

A HISTORY OF CAXAMBAS PASS FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN TIMES



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He is also an accomplished author and cartographer with several published works to his credit. His books include *Naples Waterfront, Changes in Time* (2009), *A History of The Bahamas Through Maps* (2013), and *The Florida Keys – A History Through Maps* (2017). Through his writings, Todd has chronicled the historical and geographical evolution of these regions.

Island Map Publishing, LLC (IMP) was established by Todd in 2005 and has published several editions of the above books and over 150 maps encompassing the entire coast of the United States, along with islands of The Bahamas & Caribbean. IMP's local maps include the City of Naples Centennial edition, Rookery Bay, Marco Island, the 10,000 Islands and Everglades National Park.

Craig R. Woodward

Craig R. Woodward moved to Marco Island in 1968 at age 12 and grew up living in Old Marco near Frank Hamilton Cushing's 1896 archaeological dig where the "Key Marco Cat" was found. Access to Marco was only over the old swing bridge in Goodland and many of the pioneer families still lived there or in Old Marco. Craig developed a keen interest in local history.

After graduating from Naples High School, Craig graduated from the University of Florida first with a degree in Business Administration and then a law degree. He practiced law on Marco Island from 1980 until 2023; being board certified in real estate law for 30 years and also handling land use and estate planning matters for clients.

Craig has written many published articles regarding Marco Island and Collier County history primarily in the *Coastal Breeze* newspaper and played a founding role in the Marco Island Historical Museum. In addition, he has presented various Power Point presentations on early Marco and Collier County history to numerous organizations. For the past 20 years Craig led a full day "history tour" of Marco Island for the students in the Marco Chamber's Leadership Marco program.

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1733 map by Herman Moll
A Map of the West Indies

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INTRODUCTION



Caxambas Pass defines the south end of Marco Island from the tidal pass near Cape Marco to Barfield Bay and other waterways that extend to the east. Each day, the flood tide flows into the pass and the ebb tide carries water back out to the Gulf of Mexico. The pass supports a myriad of marine life, including snook, redfish, snapper, grouper, jacks, sheepshead, mullet, sharks, small tropical fish and many others. Several types of crabs, and even the occasional lobster, can be found in the rocky areas along the north side of the pass. Dolphins and manatees are frequent visitors, as are sea turtles. The ecosystem is further enriched by barnacles, clams, oysters, sponges, tunicates, algae, seagrasses, crustaceans and a vast diversity of plankton and other microscopic life. Together, these organisms contribute to the cycle of life that sustains the ecosystems of Southwest Florida and the Gulf of Mexico (renamed the “Gulf of America” by the U.S. on January 20, 2025).

The original Caxambas settlement referenced in this summary dates back to the late 1800s. It was located at the end of today’s Inlet Drive, formerly known as Clam Factory Road, which once provided access to the Barfield Hotel on Indian Hill. At the south end of the road was the Caxambas settlement which included the Burnham Clam Factory along with numerous homes and businesses. The historic Caxambas settlement was east of the many condominiums that now stretch at the end of South Collier Blvd from Cape Marco to Shipps Landing.

Barron Collier owned most of Marco Island at the time of his death in 1939, and his heirs continued with development plans for Marco and the rest of Collier County, which had been named after him in 1923. Homes and buildings from Caxambas were moved to Goodland in 1949 as part of Collier’s sons’ plans

for development on Caxambas Pass, a concept which would have included a large shipping port dredged within the historic Caxambas area. The Collier’s holdings on Marco Island, including the Caxambas settlement site, were eventually sold to Deltona Corporation in the mid-1960s.

The residential areas between Shipps Landing and Inlet Drive were created by dredge and fill activities the Deltona Corp completed in the 1970s. The areas filled to make dry land were primarily mangrove wetlands. This is true of properties along Caxambas Pass including home sites on Caxambas Ct and Barfield Ct, all land created by filling mangroves along the Pass. The historic Caxambas settlement was located on natural dry land along the shoreline of the Pass, now Inlet Dr. It’s important to note that almost all of the waterfront lots on Marco were created by dredge and fill activities, which turned mangrove wetlands into upland lots and canals. This is true of many of the waterfront communities in South Florida. An overlay on page 24 clearly shows dry land versus mangroves along Caxambas Pass prior to the dredge and fill activities.

CAXAMBAS PASS HISTORY PRIOR TO DEVELOPMENT

Ten thousand years ago sea level was much lower than today. At that time, Marco Island was part of mainland Florida, which stretched all the way to the Florida Keys ninety miles south. Sea levels rose as the last ice age was ending. The higher elevation found at the Indian Hill area of Marco, just north of Caxambas, was once thought to be large shell mounds. However, it actually consisted mostly of sand, with some shells placed there by the indigenous people. These hills are dunes created by sands blown in from the southwest during the Pleistocene era when waters of the Gulf of Mexico were 50 to 70 miles west of present day. Recent OSL (Optically Stimulated Luminescence) tests date when the sand was laid down based on when it last saw light. Results show the Indian Hill area as 26,000 years old, the Barfield Bay dune as 15,000 years old, and the most recent dune ridge on Horr's Island (now known as Key Marco) at 8,000 years old. As the continental glaciers continued to melt, sea levels rose, cutting off the source of wind-blown sand and filling the lower areas, such as Barfield Bay, with seawater. As sea levels continued to rise Marco became an island, in a similar fashion as the Florida Keys.

Thousands of years ago, Native Americans colonized Marco when it was still part of the mainland. They may have migrated down the coast on land or arrived in primitive canoes, but Marco was inhabited more than 5,000 years ago as evidenced by radiocarbon dating of the remains from mound sites on Horr's Island. The early inhabitants in the area were simply known as Archaic Indians as they predate history, it is unknown what they called themselves. These original people either evolved into or were assimilated by the Muspa and later the Calusa tribes. Spanish records show they traded with the Muspa and Calusa tribes, who ruled the west coast of Florida from the Keys to Tampa Bay until the mid to late 1700s.

They were displaced by a combination of European settlers invading the area, related diseases breaking out, and other Native American tribes from the north fighting and sometimes enslaving them. Their successor inhabitants in Southwest Florida were primarily the Seminoles, which were likely a combination of Southeastern United States tribes, including the Muscogee people (or Creek), who migrated into South Florida from the north and then banded together with the other tribes as the Seminoles.

*Fishing in South Florida,
painting by Hermann Trappman.*



The Otter Mound Preserve

Otter Mound, a Conservation Collier site, which is located on Marco off Inlet Drive on Addison Ct, is a significant archeological site within the old Caxambas pioneer settlement. The mound is famous for its lightning whelk shell walls that are found on the western half of the property. The name 'lightning' is given as younger shells have lines resembling lightning strikes coming down the sides of the shell, while the lines have faded out in older shells. According to an archeological survey, Native Americans occupied the property around 750-1200 A.D. For hundreds of years Calusa and/or Muspa living on Marco piled up discarded shells of oysters, clams, whelks and other shellfish that were part of their diet. Due to the alkaline nature of the shell-strewn soil, artifacts such as ceramics, bones and stone tools were well-preserved in the mound. The tropical hardwood hammock which grew over the ancient mound likely provided additional protection by creating an anoxic (oxygen free/decay resistant) environment under the soil.

Lightning whelk shells had a special significance to Native Americans and were an item that was used to trade with northern tribes for things not found in Florida, such as colorful semi-precious stones and chert arrowheads. The reason that lightning whelk shells were so important was that they are a "left-handed shell" meaning when held up have their opening on the left side instead of the right side as almost every other shell is, (e.g. a conch shell). To the Native Americans this shell represented life. Archaeologists have found lightning whelk shells in grave sites from as far north in the United States as the Midwest. Anthropologists have determined that many aspects of Native American life were based on the whorls at the top of the shell which spin in a clockwise direction. Native American dances were performed in that same direction, again symbolizing life.

Several years ago one of the co-authors, Craig Woodward, along with the Director of Conservation Collier, pulled three lightning whelk shells from different parts of the walls. The locations were marked so that the shells could be replaced, and the shells were sent in to be tested for their age. Key in determining which shells to test was the presence in each of a "harvest hole" – a hole in the shell releasing the meat of the animal from the shell. This was evidence that the shell had been harvested for immediate consumption, instead of testing a whelk shell that had washed up on a beach for an unknown period of time. The tests of the three shells established that they had been harvested around the year 1220, or 272 years before Christopher Columbus landed in the "New World."

Long after the Calusa and Muspa had disappeared, a settler named Ernest Otter moved onto the shell mound, where he made his home in the 1940s and 1950s. The mound was named after him. He used additional shells to re-build areas of the walls which line the terraces Otter used to plant gardens on his property.

Beautiful walls built with lightning whelk shells at Otter Mound. Entrance to Otter Mound Preserve is located at 1831 Addison Court and is free of charge. There are benches and interpretive signs along the trails, making it an enjoyable park to visit.



EUROPEAN VOYAGES

Some historians believe that on Ponce de Leon's first trip to Florida in 1513, as he traveled up the Southwest Florida coast, the high hills of Caxambas were spotted by his crew. He possibly went ashore and traded with the native residents, possibly the Muspa tribe. The Spanish may have also determined there was freshwater on the island (note *Aquatio* meaning water on map below). On his second Florida voyage in 1521 he arrived in Southwest Florida and made the first known attempted European settlement in Florida. A battle ensued with the Native Americans and Ponce de Leon was injured. Although the location of his short-lived colony is not precisely known, D. Graham Copeland, Barron Collier's engineer who oversaw the completion of U.S. 41 to the Dade County line, believed that Ponce de Leon would not have passed up "a likely inlet such as Caxambas Pass." Dr. Jerald T. Milanich, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at the University of Florida also believed that Ponce de Leon visited the Caxambas area and that it was a possible location of the battle with the Native Americans where he was injured, called *Yglias de Matancas* (meaning "massacre"). The battle occurred where the Spanish had stopped to get water, and that points to Caxambas as the location. Bob Carr, former Dade County Archaeologist, believes Marco was where de Leon tried to settle using Barfield Bay as a protected harbor. Others believe the battle occurred in the area of today's Sanibel Island or perhaps Cape Romano. Unless evidence surfaces in Spanish archives, the real story may never be known about de Leon's settlement attempt. He died in Havana shortly after this battle when his wound, caused by a poison arrow, turned fatal.



1591 Florida map by Theodore de Bry. The word "CALOS" at the bottom of the Florida peninsula indicates the Calusa controlled the area where the Spanish gave their chief the name Calos.

EARLY MAPS OF MARCO & THE NAMING OF CAXAMBAS

Ponce de Leon's pilot on his 1513 first voyage to Florida was Anton de Alaminos. During that voyage Alaminos is best known for having discovered the Gulf Stream, a current of water that flows up the eastern coast of Florida and then toward Europe. That information was later utilized by Spanish conquistadors to ship their gold, silver and emeralds back to Spain. For many decades Spain kept the existence of the Gulf Stream a secret, realizing that knowledge of it would encourage other European countries to explore the Western Hemisphere. Alaminos also piloted for Francisco Hernandez de Córdoba's voyage to Florida in 1517, during which three ships were blown off course while in the Gulf of Mexico, ending up along the coast of the Yucatan peninsula in today's Mexico. The crew needed fresh water and attempted to land but were beaten off by the natives. Alaminos chose to sail back to Southwest Florida, almost 1,000 miles away, as he somehow knew that fresh water was available along the coast. This may have been Marco.

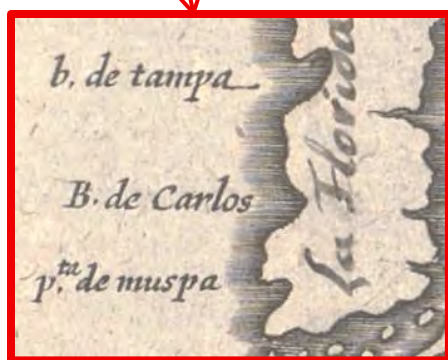
Fresh water flows in a southwest direction from the Big Cypress through sloughs and numerous waterways, such as Henderson Creek, Barron River, Turner River, etc., creating an estuary environment along the Ten Thousand Islands. Very early maps, including those from 1631 and 1639 shown on pages 8 & 9, have various forms of the word *Aguada* indicating fresh water. Those maps, along with the 1601 map on page 7, also have the name of the Indian tribe associated with Marco Island, the *Muspa*.

The word *Casimbás* was used by Spanish explorers of the time and can be understood as a historical term for a freshwater well or spring. It is an early form of the modern name Caxambas, and cartographers used various spellings to mark the area - see maps from 1772 and 1776 on pages 11 and 12. Spanish records note the procedure to obtain fresh water using buckets: *'A hogshed (a type of barrel) is sunk in the soft mud over a bubbling outlet, and as the salt water is shallow, the fresh flows in perfect purity.'* In this way, buckets could be filled because fresh water, being lighter than salt water, sits above it like a lens. Early Florida pioneers record that they could also obtain fresh water by taking their boats up nearby rivers or creeks. Much of that changed after the U.S. Corps of Engineers altered the flow of water from Lake Okeechobee. Fresh water aquifers also lie under Florida and some continually discharge fresh water offshore, such as the "Blue Hole" located west of Marco Island.



Ponce de Leon.

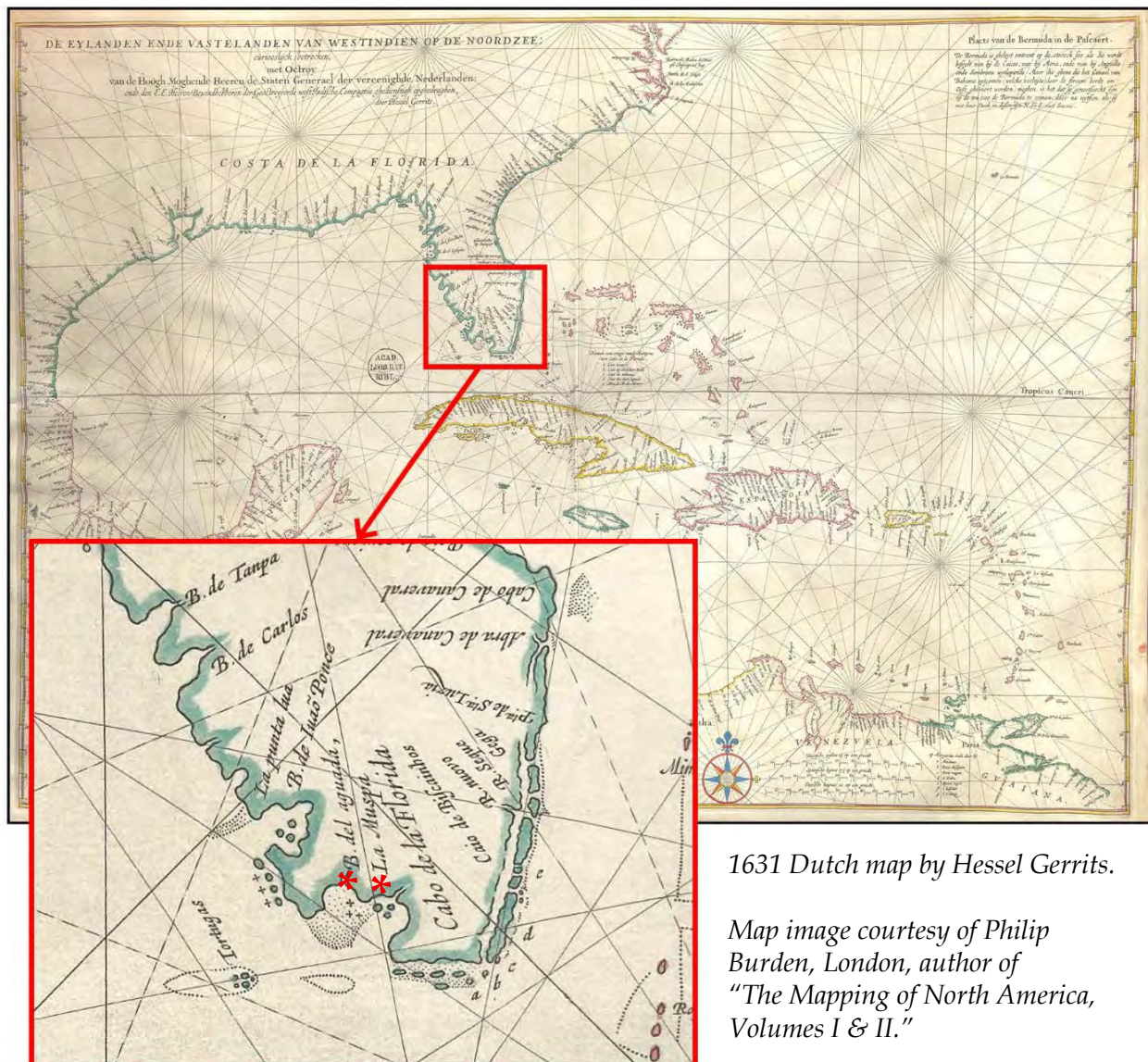
The indigenous Native American tribe on Marco Island encountered by early Spanish explorers were called the *Muspa*. One of the earliest maps to show that name (*p.^{ta} de Muspa*) is shown below; the 1601 map by Spanish historian and writer Antonio Herrera. The Muspa would have likely been present when Ponce de Leon first visited Southwest Florida in 1513 and again in 1521 when he was fatally wounded by the indigenous people, possibly by the Muspa on Marco. He later died in Havana, Cuba - then a Spanish stronghold.

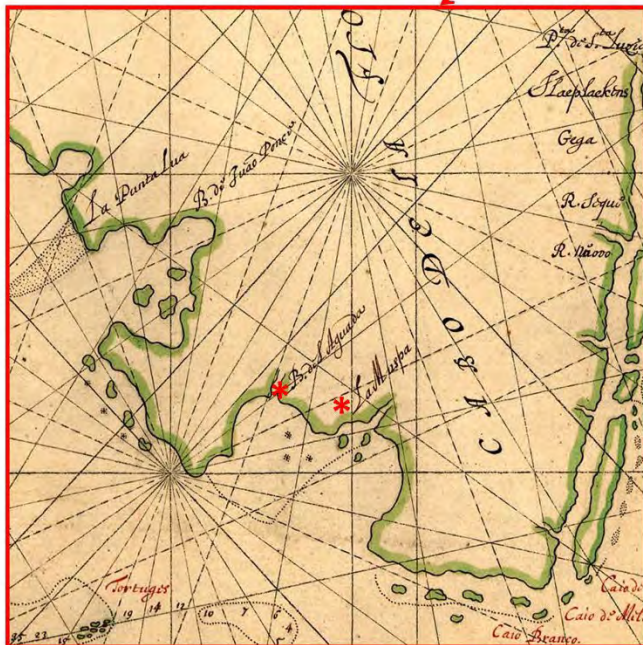


1601 map by Antonio de Herrera,
Spanish historian and cartographer.

Image courtesy of The Touchton Map Library
at the Tampa Bay History Center.

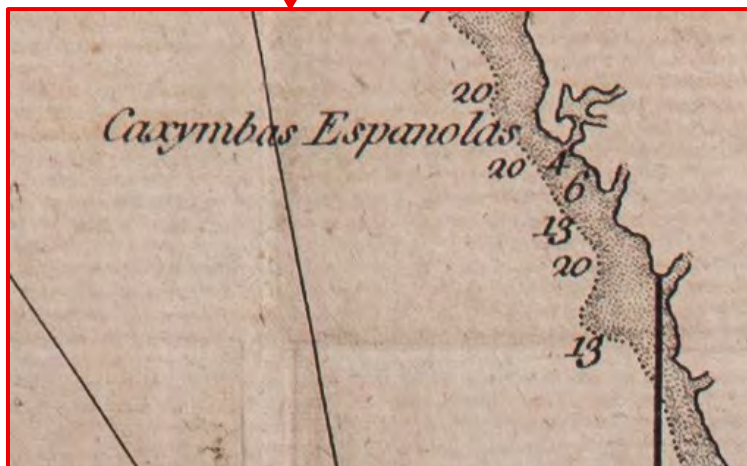
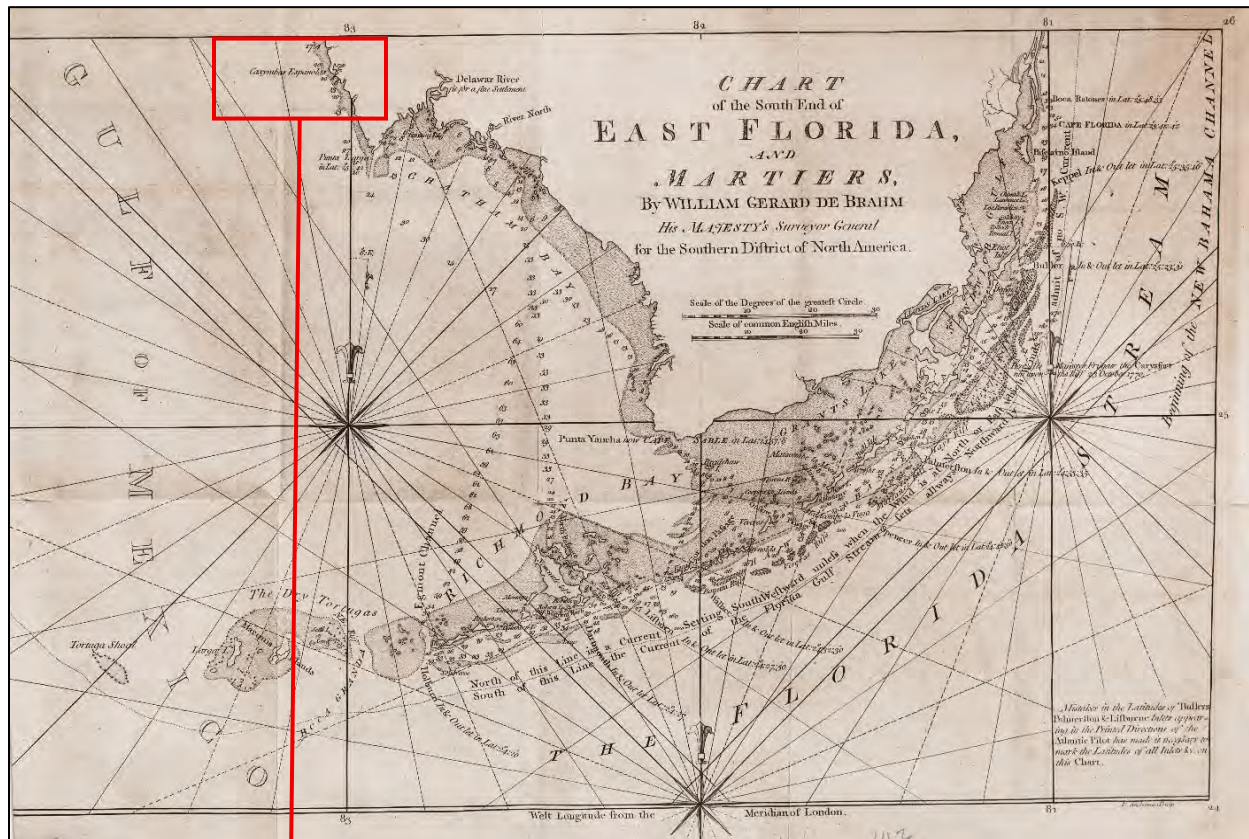
This 1631 Dutch map may be the second printed reference to the Muspa on a European map, though the Spanish were aware of the tribe and had traded with them by that date. The map was drawn by Dutch cartographer Hessel Gerrits and shows *La Muspa* and immediately above it *B. del aguada* or bay of (fresh) water. *La Muspa* refers to the indigenous tribe associated with Marco Island and *B. del aguada* could easily be the Caxambas Pass area where a source of fresh water was known to exist by early Spanish explorers. The Indian Hills area, just north of Caxambas, has topography that would have encouraged water to accumulate in aquifers at the base of the hills.





Map image courtesy of Philip Burden, London, author of "The Mapping of North America, Volumes I & II."

Perhaps the earliest use of a derivation to the word Caxambas is on this 1772 map by William De Brahm, where he uses *Caxymbas*. Ponce de Leon's pilot in 1513, Anton Alaminos, returned to the area for fresh water in 1517. De Brahm must have had knowledge of Spanish term *Casimbas* and used his version of it on the map.



1772 English map by William De Brahm.

Notice this blow up showing "Caxymbas Espanolas," an early derivation of the name Caxambas.



*Namesake of Cape
Romano in
Southwest Florida.*

CAXAMBAS PASS SETTLERS

The following exhibits on Caxambas Pass are featured at the Marco Island Historical Museum.

The text shown here is paraphrased from the museum exhibits. Visitors are encouraged to stop by this excellent museum at 180 S Heathwood Dr. to explore related photographs and interesting displays.

HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Caxambas was a village on the south end of Marco Island. Once home to 150 people, its economy centered largely around horticulture, fishing and the E.S. Burnham Packing Company - a clam factory that operated there from 1904 to 1932. Other notable landmarks include the Heights Hotel, Stephens Boarding House, Barfield General Store and Post Office, Community Hall (which also functioned as a schoolhouse, church, and movie hall), the Ideal Fish Camp and the Scripps School.

Caxambas was connected to (old) Marco at the island's north end by a five-mile shell road known as Clam Factory Road, now called Inlet Drive. Many buildings in Caxambas were located near this road or along the shoreline, but a few structures were situated on the top of the unusually high hills, which rose to an elevation of 50 feet - making Indian Hill in Caxambas the highest natural point in Southwest Florida. The village bore the brunt of several famous hurricanes, most notoriously the 1910 hurricane which destroyed many of the low-lying buildings as well as hundreds of acres of pineapples under cultivation.

THE FIRST SETTLERS

The first recorded pioneer settler at Caxambas was Mr. Roberts, who is noted on John Henderson's 1876 survey of Marco Island. Little else is known about the man after whom Henderson named Roberts Bay (north of Caxambas Pass) after.

Roberts was followed by Capt. Charles W. Johnson and family, who moved to Caxambas from Cedar Key (north Florida) in the 1870s. In 1880, Johnson was living with wife Catherine and four of their children at the island's highest point. Levin Johnson, their eldest son, lived in a separate house with his wife Lucy. In 1884, Levin received the first official land grant to property in Caxambas. The United States Coast and Geodetic Survey placed a marker near the Johnson family's house in 1887, naming it Johnson's Station.

Other families soon joined the Johnsons at Caxambas. James Barfield came with his brother Benjamin in 1892 to grow vegetables for the Key West and New York markets. Frederick Ludlow arrived after 1890 and by 1896 owned more than 196 acres of land. In 1901, a farmer named Frank Green was living at Caxambas when he met Allen Thomas (A.T.) Stephens in Estero. In exchange for seasonal help around the farm, Green brought Stephens and his family, including wife Annie Dewilla Collins and their five children to Caxambas. Gradually, as more and more new families arrived, a village took shape. A.T. and Annie Stephens' daughter, Tommie, later married James Barfield. Both were prominent citizens of Marco Island and Collier County. James Barfield served as a Collier County Commissioner, and Tommie Barfield was the County's first Superintendent of Schools. After her death an elementary school was built on the island and named after her.

CAPTAIN JOHN F. HERR

In 1877, Capt. John Folly Herr (1843-1926), a Union Army veteran and U.S. Marshal from Key West, built a vacation home on an island east of (and across the bay from) Caxambas. In 1883 and 1885, Capt. Herr obtained land grants from the United States for 134 acres on what became known as Herr's Island. By the 1890s, Herr had established a successful 50-acre pineapple plantation, citrus grove, packing plant, and cannery there. He visited periodically with his family, but hired help to maintain the operation while he was away. In 1923, Capt. Herr sold the last of his property and moved back to his birthplace of Ohio. The remains of his two-story tabby mortar house were added to the National Register of Historical Places in 1977. Today Herr's Island is a residential community known as Key Marco. Herr's house remains are now preserved there.

FREDRICK LUDLOW

Frederick Barrett Ludlow (1867-1919) was the first person to cultivate pineapples on a large scale at Marco Island. Originally from Springfield, Ohio, Ludlow settled at Caxambas sometime after receiving a degree in pharmaceutical chemistry from Cornell University in 1890. By the mid-1890s, he was a well-established pineapple grower, shipping an estimated 12,000 pineapples to market in Tampa. In March 1897, Ludlow married Emma White Collier (1880-1977), daughter of Capt. William D. Collier. They had six children and lived in a large house at the top of a hill, near the west end of what is now Ludlow Road.

By 1910, the Ludlow Fruit Company was the largest "pinery" in Florida. It shipped 50,000 crates of pineapples annually from a 3,200 sq ft packing house on the shore of what is now Roberts Bay. Ludlow's pineapple fields sprawled for nearly 200 acres. On October 17, 1910, the infamous 'Cuban Hurricane' devastated his packing plant. Ludlow then took over as manager of the Burnham clam factory until selling his property to Edward Scripps in 1918 and returning to Ohio.

RISE AND FALL

The population at Caxambas depended heavily on the availability of work. Many of the village's early residents were seasonal laborers and lived together in boarding houses. In 1901, Frederick Ludlow employed about 20 black men as field workers at his pineapple plantation. The 1900 United States Census lists the names of 18 black "farm laborers," ranging in age from 14 to 51, most of Bahamian heritage. These men were likely Ludlow's employees. Two of the men (on the Census), Thomas Johnson and Charles Saunders, were married and lived with their wives and children in their own homes at Caxambas.

When the (Burham) clam factory opened in 1904, more workers flocked to Caxambas. The 1920 U.S. Census lists 17 factory employees, 9 hotel industry workers, 7 farmers, and at least 6 independent boating guides at Caxambas. When the clam factory closed permanently in 1932, the local economy suffered. In 1935 the population of Caxambas was 156. It dropped to 130 in 1940 and 107 in 1945. In 1949 the Collier Development Corp, anticipating a development opportunity and likely noticing the community's decline, relocated the entire village of Caxambas to Goodland.

CAPTAIN HORR'S PINEAPPLE PLANTATION ON "HORR'S ISLAND" (TODAY'S KEY MARCO)

Captain John Foley Horr (1843–1926) was a civil war veteran, one of the first settlers on Caxambas Pass and namesake of "Horr's Island." He acquired the island via U.S. land grants in 1883. He built a home and pineapple plantation, ruins of which are still present. The structure was constructed with tabby mortar, a durable material made by burning shells to create lime, then mixing it with sand, ash and intact shells or stones. When properly made, tabby can last as long as modern concrete.

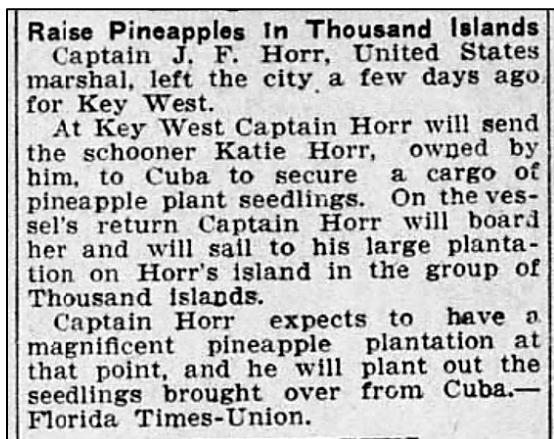
Captain Horr operated a schooner that transported not only his pineapples but also produce grown by the other farmers in the area to Key West, which was then the largest city and port in South Florida. From 1889 to 1893, he served as Collector of Customs for the Key West District, and in February 1898, President McKinley appointed him Federal Marshal for the Jacksonville to Key West district.

In 1920, the pineapple operation was shut down, and Captain Horr retired to Ohio. He eventually sold Horr's Island in 1923 for \$10,000. While he regularly visited the property with his family and maintained workers on the land, Key West was likely his primary home due to his government duties.

Captain Horr's home on Key Marco remains a historical site and was listed in the U.S. National Register of Historic Places on October 8, 1997.



Remaining ruins of Captain Horr's property.



Article from The Daily Times.



Historical marker on Horr's Island.



Captain Horr's house on the Horr's Island sand dune (1922) – MIHS.



Captain Horr's Home on Horr's Island, today's Key Marco, packing house to right.

THE CLAMMING INDUSTRY AT CAXAMBAS

The Burnham Clam Factory was once located in the settlement of Caxambas along the north shore of Caxambas Pass near what is now called South Inlet Drive. According to the Marco Island Historical Society:

“The first clam factory on Marco Island opened at Caxambas in 1904. James Barfield sold five acres of waterfront property to Elmer S. Burnham (1855-1941), head of the E.S. Burnham Packing Company in New York City. Established in 1892, the company sold assorted canned goods, produce, and sundries, but specialized in clam bouillon and chowder. Burnham built a factory at Caxambas to keep up with the growing demand for his product. Clams were transported to Burnham's factory on boats for sorting, cleaning, steaming, and packaging. They were then shipped to Key West by schooner and on to New York via steamship. In 1906, the factory was canning 500 to 700 bushels of clams daily and producing more than 24,000 cans per week. By the 1920s, Burnham's factory employed between 30 and 40 workers and paid an average of \$0.21 per hour. In 1929, the company's clam dredge sank during a storm and Burnham closed the factory and his business. Doxee Clams, who operated out of the north end of Marco, reopened the Burnham factory at the request of the Caxambas residents until a hurricane permanently destroyed the building in 1932.”

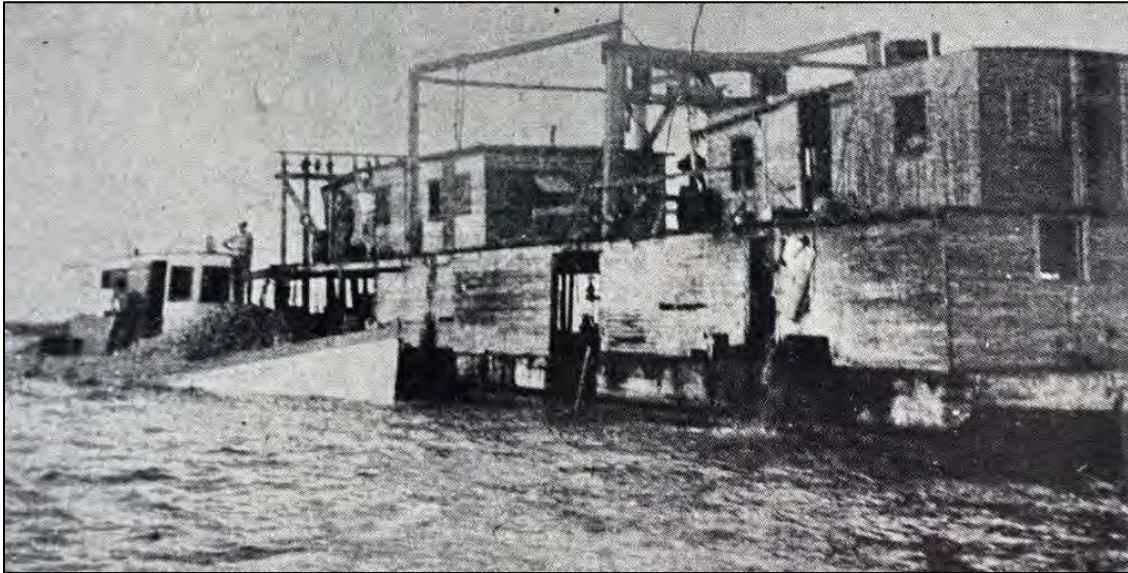


Burnham Clam Factory and Captain Bill Collier's Falcon.



Employees of the Burnham Clam Factory.

The clam dredge and boat shown below were used in the Marco Island area. Burnham Clam Factory was on Caxambas Pass and Doxsee Clam Cannery was in Old Marco.



Captain Bill Collier's Clam Dredge.



Clam boat (Marco Island).

THE OLD CAXAMBAS SETTLEMENT

James “Jim” Madison Barfield (1867-1944), the namesake of Barfield Bay, was born in Georgia shortly after the end of the American Civil War. In 1892, he joined his brother Benjamin at Caxambas to grow vegetables for the Key West market. He opened a general store and post office in 1904, serving as the Caxambas settlement's postmaster (the site of the original settlement is now on S. Inlet Drive on Caxambas Pass). His wife Tommie Barfield became a well-known civic leader who helped him start a hotel on the heights north of Caxambas. Tommie also founded a school in Caxambas and, in a different location on Marco, today's “Tommie Barfield Elementary” bears her name.



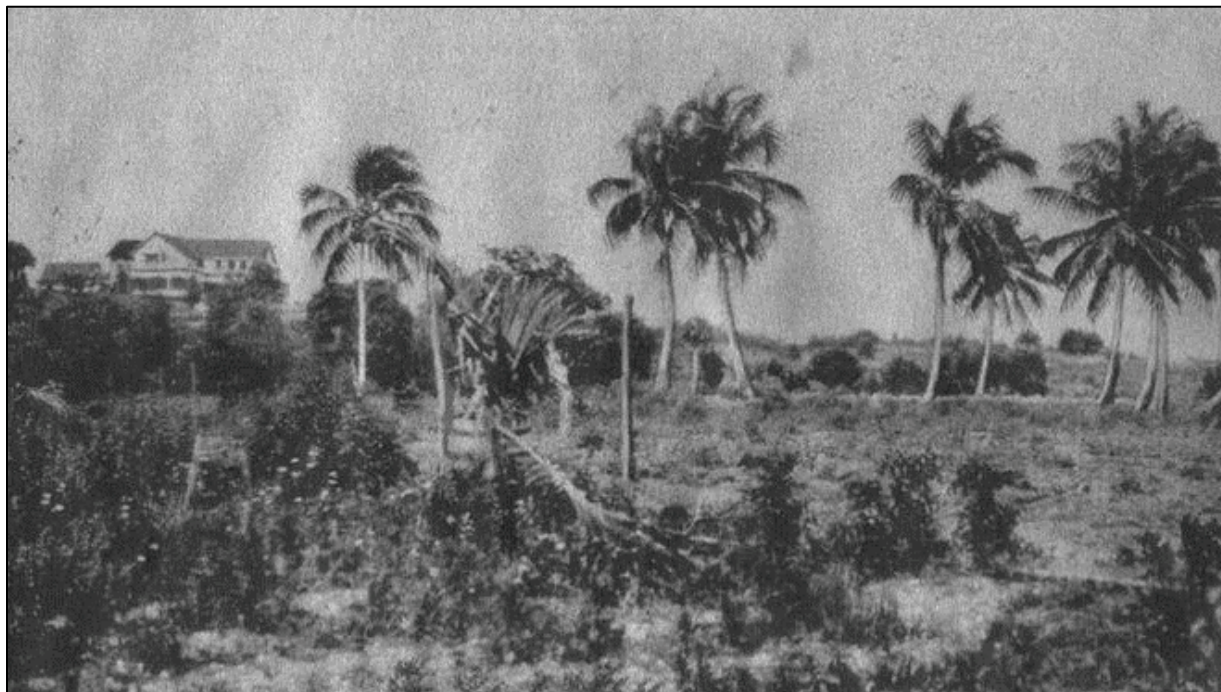
*Former Barfield home (J.M. Tommie)
– photo by June Jolly.*



Caxambas Mail Boat (circa 1920).

Mail was delivered to Marco Island from Fort Myers by sailboat since Captain Bill Collier became postmaster on the north end of the island (the “old Marco” settlement) in 1888. A second post office was opened at Caxambas in 1904 when Jim Barfield was named postmaster. Small boats like the one in the picture above (1920) delivered the mail.

Barron Gift Collier, unrelated to Captain Bill, finished the Tamiami Trail (US 41) in 1928 and at some point built a railroad bridge across the Big Marco River to access Marco Island from the north. He had plans to make Marco a great port which would have involved massive dredging in Caxambas Pass to accommodate ships. The port was never developed, and the railroad bridge and tracks were taken out sometime in the mid to late 1940s. The old railroad bed became the road that Dr. Loach used to access his Isles of Capri development project in the 1950s. The road, now known as State Road 951, was later extended south to the Big Marco River. The state funded a toll bridge now known as the “Judge S.S. Jolley Bridge” which opened in December of 1969.



The Heights Hotel (upper left), north of Caxambas, in the area of South Marco now known as Indian Hill.



Caxambas 1949, the year houses in the old Caxambas settlement were moved to Goodland.

THE CAXAMBAS SETTLEMENT MOVES TO GOODLAND

In 1921 when Barron Gift Collier purchased Deep Lake, just north of Everglades City, along with an adjacent orange grove, it marked the beginning of his acquisition of a million acres of land in what would become Collier County, including Marco Island and Everglades City. In 1923, the county was named for him after he promised to finish the Tamiami Trail through the Everglades to Miami. Goodland was one of the few holdouts, as there was a gentleman named Pettit that originally did not want to sell his land. While farming in Goodland, Pettit also sold shells as road material, and these were used to build the road that leads in and out of Goodland today. The road was built shortly after the Goodland Swing Bridge became operational in 1938, thus granting the first bridged access to Marco Island.

When Barron Collier purchased Marco, the Caxambas settlement was already a small town, its main business being the Burnham clam canning factory. When Collier purchased the land, he promised the residents he would offer them lots in Goodland which were financed by him, and that he would move them for free. Barron Collier died in 1939, but his 3 sons, Barron, Miles and Sam kept the promise and in 1949 the homes and buildings in Caxambas were moved to Goodland. Bud Kirk was postmaster in Caxambas at the time and, with his wife Kappy, led the move to Goodland where their descendants still own “Kirk Fish Co.” Once the move took place there wasn't much left near the old Caxambas town site other than the Ideal Fish Camp, used by visiting sportsmen, which operated in the 1950s through the 1970s.



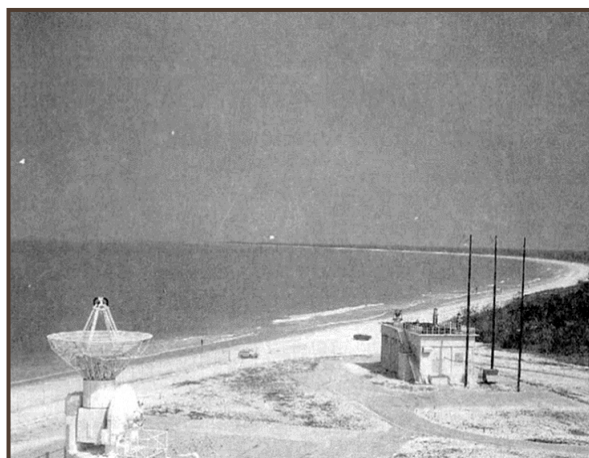
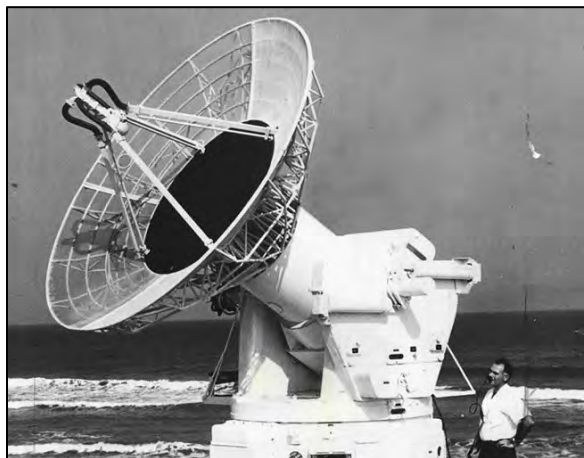
Kirk Fish Company on Goodland – modern times.

THE MISSILE TRACKING STATION ON CAXAMBAS PASS

In 1959, a missile tracking station was built at Cape Marco by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to trace the route of rockets fired from Eglin Air Force Base near Pensacola, over 400 miles away. Marco Island was barely inhabited at the time and about 50 employees were based at the tracking station from 1960 to 1961. According to Craig R. Woodward, a Marco Island historian, “they tracked the performance of missiles, such as the Matador, GAM-72, Quail, GAM-77 (known as the ‘Hound Dog’) and the Bomarc, a ground-to-air missile capable of using a nuclear warhead designed to protect the U.S. during the Cold War.” The missile tracking site (where the Cape Marco development is today) included a radar building with one fixed and two mobile radar antennas, a telemetry building, a weather building, and a tower that was later moved to Indian Hill to provide elevated views of the island. Importantly, the missile tracking site provided the first regular electric power to Marco Island.

On September 10, 1960, Hurricane Donna impacted Southwest Florida, causing devastation in Naples and on Marco. “Remarkably, the tracking site survived relatively unaffected,” said Facility Manager Randy Gilmore, “although we had to chop our way along the road removing numerous downed trees to reach the site after the storm.”

After the Cuban revolution, the site was repurposed to monitor the possibility of ballistic missiles carrying warheads heading north into the U.S. from Cuba. The operation of the missile tracking range extended from Eglin Air Force Base down the west coast of Florida, with sites at Port St. Joe in the panhandle, Anclote Point (near Tarpon Springs), Marco Island and Cudjoe Key in the Florida Keys. After the Cuban missile crisis, the Cudjoe site had a balloon mounted radar tethered to the ground to monitor Cuba. The operations of the missile range ceased as the testing of the Bomarc missile was finished and Eglin's mission changed to supporting the Vietnam War by training pilots against enemy radar simulators.



Left photo: A radar antenna at the missile tracking station in 1961. The southwest tip of Marco Island was used as a missile tracking station for years during the Cold War. The station was administered by the U.S. Air Force. Photo Courtesy of Craig R. Woodward.

Right photo: Former missile tracking station with Marco's barren beach stretching north.



Missile tracking station on Caxambas Pass while operational in the 1960s.

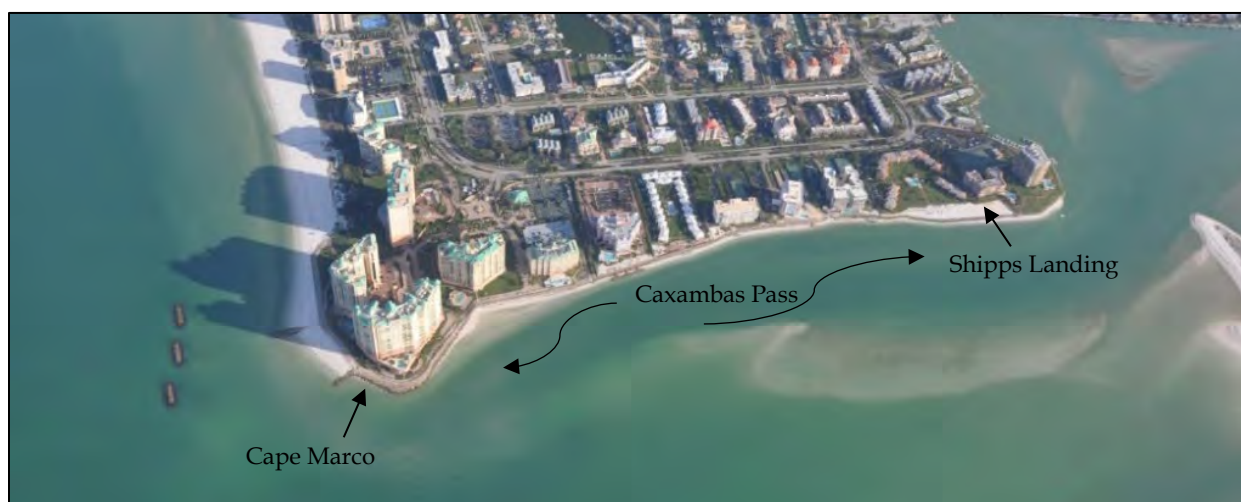


Cape Marco on the former missile tracking station in 2024.

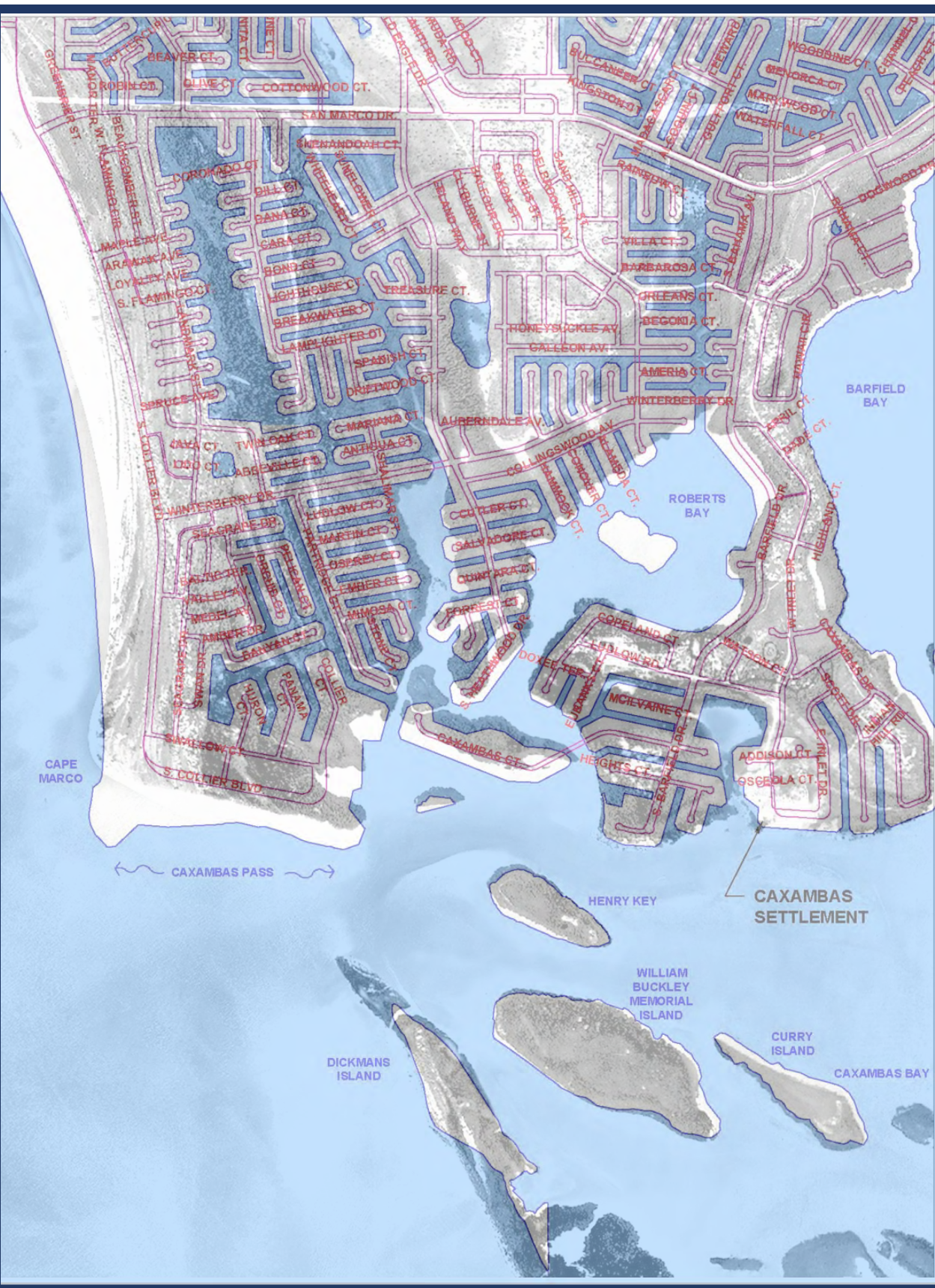
MODERN DEVELOPMENT ON CAXAMBAS PASS

The Mackle brothers and their company, Deltona Corporation, developed most of Marco Island in the late 1960s through the 1970s after successful developments on Florida's east coast including Key Biscayne. Their dream of transforming a swampy island into a tropical island paradise soon materialized. Marco Island became a success as the Mackles sold property and houses while they were building them. The process of turning mangrove swamp into waterfront homesites involved first clearing the mangroves to stack up and burn, then dredges and drag lines were used to create canals that were laid out according to Deltona's plans. The fill generated by dredging the canals was used to create lots behind concrete seawalls that were built to contain the fill. Unfortunately for the Mackle Brothers, in the 1970s the environmental movement started to gain traction and permits for dredging more canals on Marco were denied by the U.S. Government. Deltona had already pre-sold many of the waterfront lots they planned, and the courts ordered them to pay back the buyers, both domestic and international. The Mackle brothers chose the honorable decision to pay back all those investors who had purchased properties that couldn't be developed. It almost bankrupted the company and later the Deltona Corporation sold off their utility companies but still retained developments they had built throughout the State of Florida.

In the 1980s a large concrete seawall with rocks existed at the base of what is now Cape Marco to protect it from the sea, and it also provided a place for everyone to fish. The pass was deep next to the seawall, and the fishing was great. Marathon Oil owned the property and in the late 1980s a developer named Jack Antaramian bought it for \$24 million. He and his partners named the project "Cape Marco." As the Antaramian development team started developing Cape Marco, Collier County was undergoing growth management legislation and the CCCL (Coastal Construction Control Line) was being moved landward by the State of Florida, which affects where and what you can build on the beach. In addition, they had to trade property across the street to build beach access parking, part of which was open to the public and another part reserved for MICA (Marco Island Civic Association). The north shoreline of Caxambas Pass on Marco Island was eventually built-out with condominiums.



Caxambas Pass.





Aerial of the future Cape Marco site in 1989.



Cape Marco in 1995 prior to construction.



Mosquito Control DC-3 planes over Marco Island.

Top photo courtesy of Collier County Mosquito Control (1976). Bottom photo courtesy of Philip Burden, visiting from London when he took the shot from Shipps Landing (1981).

Author and pilot Todd Turrell flew the above routes in the 1980s. Todd notes that Philip's photo was taken as the DC-3 passed over Caxambas Pass just when the plane's insecticide "fog" was activated. "We turned the fog off while reversing course 180 degrees over Cape Romano to the south, then turned it back on over Caxambas Pass for another run up the length of Marco Island to the north."

CONDOMINIUMS ON THE NORTH SIDE OF CAXAMBAS PASS



January 2024 aerial of Cape Marco featuring condominiums on the north side of Caxambas Pass.

Plantation Condominium Association

Plantation Condominium Association (also referred to as “Plantation Condos”) was built in 1991 and is located at 1000 South Collier Blvd on the north shore of Caxambas Pass. Amenities include a heated pool, sauna, hot tub, fitness center, fishing pier, picnic area and tennis courts.



Plantation Condominium Association – May 2024.



The Surfside Club

The Surfside Club (built 1979) is located at 1012 South Collier Blvd on Caxambas Pass. Surfside Club Condominiums offers its visitors the comfort of a private pool, spa, boat dock and grill area.



The Surfside Club – January 2024.



Dela Park Place

Dela Park Place (built 1997) is a condominium on Caxambas Pass located at 1020 South Collier Blvd. It features 53 condo units on eight floors. Each unit has its own private balcony. The guest amenities include a large heated pool that overlooks the gulf, a fitness room, tennis courts and a fishing dock.



Dela Park Place (8-story building) – May 2024.



Caxambas Tower

Caxambas Tower Condominium (built 1979) is located at 1036 South Collier Blvd. It has 43 units distributed on nine floors. This waterfront condominium on Caxambas Pass offers amenities including a pool, spa area, exercise room, community room, fishing pier, library, tennis courts and covered parking.

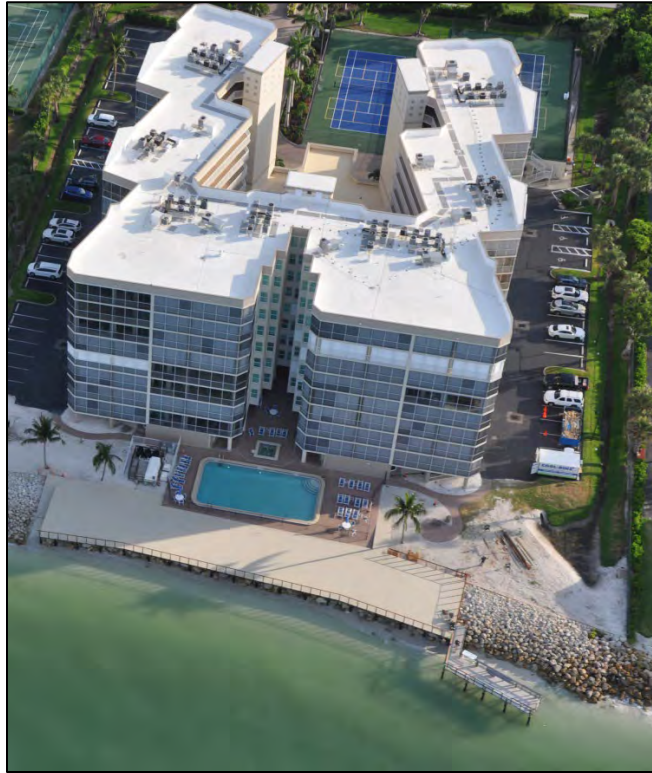


Caxambas Tower– January 2024.



Mirage on the Gulf

Built in 2001, Mirage on the Gulf is located on 1070 South Collier Blvd, overlooking Caxambas Pass. Mirage on the Gulf is home to 59 gulf-front condos and penthouses. Its amenities include a heated pool, spa, tennis courts, fitness center and a new waterfront deck for fishing in the pass and enjoying the waterfront.



Mirage on the Gulf – May 2024.



Shipp's Landing

Shipp's Landing (built 1979-1981) is a unique waterfront community. It is located at 1090 S. Collier Blvd, on the southeast corner of the main island. Its condominium community has 206 residential units distributed in 5 buildings on a 15-acre property. It has a beautiful private beach and a newly renovated marina.



Shipp's Landing on Caxambas Pass – 2024.



CAPE MARCO DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

In exploring the development history of Cape Marco, it is essential to include information about Jack Antaramian, the driving force behind the development.

Jack's development history on Marco was almost always water related. The island's waterways are all tidally connected to the Gulf and one of these areas in central Marco is Smokehouse Bay. This is where his first Marco Island waterfront project, Dockside, was located and where future



Dockside, Marco Island, Florida.

projects would take place. Dockside Condominiums were built around 1984. There are two buildings with 28 units in total, all of them located on Smokehouse Bay, with a dock that runs along the length of the property. Condominium units are on the second, third and fourth floor, with parking below. The units were sold at the time originally for under \$100,000.

Marco was a bit wild in the 1970s and early 1980s. Drug smuggling was common practice in the area since the nearby Everglades and Ten Thousand Islands made a perfect place to deliver marijuana bales, also known as "square grouper." These were brought in from mother ships offshore on shallow draft fishing boats, which law enforcement had a hard time catching in the mangrove creeks and shallow bays. The practice became so common and profitable that many locals became involved. In 1983, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and local Sheriff's Department closed off the only road to Everglades City and raided the city from the land and sea, arresting many of the working age men on charges of conspiracy to smuggle drugs.

In 1985, Antaramian built an office building for Marco Beach Realty, the largest real estate brokerage on Marco in those days, which was owned and operated by Jack and his partners. This incorporated a real estate entity into his business that became the leading force in transactions involving vacant lots and single-family homes on Marco, as well as selling units in his various development projects.

In 1987, another project along Smokehouse Bay was built by Antaramian: Smokehouse Harbor. This project was slightly larger than Dockside with 62 units and over 500 feet of dock space along the seawall. This was not enough for every unit owner to have a dock, but Deltona had placed a deed restriction on certain areas within Marco, which only allowed docks next to the seawall; no piers were allowed to extend into the bay.



Smokehouse Harbor, Marco Island, Florida.

Next came Eagle Cay, a waterfront condominium built in 1988 with 126 units and 32 boat slips. The units were organized in several low and mid-rise buildings together with a pool and tennis courts.

Marco Island features one of the best beaches in Florida and the community works to maintain them by means of periodic beach renourishment projects, which involve dredges pumping extra sand in from offshore or trucks bringing it in from quarries. This adds to the amount of sand on the beach, making it wider and more resistant to storm erosion and hurricanes. Breakwaters were constructed at the south end in front of Cape Marco to stop sand from washing into Caxambas Pass. All these efforts resulted in a lovely beach from north to south. Taking advantage of this, Antaramian built the Somerset condominium along the beach in 1990.

Somerset is located towards the southern end of the island and features a 10-story building with 122 units, two swimming pools, tennis courts and parking garages. A couple of years later, another, much larger beachfront development, Cape Marco, was built.



Somerset in relation to Cape Marco on the beach.

When Jack Antaramian bought the Cape Marco property from Marathon Oil in the 1980s, he had to take care of the remains of the old U.S. Air Force missile tracking facility (see origin story on pages 21-22). First, Antaramian had to tear down the old buildings and clean up contaminated soil from an old fuel tank. This made everyone nervous, because burning off the oil that had soaked into the dirt could cause quite a scene on the island. Then luck intervened because a beach nourishment project was underway at the same time, and the offshore dredge for it created such a big smoke plume that the oil burning operation went unnoticed.

Jack successfully built the first buildings at Cape Marco. He also built the Cape Marco clubhouse, which includes a spa, exercise and entertainment rooms and a tennis club. During that time, his long-time business partner, David Nassif, passed away and dealings with the estate resulted in the sale of the remaining Cape Marco property that allowed for two more buildings. WCI Communities bought the land and proceeded to complete the project with development of Belize in 2004 and Veracruz in 2005.



Cape Marco - Marco Island, Florida – 2012.

Cape Marco Condominiums



Merida at Cape Marco - 1990s.



Merida at Cape Marco - January 23, 2024.



Tampico at Cape Marco.





Monterrey during construction.



Monterrey completed.



Cozumel under construction.



Cozumel completed by Antaramian.



Belize developed by WCI.



Veracruz developed by WCI.



Marco Island map by Island Map Publishing, showing Caxambas Pass on south end.

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