

History

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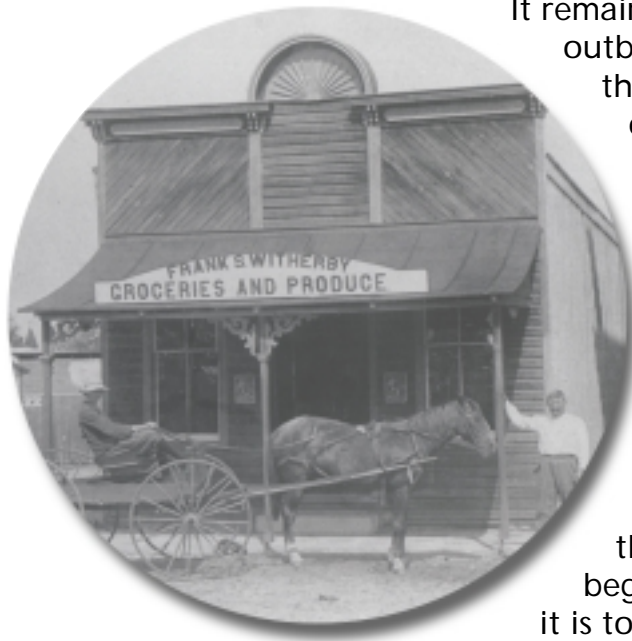
"History of Apopka and Northwest Orange County Florida" by Jerrell H. Shofner
This book is available for purchase at the Apopka Historical Society, Museum of the Apokans
(407) 703-1707
www.apokkamuseum.org

Before Apopka was "The Indoor Foliage Capital of the World," or even before it was "The Fern City," or "The Lodge," it was an Indian settlement. From about 7500 B.C. until about the 1st century A.D. when they disappeared for reasons unknown, Indians were believed to have lodged on the shores of Lake Apopka. Then, for about 400 years, the region appears to have been uninhabited.

When the Spaniards arrived in Florida in the 16th century, the Acuera tribe of the Timucua confederation was said to have lived in the Apopka area, growing crops and trading. By 1730, these natives were decimated by war and diseases brought by the Europeans and had also disappeared.

Then early in the 19th century, Indians again inhabited the area. There was a Seminole village on Lake Apopka, or "Ahapopka," as they spelled and pronounced it. In fact, Apopka is noted in Sidney Lanier's "Florida" (1876) as a small settlement near Lake Apopka. The source of this name is Aha (Potato) and popka (eating place) from papita, which means "to eat," so it was known as the "potato eating place." (From: Florida Place Names of Indian Origin and Seminole Personal Names by William A. Read, Professor of the English Language and Literature, Louisiana State University, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1934).

It remained an active Indian village until the outbreak of the Second Seminole War in the mid-1830s. Coacoochee (Wild Cat), one of the most famous and influential war chiefs, was born here and ruled as chief of about 200 Indians until the village was evacuated and the natives sought refuge in the swampy areas around the St. Johns River. The Armed Occupation Act of 1842 brought settlers to the Apopka area. They received 160 acres if they would settle them. These pioneers, and those that followed them after the Civil War from states in the north, began converting the area into what it is today.



The settlement grew, attracting developers and settlers because of the climate and the agricultural opportunities. By the 1850s, Apopka had become an important trading center. One group of individuals, the Masons, were particularly active. The Masons' Orange Lodge #36 was organized in 1857, and "The Lodge" building was completed in 1859. The Lodge building is still standing on its original site at Alabama Avenue and Highway 441 (Main Street) and is the oldest lodge room in continuous use in the State of Florida. It was around this building that the town grew in the 1860s and 1870s and ultimately became the city of Apopka, which was incorporated in 1882. Signifying the importance of this structure the city limits were measured one mile in all directions from the Masonic Lodge.



By 1912, growing ferns became one of the largest industries in the Apopka area, and soon Apopka developed the name "Fern City." More tropical plants were introduced to the growers in the area in following years. This influx of new foliage as a business opportunity took over the fern industry, and the city of Apopka became known as "The Indoor Foliage Capital of the World."

Today, the city of Apopka is located 12 miles northwest of Orlando and encompasses an area slightly larger than 24 square miles. According to 2002 estimates, the city has a population of more than 28,485 residents. Apopka is the second largest city in Orange County.

With the continuing robust growth in population and local business development and expansion, the Apopka area offers countless business and recreational opportunities for local residents. As its history suggests, more and more people are choosing to call the Apopka area home.

From its roots as an Indian settlement, to its days as the "Indoor Foliage Capital of the World," the Apopka area has grown into a community small enough for development but mature enough for stability and distinction. Today, the Apopka area offers a unique blend of natural beauty, historical pride and deep-set family values that will continue to grow in the 21st century.

