



Oral History: Lake Carroll Estates

The following historical narrative was written by Tom Levin.

I live in the oldest neighborhood bordering Lake Carroll known as Lake Carroll Estates. It was platted in 1927. Deed restrictions stated that homes should be of a value of at least \$300 and must be equipped with a septic tank (I hate to think of the alternative at that time). Armenia Avenue was the only road out of Tampa and the east side of Lake Carroll was the first to be developed with cottages and homes. Many of the homes started out as weekend or summer cottages and got expanded over the years. Many were all wood with very little interior plasterwork. Very few survive today. I have lived in this neighborhood since 1986 but originally moved to the Carrollwood subdivision as a child in 1965. I have heard stories from residents in my neighborhood who have lived here since the 1930s–40s. Many of them have passed away and I only have these few memories to share secondhand regarding the years before I came to Lake Carroll. I feel that I better get all these stories on record before their memories as well as mine disappear into eternity.

Around my home at the west end of Carroll Place in Lake Carroll Estates, they say that the area started as a Boy Scout Camp and also served as a military officer's recreation area during WW2. There was also mention of Lake Carroll being declared a potential reserve water supply for the city during the War. The oldest homes in the neighborhood were along the lake. New homes have been built on most of the lots. Only three of these remain. Deborah DeBose's family (I don't know her maiden name) lived on the lake and she provided the old photos seen here. The Steinlens, Clements and Smiths were also long time residents. Orange Grove Drive existed in part and it was the main access to a public beach known as Horseshoe Beach that was located around Samara Drive. Old maps label Lake Carroll as "Horse Lake." I haven't found anyone who knows who Carroll was, although I heard it was named after someone living at the north end of the lake.

Directly south of my home was the old Echols Grove. Bee hives were kept along the wooded shoreline. In the 1960s, Mr. Echols used to have a wooden speedboat that he took out once around the lake religiously every Sunday. He also used to scuba dive. Mr. Echols decided to develop the westernmost portion of his property abutting Orange Grove Drive. His plan included a proposed bridge spanning the seawall canal between Lake Lacera and the Cove that if built would have connected Armenia Avenue to Orange Grove Drive. Mr. Echols and Sunstate Builders dredged the coves and inlets at about the same time and perhaps cooperatively. He died on Safari in Africa. I had an opportunity to see many interesting things of the Echols after his wife died and the property was sold to develop Lake Carroll Cove. Copies of legal papers that Mr. Echols kept in his files included a copy of a lawsuit judgment from 1959 filed by the residents of Lake Carroll against the dredging activities destroying the lake environment. The residents won... sort of. Court findings agreed that the dredging was silting up the Lake, making it unsuitable for

swimming, fishing and boating but the judge “split the baby” and acknowledged both the environmental degradation as well as the rights of private property owners to “improve” their property. The compromise was crafted to limit dredging to the off-season months between Labor Day and Memorial Day. The developers had no problem with this as the judgment occurred after September and their attorney was quoted as saying, “We have no objection, we will be finished by then.” Many people may remember the ornate iron gate at the entrance to the Echols property on Armenia with the name Echols arching over the drive. I convinced the developers to restore the iron gate and move it to the small lakefront park in Lake Carroll Cove. It is still there today.



Other properties along the east side of the lake that I know about include the Cunningham Nursery at Carroll Garden Drive and the Jackson Family north of there. Mr. Jackson used to say that his grandfather was the first to settle here with others escaping from a yellow fever outbreak in Tampa. I never confirmed whether that could have been the same family that Jackson Street was named after, or perhaps related to the surveyor Jackson who was doing sectioning survey for townships in the mid 1800s. A section line intersects Lake Carroll and he certainly would have to have “meandered” the shore, giving him ample opportunity to be the first to scope out some beautiful lakefront property not too far from Tampa.



Carrollwood was developed in the 1960s and changed the character of development on the lake. The new subdivision had uniformly small lots, curbs and sidewalks as well as a common sewer and water system. When I moved to Carrollwood in 1965, I was 9 years old. Every lot had citrus trees that are mostly gone now. White Sands Beach was the place to be for Carrollwood residents during the summer and there was even a concession stand. Across the lake was the public access recreation area called Lake Carroll Beach. It was similar to Lake Ellen Beach and Ralston Beach. This was in the days where for a small admission charge you could swing on rope swings, jump off of multilevel towers, go to the concession stand or have a family picnic. As kids we would sometimes swim across to the east side and occasionally run into folks that we referred to as “the other side of the lake people”. I don’t remember much vegetation on the lake bottom at that time. Lake Carroll Beach was sold and developed into a four-lot large lot subdivision.

Photo source: Deborah DeBose

Carrollwood was originally populated by northerners and USF professors and was shunned by Tampa residents as being too far out in the boondocks. As a student at Carrollwood Elementary School in the 1960s, there were very few Florida natives and they seemed to be from the surrounding rural area north and west of Carrollwood. Lake Carroll was always big for waterskiing. The Kempton brothers were famous skiers of the time and maintained the ski jump near their home on Samara. Boats at this time were smaller and much less powered than today. I do not recall the first infestations of hydrilla as I was probably not living in the area at the time. When I moved back to



Photo source: Deborah DeBose

Lake Carroll in 1986, we bought one of the few remaining wooden lake cottages and renovated it, even though the realtor suggested tearing it down and building new. After looking at many lake properties in the area, I remembered growing up around Lake Carroll and its clear waters and decided this was the place to be.

Over the years I have seen the lake level over the docks during El Niño and seen it at its record low. At the record high, I took samples of water coming in from a pond surrounded by septic tanks and found high contamination levels. I worked for years trying to convince the City to run sewer lines and we were

finally successful about five years ago. However the answer was not to make the lake drain out faster as some suggested. There were lots of arguments about this among residents. Other times water is drained out of the lake by SWFWMD in anticipation of hurricane-related rains that end up not coming. If we go into a dry season with low water, it usually takes a few years to recover to average levels and fluctuations. Walking around the lake at the extreme low, I salvaged an old wooden water ski and a gear from a lake dredge buried in the bottom sediments. At low water conditions, there are so many shallow areas that you actually get a lot of prop scarring of the bottom. These areas are sandy while the deeper dredge holes have a very loose silt at the bottom as they seem to capture muck and silt particles moved by wave action. I have snorkeled in many of these areas. Visibility varies but on a good day you can see clear down to the bottom. There are many temperature gradients in different areas that are caused by stratification or underwater seepage. I have never seen any true springs but I have seen seepage from lake banks draining the surficial underwater aquifer into the lake. I have always thought we should make a “Chinese calendar” for the submersed lake vegetation and see if it repeats in cycles: I remember the “year of the tapegrass,” the “year of the bladderwort” and recently we had another “year of the hydrilla.” Does the pH change with heavy rain or is it temperature and light fluctuations or is it just random?

Boats now include big inboard ski boats and I would imagine there is more opportunity for gas and oil spills. Skiing has been replaced by wakeboarding for the skilled and tubing for the unskilled. Over the last 23 years I have noticed that the use of the lake by boats varies by time of year, weather, holidays and the number of families with children. In 1986, there was little boat traffic since many of the homes were occupied with empty nesters. We have

seen an increase of boaters over the years. New construction and renovation combined with re-landscaping has increased which may result in more silt and nutrients into the lake. The interesting observation I have noticed is that the correct water level and the right amount of vegetation or water clarity is directly related to the conditions present when a lake resident first moves onto the lake. This has at times created problems for docks or has resulted different opinions of lake needs.

There is something special about Lake Carroll—its location, its size, its water quality and its people. Hopefully we can all work to the keep the qualities we all cherish and improve upon problems with new opportunities.