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## SARASOTA HISTORY

(From [www.sarasotagov.com](http://www.sarasotagov.com))

Some question seems to exist as to a definite origin of the name “Sarasota”. Legend connects it with Sara, reputedly the daughter of the conquistador, DeSoto. Some have wondered if the name may have originated with an Indian word “sara-se-cota”, meaning a landfall easily observed. Maps in the 1700’s showed the area as “Porte Sarasote” and “Sarazota”. It is also said a fishing camp and Indian trading post at the end of Longboat Key was called “Saraxota”.

Use of the name “Sarasota” appears on the first complete maps of Florida printed by the government in 1839, 18 years after the Floridas passed to the United States following ownership by both the Spanish and the British. Long before the name came into question, Indians had discovered the lush area and knew the bounty of the abundant wild fruits and game in the vicinity. Fishermen and traders were not infrequent visitors to the area. Clashes between the whites and Indians in Florida eventually led to the ruinous seven-year Seminole War. It was at the conclusion of the hostilities that Congress adopted the Armed Occupation Act – deeding 160 acres and six months provisions to any person who agreed to carry arms and protect the land for five years. Additional land was available at \$1.25 per acre.

The first permanent white settler in the Sarasota area was [William H. Whitaker](#), who was deeded 144.81 acres on September 1, 1851, on Sarasota Bay. Mr. Whitaker, for whom the Whitaker Bayou is named, built his log cabin at “Yellow Bluffs”, so named because of its outcroppings of yellow limestone. The Whitaker cabin was burned to the ground by Seminole raiders in 1865. During the Civil War, raids made life too hazardous and the Whitakers moved northward to Manatee where they stayed until the war ended. The decade and a half between 1868 and 1883, resulted in the initial “large scale” discovery by outsiders of the richness of the Sarasota area. Acreage was cleared by early settlers, orange groves and gardens planted, and herds of cattle joined the Whitaker herd on the rich grazing plains.



John Webb moved to the area during this period and opened the first “manufacturing plant” to refine sugar and to produce syrup. Webb also built the first Winter resort with individual guest cottages – advertised in northern newspapers as a special paradise – Webb’s Winter Resort on Little Sarasota Bay. (Today’s **Historic Spanish Point.**) A small community grew up in Webb’s neighborhood and in 1884, he applied



for a post office. The community was named Osprey in accordance with his wishes. The Jesse Knight family settled further down the bay in the area that eventually became the sister communities of Venice and Nokomis. **Isaac A. Redd**, who had lived in the area in 1857 prior to the war, returned 10 years later to become the founder of Bee Ridge. In 1876, Redd led a movement to establish a missionary Baptist church, which became the first church built in what was to become Sarasota County.

Early in the 1870’s, a community began to take shape on the mainland between Hudson Bayou and Phillippi Creek. A post office was established in 1878, and operated under the community named “Sara Sota”. It was in this new community that Miss Caroline Abbe established the first school with an initial enrollment of a dozen students, all taught in private homes prior to a school building being built. In the late 1870’s, the orange industry began to attract attention and the citrus industry established a community called “Fruitville”, with Charles L. Reeves as the first homesteading settler in 1876. The Swamp Land Act, through a loophole, reduced drastically the effectiveness of the Homestead Act and practically halted the influx of settlers. By the end of 1883, nearly 700,000 acres had been deeded to land speculators for as little as 25 cents an acre. But with the halt of the rugged pioneers, a new type of colonization was attempted. The Florida Mortgage and Investment Company of Edinburgh purchased 60,000 acres and selected Sara Sota as the key point for its development. Scottish colonists arrived in December of 1885, but sorrow and hardships left them disenchanted with their new land. In 1886, the colony had dwindled to only three families, plus a few individuals.



In that same year, John W. Gillespie arrived, and his company, Florida Mortgage and Investment Co., Ltd., would make an attempt to revive the colony. Steamship connections were established with Tampa. Mr. Gillespie built the De Soto Hotel, and he laid out what was perhaps the first practice golf course in America.

Fishing as an industry began to flourish. Channels were dredged in a move to improve water commerce and shipping. The Spanish-American War in 1898 added to the prosperity, as cattlemen drove herds to slaughter to supply meat for the hungry soldiers.

Sarasota got its first newspaper in 1899. In November of that same year, telephone service arrived. A line from Manatee to Sarasota was installed by the Gulf Coast Telephone Company. A year later the line was extended to Fruitville and then Myakka.

The Seaboard Railroad extended its line from Tampa to Sarasota at least five years earlier than it had planned, motivated by the news that Ralph Caples, a well-known railroad entrepreneur, indicated that he planned to build the line himself following his honeymoon vacation to Sarasota in 1899.

Sarasota was incorporated as a town on October 14, 1902, and Mr. Gillespie served as the Town's first Mayor. He was subsequently elected to five additional one year terms. In addition to the railroad connection, the town boasted a yacht club, a new school, and ice plant, a cemetery, theater, municipal water works, electric plant, a second newspaper, and a sanitarium opened by John Halton in 1908.



Sarasota Key was changed to Siesta Key in 1907, but it wasn't until 10 years later that the new Siesta Bridge opened up the island to any significant development.

Mrs. Potter Palmer and her family visited Sarasota in 1910. They liked the location so much; they decided to purchase some 80,000 acres in the area which was at that time part of south Manatee County. She established her cattle ranch called "Meadow Sweet Pastures" after building her home named "The Oaks" on the old Webb property on Little Sarasota Bay in Osprey.

**John and Charles Ringling**, of the famous circus family, invested in Sarasota property two years later, just a year before Sarasota was incorporated as a city on May 13, 1913.

Tourists were now coming in a steady stream. This new influx of tourism, and the extensive Palmer and Ringling investments, stirred new interests among the residents and thus began the drive to separate from Manatee County and establish a distinct identity as a whole new county. Sarasota County was established in 1923, through a special act of the State Legislature. The City of Sarasota was then designated as

the county seat in an election held November 18, 1924.

When the Florida land boom ended, Sarasota had three large modern hotels, a high class business district, scores of apartment houses, hundreds of fine new homes, 77 miles of paved streets, a municipal golf course, a hospital, a good school system, bridges running from the keys to the mainland, and improved rail and boat transportation systems.

In the tough years of the Great Depression, Sarasota received its first Works Progress Administration (WPA) project in 1935, which funded a drainage project for the city golf course. Two years later, in 1937, came the an even more valuable WPA project – development of Bayfront Park and construction of the Municipal Auditorium, and later, the Lido Beach Casino was opened.

Work on the Manatee-Sarasota Airport was started in 1938. The airport became a military airfield during World War II, with 3,000 servicemen stationed there. The end of the war served to open the area even

further through an ever expanding tourism industry.

Spectacular growth during the “Stunning Sixties” carried through well into the seventies. The recession in the late '70s resulted in tough times for some area businesses. Sarasota’s Downtown was hit hardest with many of the existing stores closing their doors. However, in the late '80s and especially the early '90s the economy shifted and the Downtown began to prosper again. Sarasota now boasts one the finest downtowns in the State of Florida.

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## The Tatum Rawls House

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by **Missy Brewer**, who gratefully acknowledges Spessard Stone's contribution of data on the

*life of Laura Fredonia Redd.*

The c.1889 Tatum-Rawls House at Crowley is one of the oldest examples of pioneer Florida architecture still standing in Sarasota County. The building is a record of southwest Florida's rural history. The Center's volunteers have helped restore the house so that it may interpret history for future generations. Donations of period artifacts will make the house a home – typical of the period and region – once again.

Laura Fredonia Redd, born July 10, 1859, grew up on the expanding American frontier in Florida. She was the daughter of Elizabeth Redd, nee Elizabeth Brown and Isaac Alderman Redd, the first Baptist minister who settled in the area in 1867 and gave Bee Ridge its name. In marriage, the daughter became Laura Rawls, the wife of Sebern C. Rawls and the mother of five children. By her early twenties, she was a widow. In 1889, Laura moved into her new home built by her two children, Hilton and Charlie Rawls and her second husband, William Harvey Tatum, and the family enlarged the house in 1892.

The Tatum family had migrated to the area from Tatum, S.C. after the Civil War, some settling in what became Tatum Ridge. William H. Tatum, the son of one of these settlers, and Laura eventually had eight children together. After William's death, Laura remarried taking Harvey Tatum, the builder of the Tatum house, as her second husband. He was born in 1863 and died of a stroke in 1924 at age 61. Laura lived in the house until 1945 when she then lived with her youngest daughter, Clara on Laurel Street in Sarasota until her own death on February 27, 1950 at age 92.

Rebecca Tatum Hull, daughter of Harve and Laura Tatum, was a friend and neighbor of Jasper Crowley who donated the land now known as the Crowley so it is fitting that the house in which she was born is now restored and situated on the Museum grounds where Mr. Crowley spent so much time and effort to construct a display of the early settlers' way of life. When Crowley acquired it, the house had been empty for nearly four decades and demolition was imminent. In 1996, a caravan hauled pieces of the building – roof, porches, house – from its original site near Proctor Road at 3 a.m. along quiet streets to a site at the Center which nearly duplicates its original setting among pine trees. Five years and \$100,000 later, the Tatum-Rawls House was restored by volunteers and donors and with grant assistance.

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Tucked away in the historic community of Bee Ridge there remains a simple wooden home that provides a link to Sarasota's early rural history. Built circa 1890 by William Harvey Tatum, son-in-law of Bee Ridge's first settler, the home is typical of turn-of-the

The Tatum house still rests on its original wood foundation piers, and shows evidence of its original roof. Several windows on each wall allow for cross ventilation and large porches provide comfortable outdoor living spaces during the summer.

The community of Bee Ridge is located between Bee Ridge and Clark roads, Phillippi Creek on the west and Cowpen Slough on the east. It was named Bee Ridge because of the high, inland, sandy ridges and marshes present there, and the large number of bee swarms.

The Bee Ridge community's first settler was **Isaac, Alderman Redd**, who came to Sarasota during the Third Seminole War, 1856-57 and returned permanently with his family in 1867. The Redd family lived in a number of places, but by October 3, 1877, the state of Florida sold Elinor E. Redd 41 acres for \$1 an acre. This property on Bliss Road is now part of Emerald Gardens subdivision.

Isaac Redd's daughter Laura Fedonia Redd Rawls married her second husband, William Harvey Tatum, in 1885. They settled north of Proctor Road, near today's Lakeview Elementary School. It was there that William Harvey Tatum built the rural homestead where they raised her five children, and eight of their own.

Homes like the Tatum house have been gaining attention in the popular press as some architects and builders have begun to look toward historical precedents for new designs. Popularly called "Florida Cracker" by some, it refers to the simple architecture found on farms and in rural communities still scattered throughout Florida.

For information on the Bee Ridge community and a map that indicates the location of historic landmarks there, visit the Bee Ridge marker erected by the Sarasota County Historical Commission in 1991. It is on the property of the Bee Ridge Presbyterian Church at Proctor and McIntosh Roads.

Special Thanks to Lorrie Muldowney, County Historic Preservation Specialist, Sarasota County History Center for her research and time devoted to writing this article.

E. T. Lastinger

First <sup>ONE</sup> Hundred Years in  
the life of Friendship Baptist

Through the years, the membership has been ever mindful of the true meaning of its name, constantly striving, with the help of God, to live up to all that is implied in that warm and concern-for-others word, FRIENDSHIP.

### Early Pastors

E. J. Hull was called to become Friendship's first pastor, serving during the years 1875 and 1876. It was customary in the churches of that period to have circuit-riding preachers, churches having services on only one weekend in each month. No records were found indicating that E. J. Hull was ever a resident of the Fruitville area, and it is assumed that he was one of the visiting, circuit-riding preachers.

In 1877 I. A. Redd became Friendship's pastor, serving in that capacity until 1891. He had been a moving force in the church from its beginning, not only in establishing Friendship but in expanding the Baptist cause throughout Southwest Florida. He remained an active member of Friendship until his death in 1912. He also served other churches, among them Benevolence (Gillette) Church from 1880 to 1882.

Pastor Redd who was born in Russell County, Alabama in 1835 first came to this area in 1857. He worked for Bill Whitaker, Sarasota County's first settler, helping him with his cattle. After a move to Tallahassee, where he married Elizabeth Brown, and a period of service in the Civil War, he returned to the Sarasota area in 1867. He settled in Bee Ridge, founding that community and giving the early settlement its name. His wife, affectionately known as Grandma Redd, remained an active member of Friendship until her death in 1933 at the age of 102.

### A Baptizing Church

In its first year Friendship's associational letter reported a total of 35 members, all having come into the church in 1875, - 28 of them by baptism, seven by letter.

The 1876 letter reported that 10 more had come into the church, - eight by baptism, - bringing the membership total to 45.

Truly this was evidence of missionary effort, beginning at home, for this would mean that during the first two years the

**BEAN CITY** • *Palm Beach County*

Named for the vegetable grown so prolifically in the surrounding Everglades.

**BEAN'S POINT** • *Manatee County*

Anna Maria Island's first modern-day pioneer, George Emerson Bean, claimed the island's entire north point as homestead land in May 1895. In 1913, Bean's son, George W., founded the Anna Maria Development Company, which opened the island to seasonal visitors and year-round homeowners.

**BEAR CREEK** • *Gadsden County*

Likely named because of bears in this vicinity.

**BEARDALL** • *Seminole County*

A loading station named for a family who settled here in 1886.

**BEAR HEAD** • *Walton County*

Refers to a nearby swamp or hammock in which bears were abundant.

**BEAUTIFUL NEW RIVER** • *Broward County*

There is a Seminole Indian legend that Beautiful New River appeared suddenly one night. This is where, according to Bill Raymond, marine geologist, the river originally raced its course through tropical jungle and pine forest. The Indians called the river Himmarshee, the New Water, which later residents called New River.

**BEE RIDGE** • *Sarasota County*

A Baptist preacher named **Isaac Redd** came this way and settled here. The story goes that "most every hollow tree had a bee hive." Because of this and the ridge terrain, the Rev. Mr. Redd named it Bee Ridge.

**BELL AIR (OR BELLAIR)** • *Leon County*

Just two miles south of Tallahassee, it was in the mid-1800s a place of nearby refuge from the summer heat of the capital for well-to-do families.

**BELL** • *Gilchrist County*

Incorporated in 1903, shortly after a branch of the Seaboard Air Line Railroad had been built through. The name was selected by means of a beauty contest, in which the winner's name was to be given to the new station and post office. The one who received the most votes for queen was Bell Fletcher, the daughter of Daniel E. Fletcher, a native of Florida and a successful farmer of Alachua County. Bell later married G. W. Everett and lived in the Bell community until her death in 1919.

**BELLAMY** • *Alachua County*

Believed to have been named for John Bellamy, of South Carolina, who was contractor for the St. Johns–Ochlockonee rivers segment of the Territorial Road from Pensacola to St. Augustine. The Bellamy Road, as it was known, was used until the beginning of the Civil War. Bellamy, who accepted land when the Florida government ran out of money, also built a plantation home in a grove of hickory and live oaks near Monticello. The family cemetery remains.

Florida Place Names by Allen Morris

### THE FRIENDSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH

There has been much controversy in Sarasota County as to the oldest church. However, the County Historical Commission has recently accepted a copy of the proceedings of the Annual Session (9) of the South Florida Baptist Association, held in Hernando County, October 16-18, 1875, predating all other data in their archives. The document states that the Friendship Baptist Church, after being found orthodox, was received into the South Florida Baptist Association in October 1875, with 35 members. Delegates to the Session from the Friendship Church (then in Manatee, but now in Sarasota County) were J. A. Redd and G. T. Tatum. The pastor was listed as J. A. Redd. The J. A. Redd is considered to be Isaac A. Redd, as there is no J. A. Redd in the early history, and Isaac was one of the early settlers who, in the early seventies, conducted services in the homes of pioneers and later in a building in Bee Ridge, which he helped to build.

In 1887 the church acquired the present Palmer Avenue property in Fruitville from Scottish colonists. The original deed, notarized in Edinburgh and stamped with crown seal, is still in the possession of the church. The building was constructed that same year by C. L. Reave, John Tatum, Stephen Goins, and Jesse, Frank and Emmett Tucker. They were assisted by Isaac Redd, its first pastor. He and his wife are buried in the Church Cemetery. Firmly embedded in the old oak trees are the hitching rings where churchgoers tied up their oxen and horses while inside for services and prayer.

Major additions have been made to the building, and the congregation now numbers approximately 400; but it is still a family church with many of the descendants of the original members attending.

## THE PIONEER CHURCHES OF FLORIDA

*Published for*  
 The Daughters of the American Revolution

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# Here & Now

Vol. 8

An update for Florida Baptist Historical Society Board of Directors and Friends

No. 5

May, 2016



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Penny Baumgardner  
Administrative Assistant

Dear Board Members and Friends of the Florida Baptist Historical Society,

Research can take you on a fascinating journey, you might even call it a treasure hunt. One avenue of research can take you off onto many other avenues, and the wonderful stories and events you find are truly amazing. Having been born and raised in Florida has given me a desire to learn about Florida history. Having a grandfather that served as a Florida Baptist minister has also given me a love for Florida Baptist history. These two things are just a part of what makes my job so enjoyable. While doing research recently I became curious about the influence Florida Baptists have had in the establishing and naming of Florida places.

In 1845 when Florida became a state, there were 26 counties. The number of cities, towns and villages during that time is uncertain. The State of Florida now has 282 cities, 109 towns, 19 villages, and a total of 410 incorporated municipalities. These are distributed across 67 counties.

There are at least 8 cities and 3 counties from the early beginnings of the state that have documented evidence of Baptists having had an influence in the naming and establishing of Florida places. In alphabetical order they are:



James Madison  
"Boss" Hendry

**Arcadia:** In 1883, James Madison "Boss" Hendry (1839-1922), a Baptist preacher, relocated his sawmill along the Peace River to a landing referred to as "Tater Hill Bluff." During this trip Rev. Hendry stayed overnight at the home of Thomas H. Albritton, a fellow Baptist, at Lily. While visiting the family Hendry mentioned that his birthday was the following day. In celebration Mrs. Albritton and her daughter Arcadia baked a cake for him. Delighted by her kindness Rev. Hendry told Arcadia that he felt certain that one day "Tater Hill Bluff" would develop into a town and that he would try to get it named after her. True to his word the town's name was changed to Arcadia in 1886. Hendry served as pastor of New Hope and helped organize the Manatee Missionary Baptist Association. He also served as pastor at Dry Prairie of Duette, Bethany of Myakka City, Sandy, New Zion and Crewsville.

**Bee Ridge:** Isaac A. Redd (1835-1912) came to Sarasota during the Third Seminole War, 1856-1857, and returned permanently with his family in 1867. The story is told that Rev. Redd made the claim that, "most every hollow tree had a bee hive." With the abundance of bees and the areas ridge terrain, the Rev. Redd is said to have named the town Bee Ridge. In 1876, Redd along with ten area families established Friendship Baptist Church, which became the first church building built in Sarasota County. Redd pastored the church from 1877-1891.



Isaac Redd

**Brevard County** was named in honor of Theodorus W. Brevard, (1804-1877). Brevard was state comptroller from April 3, 1851 to November 27, 1854, and from January 24, 1855, to December 14, 1860. He served as a deacon at First Baptist Church, Tallahassee.

**Chipley:** Originally known as Orange, was renamed in 1882, in honor of Col. William D. Chipley (1840-1897), a railroad official, state senator (1895-1897) and Baptist layman.

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**From:** Ed Johnson <johnsonfarms@embarqmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, May 7, 2018 1:31 PM  
**To:** society2@floridabaptisthistory.org  
**Subject:** RE: I.A. Redd, a former pastor of the Friendship Baptist Church. Sarasota, FL

Ms. Penny,

I deeply appreciate your quick response. The information on Rev. I.A. Redd was very helpful.

Thanks, Ed Johnson

---

**From:** society2@floridabaptisthistory.org [mailto:society2@floridabaptisthistory.org]  
**Sent:** Monday, May 07, 2018 12:50 PM  
**To:** 'Ed Johnson'  
**Subject:** RE: I.A. Redd, a former pastor of the Friendship Baptist Church. Sarasota, FL

Mr. Johnson,

**Isaac Alderman Redd** is credited with naming the town of Bee Ridge, Florida. *Florida Place Names*, by Allen Morris, p. 23, says 'the story goes that "most every hollow tree had a bee hive."' Because of this and the ridge terrain, the Rev Mr. Redd named it Bee Ridge.

The bio from our website reads: I. A. Redd (1835-1912) was born in Russell County, Alabama. He went to the Sarasota area in 1857. He worked for Bill Whitaker, Sarasota County's first settler. He moved to Tallahassee and married Elizabeth Brown. He served in the Civil War and then moved back to the Sarasota area in 1867. He settled in and funded the Bee Ridge community. Elizabeth lived to be 102, and died in 1933. Redd worked to expand the Baptist cause in Southwest Florida. He served as pastor of Friendship in Manatee County and Benevolence Church (1880-1882) in Gillette. He was a member of Friendship Baptist Church in Peace River Association at the time of his death in 1912. Secondary Source: *Peace River Association Minutes*, 1912, p. 38. Eula Tucker Lastinger. *The First One Hundred Years in the Life of Friendship Baptist Church (1875-1975)*.

There is also some information to be found on the web under the Tatum Rawls house and Sarasota History.

I hope this is of some help.

Thank you

Penny

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**From:** Ed Johnson <johnsonfarms@embarqmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 3, 2018 2:18 PM  
**To:** [Society2@FloridaBaptistHistory.org](mailto:Society2@FloridaBaptistHistory.org)  
**Subject:** I.A. Redd, a former pastor of the Friendship Baptist Church. Sarasota, FL

I am doing some historical family research on my great uncle, Jesse D. Johnson. He was married by I.A. Redd, a former pastor of the Friendship Baptist Church in Sarasota, FL. Do you have any information that you can share on I.A. Redd?

Thanks, Ed Johnson