

History of New Smyrna Beach

New Smyrna Beach occupies a notable place in history as the site of the largest single attempt at colonial settlement in what is now the United States. Dr. Andrew Turnbull, a Scottish physician and entrepreneur, obtained a grant of land from the British Crown. In 1768 he established a colony of 1225 immigrants on the coastal plantations at New Smyrna, with a view toward the commercial production of such crops as corn, indigo, rice, hemp, and cotton.

The land that the Turnbull colonists settled is located along the west bank of the Indian River, opposite one of coastal east Florida's relatively few inlets.

For some 10,000 years before the arrival of the Europeans, Native Americans inhabited the area, initially on a nomadic basis and later in more sedentary camps and villages. Until the early twentieth century, the coastline was strewn with mounds of ancient refuse that testified to the presence of the Indians. Most of the mounds were destroyed, the shell used for roads and building construction material. However, much evidence of prehistoric habitation remains hidden under ground and water within the corporate limits of New Smyrna Beach and beyond.

The first European visitation to the New Smyrna Beach area was made during the First Spanish Colonial Period (1565-1763). Located on the fringe of the primary Spanish settlement at St. Augustine, New Smyrna was visited by missionaries sent to convert the indigenous Indian population to the Catholic faith. Toward the end of that period, the Spanish Crown conceded a number of land grants in the area.

Turnbull's colonial experiment, launched just after the British acquired East Florida in 1764, endured until 1777, when the colonists, plagued by disease and dissension, quit the place and fled to St. Augustine. Their physical legacy remains in the form of stone ruins and subsurface artifacts.

Some measure of settlement persisted after the departure of the disaffected colonists, despite the menacing presence of hostile Indians and occasional mercenaries of various stripe. The Spanish reclaimed East Florida from the British in 1784, but encountered difficulty in securing control over the vast and essentially unpopulated land. The United States acquired the colony from Spain in 1819 and established the Territory of Florida in 1821.

During the following two decades the New Smyrna area hosted several large plantations, which concentrated primarily on the production of sugar. All gains made toward settlement here, however, were lost during the first year of the Second Seminole War (1835-1842), when many of the plantations were attacked and destroyed by Indian raiding parties. A measure of order was reestablished when the United States Army set up a military base at New Smyrna in 1837, but few settlers returned to the area.

Resettlement began in earnest after the Civil War. In 1887, with a population of 150, the Town of New Smyrna was incorporated. The arrival of Henry



Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway in 1892 spurred development of the area's economy, which was based on the tourism, citrus, and commercial fishing industries.

The town counted 543 inhabitants at the turn of the century and proceeded to grow fourfold in the next two decades, reaching a population of 2,492 in 1920. The principal areas of business and residential development lay along Canal Street and Faulkner Street. Residential development during that period of expansion occurred mainly in the blocks surrounding the intersections of Washington Street and Orange Street and about two blocks inland from the river between Lytle Avenue and Clinch Street.

New Smyrna Beach, like most other Florida communities, experienced a period of intensive speculative development during the Florida land boom of the mid-1920s. During the boom a significant collection of buildings was constructed in the area extending from Louise Avenue, eight blocks north of Canal Street, southward to Sixth Street. After the collapse of the land boom in 1926, the State of Florida fell into a protracted economic depression. Development slowed to a virtual halt in New Smyrna Beach during the Great Depression years of the 1930s and did not recover to its boom-time levels until after World War II.

There may be about 800 buildings in New Smyrna Beach that remain from the historic period. They include buildings on the mainland, west of the Intracoastal Waterway, and on the peninsula, the former community of Coronado Beach, which was incorporated into the City of New Smyrna Beach in 1947.

Few historic buildings in the city date from the late nineteenth century. The majority were constructed between 1900 and 1930. Most of the historic buildings in the city exhibit vernacular designs. Bungalow, Colonial Revival, and Mediterranean Revival were the most common of the high architectural styles applied to residential buildings in New Smyrna Beach during the historic period. Most historic commercial buildings reflect the masonry vernacular designs commonly found throughout the United States in the early twentieth century.