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The True Meaning of Palma Ceia

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PALMA CEIA POOL IN ITS HEYDAY

The Palma Ceia Pool near present-day Garden Club Center on Bayshore Boulevard was a popular swimming hole for many years the early part of this century. This photo was made in July, 1926. The pool was spring fed, but reportedly health authorities felt it was inadequate source and eventually closed the pool.

-Photo from HAMPTON DUNN COLLECTION

THE TRUE MEANING OF PALMA CEIA

By DR. EUSTASIO FERNANDEZ

Chairman

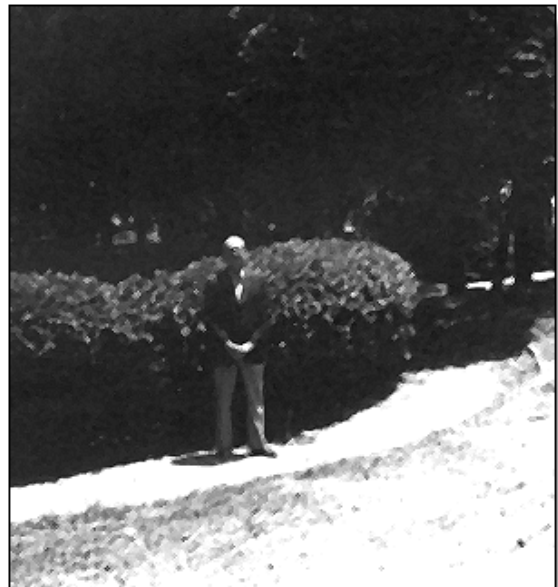
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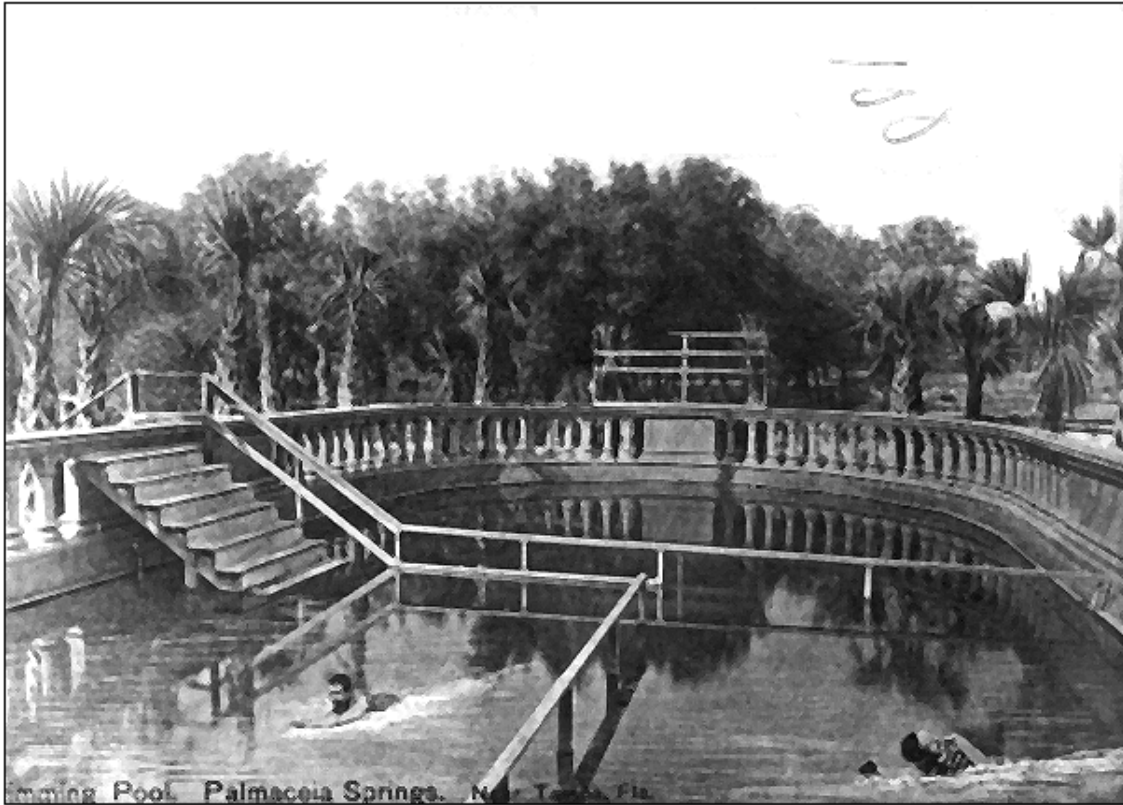
For many years the meaning of the place named "Palma Ceia" has been a puzzle to native Tampan. The influx of new people to the area has made the problem once again acute.

In the past there have been many divergent solutions suggested to Tampa's long-standing puzzle. Yet the correct answer has never been offered. With this article, the matter, I believe, is finally settled.

The meaning of Palma Ceia should be considered in conjunction with the meaning of Terra Ceia, Terra Ceia Bay and Terra Ceia Point, all located on the southern side of Tampa Bay near its meeting with the Gulf. There is also a small town on State Road 683, north of Ellenton, called Terra Ceia Junction. Years ago, in 1912, there was an East Terra Ceia, but this name was



PALMA CEIA SPRING TODAY
... Dr. Eustasio Fernandez



ANOTHER VIEW OF THE PALMA CEIA POOL

-Photo from HAMPTON DUNN COLLECTION

swallowed up by the community of Rubonia.

A HYBRID TERM

In recent years, in the western outskirts of Tampa the place name "Bay Ceia" was coined by someone who borrowed the Ceia from Palma Ceia and produced a hybrid: half English and half Portuguese. Since the term was coined from two languages, it has no meaning or translation. It has though, a pleasant phonetic sound.

The Tampa subdivision known as Palma Ceia was developed around World War I by the Tampa Bay Land Company headed by James F. Taylor and his associate, Earle G. Moore. The name was borrowed from Palma

Ceia Spring, which is located on the north side of Bayshore Boulevard at the corner of West Rubideaux Avenue, next to the Tampa Garden Center Building. From my early childhood years, I remember that at the spring site there was a poured-concrete swimming pool which received the fresh, clear-flowing water. It was the favorite swimming spot for the youth of the area.

FRED BALL PARK

After World War II, a half-acre mini-park was put together out of the spring area with concrete picnic tables and a large barbecue pit. The County Commissioners named it Fred Ball Park in honor of a commissioner of the time.

Today the spring lies abandoned to its past. On the east side of a concrete wall retaining the spring water is an old stone with chiseled-out, faded writing. It reads: Palma Ceia Spring, 1906.

In the past, all the translations of Palma Ceia that I have known were based on the assumption that the two words were Spanish because "Palma" is a Spanish word. "Palma" is, however, also a Portuguese word. The term is identical in both languages and has the same meaning- "palm." The word is derived from the Latin "palma," so named because the tree's spreading fronds look like the open palm and fingers of the hand. "Ceia," however, is a Portuguese word that is not found in Spanish.

OF SPANISH ORIGIN

In the place name "Terra Ceia," both words are Portuguese. "Terra," which is derived from the Latin "terra," is "tierra" in Spanish, meaning "land." It should be kept in mind that in these two-word place names, the second element (Ceia) is used as an adjective, whereas the first element (Palma or Terra) is considered a noun. It is the reverse in English, where the adjective precedes the noun. Thus, the Portuguese words "Casa Branca," for example, (literally "house white" in the Portuguese word order) translate into English as "White House."

In Palma Ceia, since Ceia, along with Palma, was assumed to be of Spanish origin and since there was no such Spanish word, it was further assumed that Ceia was the corrupted spelling of a Spanish word by English-speaking people. Consequently, ever since the subdivision was built, there have been many erroneous theories offered as to the meaning of Palma Ceia. The problem was not with Palma; it was the Ceia that had everyone stumped.

"HEAVENLY PALM"

As early as the period of the Florida land boom of the 1920s, the first translation of Palma Ceia was recorded as "heavenly palm." It was thought that Ceia came from the Spanish "cielo," which means "heaven" or "sky." This translation became very popular, being for years the accepted meaning. In 1939, the Federal Writers' Project in their "Guide to Florida" stated that Terra Ceia stood for the Spanish phrase "heavenly land."

Some national and Florida dictionaries of America place names and doctoral dissertation on Florida place names at the University of Florida contain the erroneous translation of Palma Ceia as "heavenly palm."

ERRONEOUS EXPLANATION

Another erroneous explanation offered later was that Palma Ceia came from the Spanish "Palma Ceja," with "Ceja" meaning "eyebrow" or the "brow of a hill." Thus arose the translation of "palm ridge." The American Place Names: A Concise and Selective Dictionary for the Continental U.S.A., G. R. Stewart, 1970, states the following: "Terra Ceia: Florida. Probably for Spanish 'Tierra Ceja', which could be taken to mean 'land-summit'."

In recent years, in yet another erroneous translation, Palma Ceia was taken to mean in Spanish "palmacilla," or "little palm." There was also the opinion that Palma Ceia was the corruption of the botanical name for the cabbage palm of Florida. Thus, Palma Ceia came from "Palaceae." Finally, there has been the translation of Palma Ceia as "palm by the seashore," Ceia meaning "by the shore" in Spanish.

According to the Spanish encyclopedia *Espasa Calpe* and world maps, there are several place names in Portugal and in Brazil using the words "Seia" or "Ceia," a spelling variant because of the confusion of the two sibilants "c" and "s". In Brazil there is also a derivative of the word "Seia" which is "Seiada," meaning "a series of hollows," "caves" or "deep recesses in a mountain."

The root word "Seio," however, furnishes us with the meaning of the place names "Seia" and "Ceia" of Portuguese origin. "Seio" means "bay of the sea"; it could also be interpreted as "concave opening" or "loop."

There is a second Portuguese word "Ceia" which means supper, such as "ceia-do senhor," meaning "the Lord's Supper." This word, however, comes from the Portuguese verb "cear," meaning "to dine," "to have supper."

In view of the foregoing linguistic investigation, it is clear that Palma Ceia means "bay palm" in English, like the idea behind Bay Pines (Pinellas County). Terra Ceia translates as "bay land," similar to the fused place name "Lakeland" in central Florida.