of a city hall, library and police station, revealed a developing north/south schism within the city. Citizens in recently annexed northern areas desired a central location, the current site of oceanfront Sidney Fischer Park, for the municipal complex in lieu of a downtown location. However, the 1961 city comprehensive plan recommended that the governmental center retain its downtown location specifically to define a core community rather than division.⁴³ Ultimately, the city commissioners chose to continue the downtown tradition with the construction of the municipal complex beginning in September 1962. Formally dedicated on 10 March 1963, the facility expanded in two years with the new construction commencing December 1965.

41. George W. Simmons, Jr., *Comprehensive City Plan: Cocoa Beach, Florida – Volume 2* (Jacksonville, Florida: Florida Development Commission, 1961), 15.

42. City of Cocoa Beach Official Ballot – Special Bond Election. Copy in City of Cocoa Beach Archives.

43. Simons, *Comprehensive Plan, Volume 2*, 39.

The projected growth of Brevard also necessitated additional hospital services. In 1958 the county possessed three facilities: Wuesthoff Memorial in Rockledge, with 68 beds; Brevard Hospital in Melbourne, with 23 "acceptable beds" of a 63-bed total; and the Patrick Air Force Base Hospital, with 125 beds.⁴⁴ Inclusive of the military hospital at PAFB, the total number of available beds was below the state and federal agencies' recommendations of 4.5 hospital beds per 1000 residents.⁴⁵ With the nearest hospital, Wuesthoff Memorial, 10 miles away, the civilian beach area population endured delays during emergencies that were frequently exacerbated by the gridlock of the 520 Causeway.

The first step toward the development of the beach area hospital came with the establishment of the Cape Canaveral Hospital District on 18 August 1959. Funding for the facility derived from the sale of \$450,000 in bonds, \$175,000 in federal monies through the Hill-Burton Fund, and private contributions.⁴⁶ The State of Florida donated 49.6 acres of Banana River bottomland adjacent to the 520 Causeway from which 9.6 acres of buildable land was dredged. Capable of accommodating a maximum of 100 beds, the two-story facility began operation 26 July 1962.

The influx of space workers posed a monumental problem for the Brevard County public school system. Public school enrollment swelled from 4,163 in the 1950-51 school year to 60,396 at its peak during the 1968-69 school year, a 1450.8% increase. Federally connected pupils rose from 10.1% to 47.9%.⁴⁷ During the 1960-61 school year, the student population outnumbered the county's total population ten years earlier. Brevard citizens approved a \$4.5 million bond issue on 9 September 1958 in an effort to alleviate the classroom overpopulation dilemma.⁴⁸ The federal government also assumed a portion of the cost under Public Law 874, which provides educational funds in federally impacted areas.⁴⁹

44. *Action Report of the Brevard County Task Force*, 24-25.

45. John F. Lietz, Jr., *Beach Community Hospital Feasibility Report*, Brevard County, Florida, 10 July 1957, 17.

46. Cape Canaveral Hospital District, *Official State Relating to the Issuance of \$450,000 Cape Canaveral Hospital District Building Bonds*, 3.

47. Annie May Hartsfield, Mary Alice Griffin and Charles M. Grigg, eds., *Summary Report: Impact on Brevard County* (Tallahassee: Institute of Social Research, Florida State University, 1966), 13; Benson and Faherty, *Moonport*, 308.

48. *Operations Analysis Working Paper*, 58-6, 12.

49. Hartsfield, Griffin and Grigg, *NASA Impact*, 13.

Cocoa Beach Elementary was the first public school, opening its doors in 1958 to 600 students.⁵⁰ Astronauts frequently visited the students; in fact, it is said that children counted not from one to ten, but from ten to one like their fathers at a Cape countdown. The school was renamed Freedom Seven Elementary in honor of astronaut Alan Shepard's 5 May 1961 suborbital flight. When Shepard returned from space, NASA presented a flag to Freedom Seven that Shepard had tucked inside his capsule. School stationary proudly proclaimed, "HOME OF THE FIRST U.S. FLAG IN SPACE," and the flag remained on display in the school's cafeteria until its closing in 1983. Later, in September 1968, missile contractor McDonnell Aircraft donated a boilerplate Mercury capsule for exhibition outside of the school.⁵¹ With the construction of Cape View Elementary, Theodore Roosevelt Middle School, and Cocoa Beach High School, the Cocoa Beach area provided public educational facilities for all its student-citizens by September 1964.

With its close proximity to the Cape and PAFB and the added recreational and aesthetic advantages of a beach community, the population of Cocoa Beach mushroomed between 1950 and 1960. The resident growth statistic of 1412.6% for the period is impressive, but somewhat deceptive.⁵² An area consolidation analysis undertaken in 1957 estimated that with the current city limits of approximately 400 acres, the population would peak at 4,100.⁵³ To circumvent static growth the city exercised a provision with the city charter permitting the annexation of areas contiguous to the city limits by a simple majority vote of its commission. Such practices enlarged the populace by 40% in 1958 alone—virtually overnight.⁵⁴

Development no longer centered on "old" Cocoa Beach as it had during the first period of military missile oriented growth.

50. Greater Cocoa Area Chamber of Commerce Newsletter, "Central Brevard Area," January 1962, 3.

51. Robert J. Fritz, Cocoa Beach, to Dr. Kurt H. Debus, KSC, 3 September 1968. Kennedy Space Center Archives, Public Affairs Box 1, File 16; Gordon L. Harris, KSC to Robert J. Fritz, Cocoa Beach, 16 September 1968. Kennedy Space Center Archives, Public Affairs Box 1, File 16.

52. George W. Simmons, Jr. *Cocoa Beach, Florida Comprehensive City Plan*, (Jacksonville: Florida Development Commission, 1960), 27.

53. *Survey and Analysis of Community Development Relating to Cocoa Ocean Beach and Adjacent Areas* (West Palm Beach: Gee and Jenson Consulting Engineers, 1957), 57.

54. Simons, *Comprehensive Plan 1960*, 36.

While the northward shift sprouted from the Loveridge subdivision in 1957, increased activities at Cape Canaveral with the creation of NASA led to a proliferation of building on the Cocoa Beach peninsula north of State Road 520. The Cape was now home to the manned space effort Project Mercury and with it came new workers who sought homes closer to the Cape rather than PAFB to the south. Northern growth presented the City of Cocoa Beach with the possibility of sizable physical gains in the form of selected annexation of contiguous properties or consolidation of the entire barrier island area from the Cape to PAFB into a single municipal unit.

Expansion by way of annexation or consolidation provided distinct advantages for both Cocoa Beach and the formerly unincorporated regions. The outstanding benefit for the city was a potential trebling of its total property valuation, thus enlarging its tax base substantially.⁵⁵ Increased population qualified the municipality for additional funds in state and federal revenue sharing programs. Incorporation by Cocoa Beach provided property owners in the unincorporated areas with services and facilities that were otherwise met by county services. Increased services and corresponding insurance savings offset any rise in home or business owners' property taxes. Most importantly, homeowners could exercise their political voice in local community affairs.

Motel Row, the 2.7-mile stretch of land from Fourth Street North to State Road 520, actively courted immediate assimilation by Cocoa Beach. The liberal liquor service hours sanctioned within the city limits, combined with increased police and fire services, enticed motel owners. Brevard County zoning forbade motels to open their lucrative cocktail lounge areas on Sundays. Cocoa Beach not only permitted opening on Sunday; it provided an additional hour of late-night operation.

With the annexation of motel areas, the commission looked northward toward Loveridge. By December 1958, the city annexed property to the Polaris Motel including the Loveridge, Young, Metzner, and Seacrest Beach subdivisions. Areas further north were deemed "least suited for immediate annexation" as they lacked stores and paved roadways and included a large number of trailer camps.⁵⁶ Annexation of these areas would have required

55. Ibid.

56. Simons, *Comprehensive Plan Volume 2*, 22.

Cocoa Beach to provide necessary capital improvements in a timely fashion, placing a large financial burden on the city. Therefore, Cocoa Beach officials were selective with their incorporation bids, striving to acquire only the most desirable properties. Annexation of new River Isles and Cocoa Isles properties continued as the subdivisions spread even further into the Banana River. Of the 419 single family residence building permits issued within the City of Cocoa Beach between January 1958 in December 1961, 332 were on these man-made fingers of land.⁵⁷ In an effort to replicate the canal atmosphere of Cocoa and River Isles, the Venetian Way subdivision west of Loveridge began dredging efforts in 1960. The northern areas not absorbed by Cocoa Beach ultimately incorporated themselves as the City of Cape Canaveral on 2 June 1962, thus ending the possibility of consolidating the entire Cape to PAFB region as the City of Cocoa Beach.

A 1959 sample survey of Cocoa Beach residents revealed that many who had made frequent shopping trips to Orlando three years earlier now found that it was seldom necessary to travel outside the city limits to shop.⁵⁸ The retail and service sector exploded, the downtown area continued to expand and a second central shopping district appeared near the intersection of State Road 520 and A1A to accommodate the burgeoning northern subdivisions. Many in Brevard jested, "Cocoa Beach will eventually sink under a mass of construction material."⁵⁹ New buildings began to reflect the Space Age feel of the community—many sporting sleek stainless steel and glass fronts—including the \$500,000 First Federal Savings and Loan often referred to as the "glass bank." A study completed by the United States Chamber of Commerce demonstrates how population impact of the space and missile program was geometric, not simply arithmetic. According to the report, every 1000 households brought into the community by the Air Force and NASA activities created approximately 700 service positions. Using this formula, approximately 91% of the population of Cocoa Beach was directly or indirectly related to activities at Patrick Air Force Base and Cape Canaveral.⁶⁰

57. City of Cocoa Beach Building Permits, 1958-1961.

58. Simons, *Comprehensive Plan Volume 2*, 23.

59. *Cocoa Tribune*, 2 July 1958.

60. Simons, *Comprehensive Plan 1960*, 27.

Changes in Cocoa Beach during this second period of growth were not restricted to the physical. Cocoa Beach became the proverbial home away from home for the Mercury astronauts. It was a place where they could unwind and forget about Atlas, Redstone, and missile mishaps. The Holiday Inn and its manager, Henri Landwirth, often hosted the astronauts and endured their mischief, including angling for live fish poolside.⁶¹ Scott Carpenter, John Glenn, and Gus Grissom would run along the dunes on the beach where the sand was soft and deep. Glenn would often frequent church services while in Cocoa Beach. And it was at a drugstore in Cocoa Beach where Glenn purchased an inexpensive 35mm camera that he would carry into space to take pictures as he orbited the earth.

The Mercury astronauts set their eyes on a vacant parcel of land across from the Holiday Inn. Using funds from an arrangement with *Life* magazine for the exclusive rights to their personal accounts of their upcoming flights, the astronauts invested in a posh 64 room Cape Colony Inn motel slated for construction in 1961. NASA disapproved of such commercialization, ultimately forcing the Mercury Seven to cease their association with the project.⁶² Some forty-five years later it no longer bears the name Cape Colony Inn, but the motel itself still stands and within its pool area a sign proudly proclaims the brief association with the Mercury Seven.

Cocoa Beach enjoyed its close relationship with Project Mercury – while the missile boom had brought prosperity, Project Mercury put Cocoa Beach on the map. After each space flight, the city gave their returning heroes a welcome home parade—the red carpet treatment Cocoa Beach style, with a stretch of A1A painted crimson. At times it seemed as if all of Florida came to share in this ritual; during a parade on 23 February 1962, over 100,000 spectators lined A1A hoping to catch a glimpse of John Glenn.⁶³ The motels along A1A in Cocoa Beach served as NASA press informa-

61. John Glenn and Nick Taylor, *John Glenn: A Memoir*, (New York, Bantam Books, 1999), 247.

62. *US News and World Report*, “The Boom that Space Built,” 26 March 1962, 52; *Time Magazine*, 10 January 1964, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,875519-2,00.html> (accessed 15 June 2008); Benson and Faherty, *Moonport*.

63. Barbour, *Footprints*, 57.



Crowds gather around Astronaut John Glenn and Vice-President Lyndon Johnson as the motorcade moves north on Atlantic Avenue in Cocoa Beach. Image held by Florida Space Coast History Project, University of Central Florida.

tion centers throughout Project Mercury. For Alan Shepard's 5 May 1961 flight the Holiday Inn "was converted into the 'nerve center' for NASA" as a Public Information Office. CBS news correspondent Walter Cronkite and his staff also used the Holiday Inn as their headquarters. Twelve guest rooms were fashioned into darkrooms for the Associated Press, United Press International, *Time-Life*, and other news organizations.⁶⁴

Much to the dismay of the area's chamber of commerce, however, the city underwent major image devolution. The launch crew's fun loving lifestyle earned the city several unflattering nicknames: "Sin-City" and "Peyton Place with Sunshine." In their quest to surpass Soviet space efforts, the missilemen worked extensive hours often in an atmosphere of secrecy and isolation. The launch pads at Cape Canaveral were akin to concrete islands of civilization

64. Dean C. DuBois, "Host to the Astronauts," *Holiday Inn Magazine for Traveling*, 1 June 1961, 7-10.

in a desolate wilderness that was Cape Canaveral. Frequent launch failures added to a deep desire to unwind. When released from the confines of the Cape, missile workers would hit the smart supper clubs and lounges along motel row. The Samoan Lounge became famous for its limbo contests. When the waters on the Banana River became too rough, the Mercury-Atlas launch team picked up their party boat and carried it across AIA, placed it in the Olympic sized swimming pool at the Holiday Inn, and continued the party.⁶⁵

The Cocoa Beach lifestyle attracted the attention of NBC News correspondent David Brinkley. On the night of 11 October 1961 at 10:30 p.m. EST, a nationally televised broadcast presented a decidedly negative view of the City of Cocoa Beach. Brinkley painted a picture of a decadent and thoroughly debauched “Sin City” where beatniks and unruly students roamed freely terrorizing beachgoers and life was a never ending cocktail party. The broadcast outraged the community and Brinkley was promptly hanged in effigy from a signpost in Wayside Park.⁶⁶ Cocoa Beach residents condemned the report as sensationalism and accused the reporter of staging events. Several tourists who had visited Cocoa Beach wrote to Brinkley complaining about his depiction. One Ohio visitor wrote, “Your report made it appear to be all missiles, nightclubs and beach. You missed the real Cocoa Beach.”⁶⁷ Mayor Thomas Kenney stated that his objection was not in the program’s airing of the city’s wilder side, but that only that image was presented. The mayor asked the reporter to return, but was told “very frankly,” that the “other side of Cocoa Beach—our missile workers, our businessmen, churches, schools, hospitals—would not interest his viewers.”⁶⁸ Brinkley chose to leave the story as it was, never returning to Cocoa Beach.

The majority of reporters elected to focus on uncovering the veil of secrecy surrounding activities at Cape Canaveral rather than examining the pleasure seeking of Cocoa Beach residents.

65. Alan Shepard and Deke Slayton, *Moon Shot: The Inside Story of America's Race to the Moon* (Atlanta, Turner Publishing, Inc., 1994), 87.

66. *Orlando Sentinel*, 17 October 1961.

67. Tamar Calhoun to David Brinkley, 14 October 1961, City of Cocoa Beach Archives.

68. *Orlando Sentinel*, 24 September 1961.



Cocoa Beach welcomes home Astronaut Gordon Cooper after his 22-orbit May 1963 flight. Image held by Florida Space Coast History Project, University of Central Florida.

Before the Vanguard fiasco, the government announced launch dates, but after a series of embarrassing fizzles, the schedules became hush-hush. Missilemen would gather at places like Ramon's ("The Toast of the Coast"), the Vanguard's Lounge, or Bernard's Surf to drink and unwind. Bartenders and servers at the eateries would overhear the space workers talking and quickly became privy to the information. The press corps utilized this network of restaurant informants along with observation of traffic patterns, long-range telescopes, and aerial surveillance to get their story. When a "top secret" launch was about to go off, the beaches were crammed full of spectators who just happened to be there at the time.⁶⁹

Businesses within Cocoa Beach closely identified themselves with Cape activities to the north. Newer motels all supported "space age" names, the Satellite, Astrocraft, Starlite, and Sea Missile, just to name a few. The Galaxy Lounge at George's Steak

69. Stephen J. Flynn, "Cocoa Beach Area is Out of this World," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, 1957.

House came replete with phone booths shaped like space capsules. Barstools at one lounge were equipped with seatbelts to aid those customers who had indulged in too many “liftoff” martinis. The “girls in the orbit review” entertained patrons at the Starlite Motel. Restrooms marked “astronauts” and “astronets” could be spotted, and children ordered from menus shaped like an astronaut’s space helmet. Cocoa Beach paid an unending tribute to the space age that made it prosper.

Throughout most of the 1950s, short-term housing requirements for workers at the Cape and Patrick Air Force Base had virtually displaced a traditional fun-in-the-sun tourist industry in Cocoa Beach. Most innkeepers did not seem to care—money was money and at least the Cape workers were not seasonal. The Brevard County Task Force in 1958 brought to light an important auxiliary consequence. The city received an untold amount of free publicity with television networks and wire services utilizing Cocoa Beach as their date line. The city became fused with Cape Canaveral in the public’s mindset. The report forecast that with the establishment of adequate motel facilities a tourist area would thrive.⁷⁰

By the end of 1962, the construction of motel accommodations had caught up with tourist demands. Rooms ranged from the “Las Vegas-like” accommodations along the strip to the apartment type in the downtown area.⁷¹ Contemporary newspaper travel columns extolled the benefits of vacationing at Cocoa Beach. Not only could a visitor witness a launch, they stood a good chance of dining in the same restaurant as an astronaut. “Where else could a traveler rub shoulders with such unusual people?”⁷² The public flocked to Cocoa Beach to watch the missiles fly and the municipality benefitted from a unique brand of tourism in Florida, one untethered from the state’s traditional attraction of warm winters.

While military missile testing transformed Cocoa Beach into a satellite community of Cape Canaveral, manned spaceflight greatly increased its orbit of prosperity. Cocoa Beach shed its boomtown appearance during the NASA induced period of growth. The municipality acquired more than the mortar and stone communal

70. *Action Report of the Brevard County Task Force*, 6 March 1958, 38-39.

71. “Cocoa Beach to Host the Space Age,” *MTP News*, 1963, 3.

72. *Miami Herald*, 19 March 1961.

elements of schools, hospitals, housing, and shopping—it found a unique identity. This once slumberous minute speck along Florida's Eastern shore transformed itself into "Missileland, USA." As the decade of the 1960s continued to unfurl, the City of Cocoa Beach reveled in its Space Age persona. As the missilemen at Cape Canaveral prepared to launch the final Mercury astronaut into space, Missileland, USA readied itself for an even greater period of growth and expansion—the Moon Boom.