

6-1-1982

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Tampa Morning Tribune

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Recommended Citation

Tampa Morning Tribune (1982) "Prosperous Palmetto," *Tampa Bay History*. Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol4/iss1/8>

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PROSPEROUS PALMETTO

Editors Note: In the spring of 1897, the Tampa *Morning Tribune* offered readers vignettes of small town life on the west coast of Florida. Reporters were sent to write stories dealing with then such villages as Clearwater, Ozona and Fort Meade. This article, which highlights Palmetto, was featured in the July 27, 1897 issue of the *Morning Tribune*.

The beautiful and progressive little city of Palmetto, situated on the north bank of the Manatee river, which is one mile wide at this point, just across the river from Braidenton, is the most enterprising and rapidly growing city in the famous Manatee country. The town has long since been laid off into beautiful business and residence lots, streets, avenues, alleys and parks; and liberal donations of beautiful sites have been made to the various churches and schools of that vicinity.

The town is incorporated and has a live, progressive and public-spirited set of city officials, who claim a bonafide population of 600 or 700 inhabitants, all of whom are most desirable citizens.

The city officials are: Mayor, R. F. Willis; city clerk, J. W. Jackson; marshal, Joe Terry, who also acts as tax collector and assessor (but the new charter calls for a separate assessor and collector). Town council: J. J. Haley, J. A. Howze, J. K. Parrish, J. D. Richards, J. W. Nettles, H. E. Harlee and Dr. M. B. Harrison.

Under the administration of the above officials the town of Palmetto has already taken its position in the front ranks of the live and more populous towns in Manatee county, and all that it now needs to make it leap ahead of any other town is the county temple of justice.

The Palmetto Academy, erected by the public-spirited citizens of the town and immediate vicinity, is a credit to the county. Between 150 and 260 pupils were in attendance last session and even a much greater attendance is expected the approaching term. Prof. J. E. Hughes, recently of Cedar Keys, is principal of the school, with two or three able assistants. The original cost of the academy was about \$3,000.

The trustees of the school are: M. B. Harrison, M.D., chairman, and S. S. Lamb and J. W. Nettles.

At present only two denominations have houses of worship, to-wit: the Methodists, Rev. Dr. Claridy, pastor; and the Baptists, Rev. R. H. Whitehead, pastor.

Palmetto also boasts of a large and flourishing board of trade, known as the Manatee River Board of Trade, an organization already made famous throughout South Florida for great activity and general usefulness. It is blessed with a set of officers who have the confidence and respect of the commercial world. Its officers are: P. S. Harlee, president; S. S. Lamb, vice-president; F. A. Walpole, secretary and treasurer; H. E. Harlee, W. B. Whitehead, J. K. Parrish, J. H. Kennedy and Jno. W. Jackson, board of governors.



Palmetto Docks at the turn of the century.

Photograph courtesy of the Manatee County Historical Society.

The Gulf Coast Telephone Company will soon lay a cable from Manatee to Palmetto, Ellenton, Terra Ceia and other important points in the Manatee country.

The Palmetto lodge, F. & A.M., No. 110 meets every fourth Monday night in the month at Palmetto. The officers are: Dr. M. B. Harrison, W. M.; P. S. Harlee, S. W.; R. F. Miller, Jr.; J. W. Nettles, secretary.

The new dock, which has recently been built, is 800 feet long; however, it is much shorter and better in every way than the old dock, and is a credit to the enterprise of Mr. J. A. Howze.

Upwards of 200,000 crates of vegetables and 25,000 boxes of oranges were shipped from the Palmetto section of the county last year; this estimate, of course, includes a radius of several miles in and around Palmetto.

The Palmetto *News*, Frank A. Walpole, editor, is one of the brightest papers in this section. The editor is very popular among all classes and is fast building up a large subscription and advertising patronage.

Lying on the fertile banks of the famous Manatee river, about two and a half miles northwest of Palmetto, is the famous Atwood grapefruit grove, which bears the distinction of being the largest one in the world. Mr. Kimball C. Atwood, of New York City, a millionaire, is the owner of 200 acres of as fine hammock land as can be found in the world. He has about 125 acres cleared and set out in choice grapefruit trees, which will soon come into bearing.

The Atwood grove is situated in the midst of the largest and finest body of hammock lands to be found in the state. In fact the town of Palmetto is in the center of some fourteen thousand acres of very fine hammock lands, and large quantities of early vegetables are annually shipped from the several wharves along the banks of the beautiful Manatee river; and the principal feature is the fact that frost never injures the vegetable or fruit crops of this section.

The Manatee Lemon Company [has] a large lemon grove about two and a half miles northwest of Palmetto, which embraces over 200 acres of rich hammock land, all set in fancy budded lemon trees, which will soon come into bearing. The grove is on Terra Ceia Bay, and will ship an immense crop of lemons, oranges, grapefruit and other choice marketable fruits this season.

Beyond a doubt this is the finest vegetable and fruit country in the world. If all the facts and actual possibilities which these 14,000 acres of rich hammock lands are capable of were written in one book, it would read like Arabian Nights' tale - in fact, there is no limit to the possibilities.

There are scores of industrious citizens of Palmetto and vicinity [who] moved into that country only a few years ago very poor, but who now count their wealth by the thousands.

The best hammock lands sell from \$50 to \$250 per acre, and cleared hammock lands rent from \$30 to \$50 per acre per annum.

Among the leading fruit growers of Palmetto and vicinity are: J. I. Pickens, ten-acre grove; J. W. Hendrix owns the Lightfoot grove of twenty acres; J. W. Hendrix, Jr., twenty acres; the Wimbush estate, ten acres; J. W. Nettles, ten acres; Lowery Bros., forty acres; the Wilson estate, ten acres; Mitchell Bros., twenty acres; J. J. Haley, ten acres; R. F. Willis, fifteen acres; J. A. Lamb, ten acres; S. S. Lamb, twenty acres; Mr. L. Engle, ten acres; Mr. McDougal, ten acres; W. H. Harrison, M. O. Harrison, P. S. Harlee, Willis Bros., and others too numerous to mention also own fine groves in this fertile hammock.

Large crops of fruit and vegetables are also shipped from Ellenton and Terra Ceia Island, which are also embraced in this fertile section of Manatee county.

Dr. M. B. Harrison, the leading practicing physician of Palmetto, also conducts a large drug store at that place. Dr. Harrison says that the health of this section will compare favorably with that of any other portion of the globe.

Dr. J. S. Helms, a young physician who moved to Palmetto about one year ago, is building a fine practice.

Palmetto offers a fine opportunity to some enterprising capitalist to build a large tourist hotel. Mr. S. S. Lamb, one of the leading citizens and a large property owner, would make liberal concessions to the right man. Mr. Lamb owns a very pretty thirty-acre tract within the incorporated limits of the town which would make a most desirable hotel site. Mr. Lamb is also one of the oldest and most progressive merchants of Palmetto. He carries a stock valued at some eight or ten thousand dollars, consisting of dry goods, groceries and general merchandise, and does an immense retail and jobbing business. The firm was established in 1878, and is one of the

strongest mercantile firms in Manatee county. Mr. Lamb also owns about 300 acres of fine hammock lands, thirty acres of which have been set out in a beautiful orange grove, most of which is bearing large crops. Mr. J. A. Lamb is engaged in the mercantile business with his father, Mr. S. S. Lamb, who also owns a valuable twelve-acre grove, eleven years old and bearing a fine crop this year.

Mr. M. C. Nettles is the popular and efficient postmaster.

Mr. J. K. Parrish carries a large stock of general merchandise, estimated at \$5,000, which was established in 1885 and does a large and rapidly increasing business. He also owns about fifty acres of fine hammock land, containing an eight-acre orange grove in full bearing.

Mr. M. G. Shofper carries a very pretty stock of drugs, and his wife conducts a millinery business.

W. T. Chapman has a large livery stable and does a lucrative business.

C. E. Haley & Co. carry a full line of fancy and staple groceries. Mr. Haley moved to Palmetto eight years ago, for his health, which he has fully recovered. About a year ago he embarked in the mercantile business and has succeeded in building up a most enviable trade.

Mr. W. B. Whitehead established a general merchandise business about a year ago, and is fast building up a lucrative business.

Mr. John W. Jackson is a live and progressive real estate agent and has done a great deal toward building up the country by inducing desirable settlers to locate there.

Hon. R. E. Willis, the mayor of Palmetto, is also an extensive vegetable and truck farmer. Last year he cultivated about thirty acres, and shipped 3,000 crates of tomatoes, celery, etc.

The Palmetto Grocery Store, S. N. Thomas, proprietor, dealer in dry goods, notions, glassware, crockery, etc. is doing an immense business.

Messrs. W. H. and M. O. Harrison cultivated a thirty-acre truck farm last year, and from sixteen acres they gathered and shipped 4,000 crates of tomatoes alone, which netted over one dollar per crate.

Mr. J. McLean cultivated a nine-acre truck farm about one and a half miles east of town, and shipped 1,500 crates of vegetables, mostly tomatoes.

Many of the truckers will engage in the tobacco culture this year, and the weed promises to soon become a leading industry in and around Palmetto.