



G·I·C·I·A·

***THE FIRST
TWENTY-FIVE YEARS***



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-Stan Donnelly, 1971
(first President of the Gasparilla Island
Conservation and Improvement Association)



- Written by John Heffernan, with contributions by Sam Murphy and Chauncey Goss, and editing by Frank White.
- Design and layout by Lynne Hendricks.



IN THE BEGINNING

In the late 1960s, there were no more than five hundred dwellings on Gasparilla Island. The peak population was about 1500 people in the winter, and only 400 or so in the summer. (By contrast, in 1996 we have about 1600 dwelling units and a peak population of roughly 4000 people). There was virtually nothing north of 19th Street, and subdivisions such as Boca Grande Isles and Harbor Drive/Waterways did not exist. The railroad was still going strong, with its freights rumbling down the length of the island to unload at the phosphate dock at the south end, and the whistle of the engine was a familiar and welcome sound in Boca Grande. The island was certainly not crowded; but a small group of far-sighted people anticipated the enormous changes which could eventually overwhelm it unless some effective action were taken to meet the threat posed by then-existing zoning which would have allowed the construction of 7,000 dwelling units - including high rises - with a potential population of 16,500 people.

The prime mover of this group was Wyman "Mac" Miller, owner of the original Miller's Marina and General Manager of the Gasparilla Inn in the 1960s. One of his most important responsibilities at the Inn was to deal with the various State and County agencies in Ft. Myers on matters of concern to the Inn, as well as the island as a whole. His experiences had convinced him - and through him, others - that this island needed a single, unifying voice, acting on behalf of Boca Grande property owners to make government officials more aware of the special needs of the barrier islands, and particularly this one. Miller worked tirelessly to advance the best interests of Boca Grande through GICIA and, for some years beginning in 1972, as a member of the Lee County Mosquito Control Board. He is the father of the island's effort to control its own growth.



Concerned with the threat of overwhelming growth on Gasparilla Island, Wyman "Mac" Miller was instrumental in the formation of the Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association.

THE CIVIC LEAGUE

Robert Searles, who has long been active in GICIA - including service as President - and is currently a director and Vice President, recalls sailing in through the Pass in 1970 to Miller's Marina and talking with Mac Miller, a fellow Minnesotan, about Bob's experiences with a Minnesota Conservation District and whether and how such an organization might be useful on Gasparilla Island. (Bob also recalls that, as he sailed past it, the old lighthouse was standing partially in the water, waiting for rescue and rehabilitation - as was later done by GICIA.)

The first organizational efforts must already have been underway at that time, and GICIA was born as the Gasparilla Island Civic League, Inc. on February 13, 1971, the date of the League's incorporation. The incorporators were Lois Swan "Lolo" Junkin, Mac Miller, Norman Smith and Ted Smith. Serving temporarily as officers, until the first election could be held, were Norman Smith as President, Bayard Sharp as Vice President and Mac Miller as Secretary Treasurer.

Some of the questions listed at the time as having prompted formation of the league were:

- Zoning and the threat of overbuilding.
- Beach erosion, especially at the south end.
- Provision of a recreational area for children.
- Protection of the island's fragile ecology and protection from pollution.
- How to stop the filling of ponds to preserve a habitat for birds.
- How to prevent the destruction of the mangroves.
- The need for additional law enforcement personnel.
- Burning at the town dump.
- The condition of the streets.
- Improvement of the County Park.

Stan Donnelly was the first elected President of the Civic League, and his address to the first formal membership meeting on March 29, 1971 set the tone and the direction of the new organization. His remarks show how foresighted our founders were, as he explained the reasons behind formation of the group: "...with the making of the bridge [completed in 1958], the introduction of the water board and... the near completion of the sewer system, this island is going to become more attractive to everyone in the United States, and in our jet age... we have to face the fact that the island is going to grow. And, rather than have it grow like Topsy, we feel it should grow with some orderliness for the people who live here, for nature's inhabitants - the fish and the birds - and also for the preservation of some of the architecture and traditions of Gasparilla Island. We want to be a voice of a unified group of people who are the property owners to speak on whatever cause we feel is helpful to the property owners as a whole."

No one has yet made a better statement of what the GICIA is all about.

Conservation and Improvement

"What's in a name? that which we call a rose,
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called."

-Romeo and Juliet, by Wm. Shakespeare

As is so often the case with ventures launched amid high ideals, the brand new Civic League's first task was utterly down to earth: the need to achieve and maintain its status as a non-profit, tax-exempt organization whose members could treat their dues and contributions as tax-deductible.

In the eyes of the taxing authorities, the organization's name was of great importance, and "Civic League" smacked too much of forbidden political action. So, Miller and Donnelly, together with Bayard Sharp, Lolo Junkin, Norman Smith and other GICIA founders, spent a good deal of time discussing various possibilities among themselves and with lawyer Arthur Knudsen before coming up with a new name which would more accurately describe what their activities were all about. All agreed that "conservation" and "improvement" were essential to the purposes they sought to accomplish. Thus - even before it was a year old - the Gasparilla Island Civic League was re-christened as:

THE GASPARILLA ISLAND CONSERVATION AND IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION, INC.

That did the trick! Although the name is long, and clumsy to abbreviate (G-I-C-I-A is the preferred version), the new association duly qualified for non-profit, tax-exempt status and has maintained that position ever since. For twenty-five years, the GICIA has worked steadily to preserve the integrity of the island as an attractive place to live and work: a place where (1) growth could be carefully monitored without restraining development unreasonably; (2) as much as possible of Boca Grande's small-town atmosphere could be preserved; and (3) where the island's reputation for leisurely life-style would be hailed by one of our many recent discoverers in a New York Times article as a "sliver of serenity."

The purposes stated in the new Association's by-laws, and never changed, were very much like those of the Civic League. They are:

- #1. To promote land, water, and wildlife conservation uses and purposes in the Gasparilla Island area... including the preservation of the ecology of the area, the protection of fish and shellfish breeding areas, the preservation of wildlife, and the promotion of anti-pollution measures;
- #2. To erect or maintain public buildings;
- #3. To preserve the traditions, architecture, and appearance of the community;
- #4. To assist in the establishment, development, and maintenance, of recreational facilities;
- #5. To promote the general welfare of the residents of Gasparilla Island.

A FEW OF THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE PLAYED A BIG PART

The first Directors of the GICIA, elected in 1971, were **Stan Donnelly, Peter Ffolliott, Jack Griswold, Ned Jewett, Lois Swan Junkin, Mac Miller, Darrell Polk, Bayard Sharp, Norman Smith, Ted Smith and Bill Speer.**

We have already met Stan Donnelly and Mac Miller. Peter Ffolliott remains an active and an interested member of our community. Ted Smith was for many years the professional at the Gasparilla Inn Golf Club. Bill Speer had a local plumbing and electrical business. Ned Jewett had been in the automobile business in Detroit.



Lolo Junkin and Nell Kuhl have been actively involved in GICIA since its inception in 1971.

Everyone in Boca Grande knows Darrell Polk, who is General Manager of the Gasparilla Island Water Association and, with his wife, Margaret, an owner of the Barnichol hardware store. Everyone also knows Bayard Sharp, who never blows his own horn, but he and his late brother, Hugh, are responsible for many of the good works which have benefited Boca Grande enormously.

"Lolo" Junkin has been continuously active in the GICIA longer than any other person. She was in at the very beginning as an incorporator of the Civic League, was a member of the GICIA's first elected Board and is still serving as Assistant Treasurer. She comes to the office daily, keeps a sensitive finger on the financial pulse of the organization and acknowledges every contribution personally.

Mac Miller, having played such a key role in the birth of our organization, remained one of the moving forces in it. He served three times as President, 1973-1974, 1976-1977 and 1980-1982, and was First Vice President and a Director at the time of his death in 1990. He played a crucial role in securing

enactment of the Gasparilla Island Conservation District Act (of which, more later), as well as in the creation of the Boca Grande Historic District.

Jack M.Q. Petersen was a Director for six years and succeeded Mr. Miller as President during 1974-1976. Perhaps his greatest contribution to the island was his service as President of the Water Association in 1980, and again in 1985, when, directing a period of great expansion, he took the heat for the inevitably rising water rates.



H.L.T. "Barney" Koren served as GICIA president for six years. Under his leadership, the Gasparilla Island Conservation District Act was enacted into law.

H.L.T. Koren - known to one and all as "Barney" - was a towering figure in our history. After a distinguished career in the Army, the Foreign Service and the White House, Mr. Koren retired to Boca Grande in 1975. He almost immediately took an active role in GICIA, serving Board terms in 1976, 1981 and 1986, then taking on an advisory role until moving to a retirement community in 1988. He contributed greatly to the GICIA's credibility at the State level and played a very influential role in having the Gasparilla Island Conservation District Act enacted into law

in 1980. Barney Koren was named GICIA's President Emeritus in 1988, and is the only person ever to have been so honored.

Since 1985, the Association's Presidents have been Bob Searles, the late William Lerchen, Walter M. Ringer, Jr., Sam Murphy, John Heffernan, and Sam Murphy again. They came from a variety of backgrounds and careers, but shared a common interest in making what contribution they could to the "con-

servation" and "preservation" of Gasparilla Island.

At first, GICIA's membership numbered only about fifty island property owners, and in 1971 there were just twenty-three contributors. (In 1995, there were approximately 950 dues-paying members, of whom about 600 made contributions in addition to their dues.) There was no staff at the beginning, and thus very little in the way of expenses. The Association's work was performed by its Directors and members as volunteers. *(The names of all islanders who have served as directors during the last twenty-five years are printed as an annex to this history.)*

THE COMMUNITY CENTER



Among the first projects to be undertaken by this volunteer group was restoration of the old school, which had been unused since 1964, and its transformation into what has become our wonderful Community Center. After many trips to Ft. Myers, Stan Donnelly and his cohorts succeeded in obtaining cooperation and some funding from Lee County. Then, working together, GICIA and the Woman's Club were able to muster the necessary support in the community at large. The refurbished building opened as the Community Center in 1975, and GICIA has maintained its office there ever since.

Jack Peterson was President of the Association at the time the Community Center project was brought to a successful conclusion, and he had this to say in February of 1976:



One of the first projects tackled by GICIA, undertaken in association with the Woman's Club, was the restoration of the old Boca Grande School. The building had been vacant since 1964 and reopened in 1975 as a center for community activities. GICIA has maintained an office on the premises ever since.

"It is not exaggerating to say that the Association is known in government circles, not only in Lee and Charlotte Counties, as an organization whose views are important as they relate to the island and its environs, but also in Tallahassee. Indeed, the dedication of the Boca Grande Community Center was addressed by Governor Askew, and attended by Senator Mike Mansfield, Majority leader of the US Senate, and by all five Commissioners of Lee County. It was the first time a governor of Florida officially visited the island."

A PROFESSIONAL STAFF

In the Association's earliest years, the late Margaret Mallard served as its Secretary, working out of an office above Miller's Marina. (That office, along with all our files, was consumed by the 1975 fire which destroyed the entire marina.) Margaret was the entire staff until the employment of Creighton L. Sherman as the first Executive Director on May 1, 1979. Trisha Lowe, a true Boca Grande native, who grew up and attended school here, joined GICIA in 1981 and became Executive Secretary when Margaret retired soon thereafter. Trisha continues to fill that position with distinction.

With the employment of Creighton Sherman in 1979 as the GICIA's Executive Director, the organization's capacity and effectiveness took on a new and an important dimension. Now it was able to escape the inherent limitations of a wholly volunteer organization and apply itself on a full-time basis to protecting and advancing the interests of the island's property owners. Creighton remained on the job for fourteen years which were filled with numerous accomplishments, many of which are described below.



With the hiring of Executive Director Creighton Sherman, GICIA was able to better direct the efforts it was making on behalf of island property owners.

When Creighton was nearing retirement, Walter Ringer led the search which resulted in the hiring of Chauncey Goss to succeed Creighton as Executive Director. That selection has turned out to have been a very fortunate one for the organization, as Chauncey has proved himself to be a good manager and an effective advocate for the island. With luck, Chauncey and Trisha may take us well through the turbulent times the next twenty-five years are sure to bring to Gasparilla Island.

THE CONSERVATION DISTRICT ACT

Without a doubt, the crowning achievement of the GICIA's twenty-five years has been to secure the enactment of the Gasparilla Island Conservation District Act in 1980, and to see to its defense and enforcement in the years since.

The Act covers all of Gasparilla Island - both the Lee and Charlotte County portions - including Boca Grande Isles, Golf Course Island, Three Sisters Island, Hoagen Key, and Loomis Island. (It does not cover Cole Island, where the Boca Grande North community is located.) One of its most basic provisions is a legislative "finding of fact" that our islands:

"...are fragile barrier islands as defined in the Presidential directive on barrier islands dated May 23, 1977, and are areas of particular natural beauty containing abundant plant, marine, animal, and bird life. The conservation of the natural beauty... of the islands is in the best interest of the residents and property owners of the islands and the citizens of Lee and Charlotte Counties and the state of Florida. The manner and extent to which development is permitted to occur will have a substantial effect on the ecology and the natural beauty of the islands. In order to preserve and conserve the fragile ecosystems and natural characteristics of the islands, it is necessary to restrict by this act land uses and the height and density of structures and to prevent the proliferation of exterior advertising signs on the island."

The Act's other principal provisions are intended to carry that legislative finding into effect:

■ No building may exceed a height of 38 feet from the grade of the lot to the peak of the roof (or 42 feet above mean sea level, whichever is lower). This provision protects Gasparilla Island from the worst of the high-rise beachfront developments which have been so devastating to other barrier islands.

■ Density is limited to five dwelling units per acre. Although this limitation has been overtaken by a more recent County density restriction of three units per acre, it was a huge step forward at the time and is the reason that the maximum number of units to be constructed on the island is 2,250 rather than 7,000.

■ No land can be used for commercial, industrial or multi-family purposes unless it was zoned for such use before passage of the Act. (A special provision was made for the Port district, most of which is now occupied by Boca Bay.)

■ Exterior advertising signs are prohibited if they are not on-site and related to the use of the premises. Exterior signs which are banners, beacons, neon, rotating, flashing or animated are altogether prohibited.

■ No local governing body can grant variances or exceptions to the Act.

Lolo Junkins recalls that the idea of such a special law for the island may have first been suggested by Eustis Paine, who was the Association's Treasurer at the time. In any event, a draft of the proposed legislation was first reviewed by GICIA's Board in February of 1979, and one thing is certain: without the Act, Boca Grande would be a far less attractive place than it is today. Passage of the Act was obtained in the nick of time, at the very early stages of major development of the island. Moreover, Creighton Sherman came to work for the GICIA just as the legislative effort was getting underway, so that the Association was able to focus directly on the effort and was no longer so heavily dependent on retained consultants and volunteers.

The work that led to passage of the Act began for GICIA in 1977 when developers filed three applications with Lee County for multi-family uses along the Gulf south of the Range Light. Since these were to be the first condominiums on the beach, they clearly presaged major changes to come and marked the beginning of a wave that had the potential to swamp the island, since zoning at the time would have permitted a buildout density of about 16,500 people (or ten times the then-peak population).

GICIA successfully petitioned the Lee County Commission to postpone its decision on those applications (they were ultimately granted) to allow time for a comprehensive planning study which would determine how much growth Gasparilla Island could tolerate without destruction of its character and quality of life. A team of planners, lawyers, an ecologist, and an economist was assembled. Their findings were reported in 1978 in "The Gasparilla Island Report" by Adley Associates and are summarized as follows:

If regional population growth, present real estate trends, and allowable zoning densities were to determine land use on Gasparilla Island, over 6,000 units - ten times the present population - would be built. The character, heritage, and

quality of life that now characterizes Gasparilla would be completely lost. With it would go the small business economic base of the island and the present way of life of every resident. If, on the other hand, total growth can be held to about 2,500 units for the whole island, the economic base could be kept intact. Businesses would grow - quadrupling their market - but Boca Grande would remain a village and keep its uniqueness and charm.

There seems no doubt that this work was the genesis of the Gasparilla Act and the present density cap of 2,250 units. The report's findings were presented by its authors at the delayed hearings on the three multi-family development applications. In an unprecedented gesture, the Lee County Commission held the hearing in Boca Grande, where about 300 people attended, and most of them spoke in opposition to any increase in densities. The Adley report was adopted in 1979 by the Lee County Planning Department as the basis for its own plan for the island; and the report made the case which GICIA put to the legislature in seeking a special law to manage the island's growth.

Most of the work of planning and drafting the proposed legislation took place in the Ft. Myers office of attorney Arthur Knudsen, and in the Punta Gorda office of Leo Wotitsky, a prominent Charlotte County lawyer. Guy Batsel, an island attorney working for Wotitsky, and a future GICIA Board member, was also instrumental in drafting the legislation.

As it was first introduced in the 1979 legislature, the proposed special act would have created the Gasparilla Island Historic and Conservation District (covering both the Lee and Charlotte County portions of the island), and a Historic and Conservation Review Board. Height and density requirements for the new District were to have been the same as those provided in the 1980 version of the Act, which later became law. The Review Board was to be elective, with the power to control future building and to grant variances. A referendum among island property owners, as well as registered voters, was to be held before the legislation would become effective, and property owners would be able to vote in future elections for Review Board members.

There was strong opposition to the proposed bill by Charlotte County and Sunset Realty. Sunset, at that time, owned much of the developable property on the island, including virtually everything North of 19th Street, all of what is now Boca Grande Isles, and most of the present-day Harbor Drive/Waterways area. Newspaper headlines of the day reflected the sometimes bitter



The annual GICIA tours are very popular among island residents. Pictured above: Elsie Bracken, Barbara Jewett, Clint Morrison, Mary Morrison and Pat Miller enjoying a 1992 picnic at Corkscrew Swamp.



On February 13, 1996, past directors of GICIA and their spouses gathered at the Gasparilla Inn Beach Club to celebrate the 25th anniversary of GICIA's incorporation. Above: Greg and Dorothy Magratten, Amor Hollingsworth, Kay Reed, Eleanor Hollingsworth and Angus Morrison. photo by Dusty Hopkins



Bob Peoples, Bill White, Peter Sholley, Peter Sieglaff, Mike Peoples and Bob Searles.
photo by Dusty Hopkins



Chauncey and Allison Goss, Mariel Goss, Virginia Koren, Porter Goss and Creighton Sherman.



Creighton Sherman, the first Executive Director of GICIA



Margaret Mallard served as GICIA's secretary and only staff member in the organization's earliest years.

As a former Lee County Commissioner for the district that includes Boca Grande, and current U.S. Congressman, Porter Goss has played, and continues to play, a supportive role in the efforts of GICIA.



struggle for and against passage of the Act. "Legislators Battle Over Gasparilla Bill," said the Ft. Myers News Press. "For what is essentially a local bill," reported the paper, "the proposed legislation for Gasparilla Island has generated considerable attention and controversy. All the area legislators said lobbying efforts from both advocates and opponents of the bill have been extremely intense."

Barney Koren and Mac Miller were in the forefront of the struggle from the beginning, and Bayard Sharp weighed in at critical moments. In the final days, when the bill's prospects seemed dubious, Senator Warren Henderson of Venice, a good friend of the island, saved the day by successfully steering the bill through both houses of the legislature. As the News Press reported it, "with a slick bit of political maneuvering [by Senator Henderson], the bill was removed from the jaws of a Senate committee where its death seemed almost immediate." Then the amended bill and 71 other local bills on the calendar that day were passed by the Senate unanimously and without discussion. After an equally intense battle in the House, the bill was passed and then signed by Governor Graham in a public ceremony with Senator Henderson and Representative Frank Mann.

Sunset Realty challenged the legality of the Act; and the Florida Supreme Court, in a 4-3 decision, ruled the Act unconstitutional. The Court's principal objection was to the provision for voting by non-resident property owners.

GICIA and its attorneys thereupon redrafted the Act to meet the Court's objections and to reflect other criticisms, and the new bill was re-submitted to the 1980 legislature by Senator Henderson and Representative Mann. Having much of the controversial language amended, the new bill was passed out of the legislature, filed with the Secretary of State, and became law without the Governor's signature on July 7, 1980.

As enacted, the legislation did not take effect until approved by a majority of the island's eligible voters ("electors") in a referendum to be held in November of 1980 at the time of the regular election. There was by no means unanimity in Boca Grande about the desirability of the special law. Much of the local opposition to it centered around the Boca Grande Chamber of Commerce, which adopted a resolution arguing that the law was: (1) unnecessary, (2) a threat to commercial growth, (3) destructive to the possibility of affordable housing, (4) too rigid, and (5) arbitrary and poorly planned. "In summing up," the Chamber's announcement said, we are "in favor of restricting growth, but not

in such a simplistic, undemocratic and inflexible manner. To do so will create new problems and work against the solution of others - lack of commercial property and affordable housing in particular. Last, but certainly not least, the Chamber does not want to forfeit local control to the State legislature." An anonymous circular was distributed claiming that, "those who earned a living on the island would have this right taken away," and that the proponents of the Act would "stop at nothing to control you."

In its response, GICIA said that the Chamber's objections "do not appear valid or convincing." It added: "A vote for the Act is in the best interest of all residents of Gasparilla. It gives you, not the Counties, the chance to determine our future density, growth, and zoning."

On election day, the referendum vote approved the Act by a margin of 3 to 1, and the law became effective. With amendments in 1983, and again in 1986, the Gasparilla Act has controlled our growth ever since. On more than one occasion it has withstood attack, and a major portion of the GICIA's resources and manpower is now devoted to ensuring that the Act is properly applied by the Charlotte and Lee County authorities. In a very real sense, the GICIA is the watchdog to ensure that the Act is followed scrupulously.

ABANDONMENT OF THE RAILROAD: THE BICYCLE PATH

For years, Boca Granders had a romantic attachment to the railroad. Many of them had come to Gasparilla Island initially by train before the road bridge was built. Although passenger service ended in 1959, the railroad continued freight operations, bringing loads of phosphate down the island to the port for overseas shipping. It was therefore with a considerable sense of loss that islanders learned in 1978 that the railroad proposed to abandon its operations here entirely.

The line covered a distance of 47.7 miles from Arcadia to Boca Grande, and had been built in 1905 by the Charlotte Harbor and Northern Railroad Company (known locally as "the Cold, Hungry, and Naked"). That company was later acquired by the Seaboard Air Line Railroad, and then by Seaboard Coast Line, which later became CSX. It was SCL which announced abandonment of operations because of high maintenance costs and the decay of the port facility at the southern end of the island. After several years of hearings before the Interstate Commerce Commission, a



final notice of abandonment was issued on January 8, 1981.

Concerned about the effect of abandonment on the local economy, GICIA did what little it could do to appeal to the authorities and the railroad, and adopted a resolution which, among other things, recited that the railroad and its port facility represented "an integral part of the quality of life in Boca Grande and the heritage of Gasparilla Island." But the railroad was unmoved. It closed down all operations here and shifted them to Tampa. No longer would the residents of Boca Grande hear the "toot, toot" of the freight train as it passed down the length of the island in the middle of the night. No one had minded that interruption of sleep; indeed, it was a welcome sound.

With abandonment of railroad operations came another major issue to confront GICIA in the form of a proposal by influential business and political figures in Ft. Myers to construct a large commercial port where the railroad's terminus had been at the south end of the island. In Boca Grande, the prospect was a nightmare, since it was feared that such a port operation would require a four-lane road down the island's spine to accommodate large eighteen-wheel trucks. Mac Miller's memorandum on the subject estimated that only twenty-five to thirty-five residents favored a port, while everyone else on the island was opposed. He pointed out that such a massive operation would thoroughly disrupt life in Boca Grande and would also endanger the waters of Charlotte Harbor.

At that time, the newly enacted Gasparilla Act did not prohibit the establishment of a commercial port at that particular site. As a compromise to help win passage in the legislature, some fifty-five acres which had been used in the trans-shipment of phosphate had been made exempt from its provisions until July 1, 1981 in order to allow Lee County one year to determine what it would do with that portion of the railroad's property.

In the time available to it as a result of that exemption, Lee County launched an effort to arouse private interest in establishing a modern port. The press was on both sides of the issue. The News Press urged its readers to lobby the commissioners on behalf of the proposal because, "a deep water port may well become a vital asset." The Sarasota Herald Tribune, on the other hand, believed that such a port might have adverse effects outside Lee County and that Lee County officials should not be the only ones to determine the merits or demerits of a commercial port operation. In any event, no private interest came forward with a serious proposal for a port. The idea was dropped, the exemption period under the act passed by, and the acreage involved is now in the most southerly portion of the Boca Bay development.

Later, with the rails torn up and the right-of-way abandoned, it was suggested - perhaps first by Amor Hollingsworth - that it might be possible to replace the rail line with a bicycle path.

Bayard and Hugh Sharp made this dream possible by negotiating a land swap with CSX: in exchange for the right-of-way from the north end of the island to First Street, the Sharps conveyed the land south of First Street which had been the site of the old Boca Grande Hotel. (That property is now Boca Bay's North Village.) The right-of-way was then given to GICIA by the Sharp families. Moreover, this handsome gift included a parcel of land between what is now the bicycle path and Palm Avenue, bordered on the south by First Street, which was to be divided and sold in order to provide funds which could be used to maintain and improve the bike path. The parcel is known as the Palm Grove Subdivision and was platted into nine lots.

In a drive led by Walter Ringer in 1983, GICIA was able to raise



Hugh and Bayard Sharp exchanged with CSX the land that was once the site of the Boca Grande Hotel for the right-of-way from the north end of the island to First Street. The Sharps then generously donated the right-of-way to the GICIA for construction of the Boca Grande bike path.

\$120,000 in voluntary contributions by islanders towards the cost of constructing the path. Lee County also made an important monetary contribution and bore the entire cost of construction south of First Street on county land. The path was officially dedicated on February 23, 1985 and has been a source of great pleasure to residents and visitors ever since.

GICIA AS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF GASPARILLA ISLAND

While no other accomplishment is likely to match the Gasparilla Act in terms of impact on the island's character, nor the Community Center and bicycle path as physical contributions to Boca Grande's well-being as a community, GICIA has continued to play its role as a unified voice for the property owners of the island. This was what its founders intended, and the Association has continued to be a force of some influence on the island's behalf. In a sense, its major achievement may be that Lee and Charlotte counties now understand that Boca Grande has special needs and concerns, which must be taken into account, and that they should not view the island solely as a source for property tax revenue. GICIA is the recognized spokesman for Gasparilla Island property owners in the two counties, in Tallahassee, and occasionally in Washington, DC.

OVER THE YEARS:



GICIA spearheaded the restoration of the historic Boca Grande lighthouse, saving it from the badly eroding southern shoreline.

- It has rescued the old lighthouse from the waters of the Boca Grande Pass, rehabilitated it so that it could be returned to active service as an aid to navigation, and ensured that it was turned over to the State of Florida's Park Service for management.

- GICIA played a leading role in developing the Charlotte Harbor Plan, creating the Charlotte Harbor and Lemon Bay Aquatic Preserves, and assisted in the

preparation of their management plans. Those measures are the first line of defense for the waters in which our island lives.

- It was the motivating force behind Lee County's restrictions on the construction of docks and other structures along the shoreline and into the grass beds of the Harbor, especially the creation of a 3,000-foot environmental easement along the Charlotte Harbor shore of the Boca Bay development.

- The Association was the prime mover in establishing the Historic District. Its Executive Director has served on the Lee County Historic Preservation Board since the Board's creation in 1988.

- GICIA has actively pursued the development and maintenance of recreational facilities on the island and its Executive Director has served on the Lee County Parks and Recreation and Advisory Committee for the last decade. Through the continued generosity of the Sharps, GICIA was able to assist in the contribution by those families of nearly one mile of Gulf beach to the State of Florida for public use, and one hundred and eleven acres of upland to the State for perpetual preservation and conservation. Those actions effectively eliminated three hundred and thirty-three potential building sites.

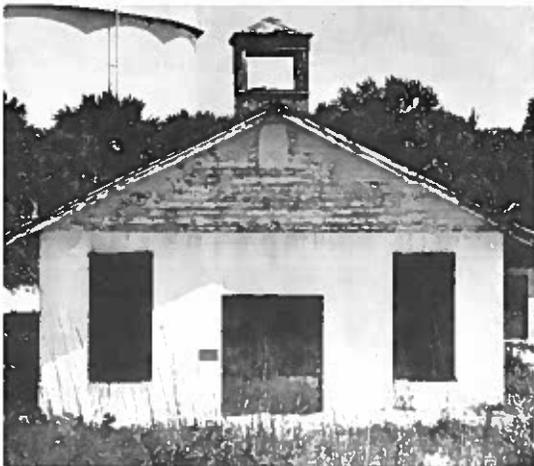
- During Walter Ringer's presidency, GICIA played an active role with Dr. Wright and the clinic and others in bringing an EMS unit and ambulance to the island in 1991, and housing them in the old clinic building.

- In 1993, the Association fought an effort by CSX to gouge an inland boat basin out of the heart of the south end of the island, with a canal and lock proposed to link the basin to Charlotte Harbor. After a considerable struggle, including a contested administrative hearing, the plan was defeated.

- A recurring program over the last ten years has been directed at an attempted regularization of the US Army Corps of Engineers' dredging of the Boca Grande Pass. Working through and on various government agencies, GICIA has sought to coordinate the periodic dredgings so as not to interfere with other seasonal occurrences, such as Tarpon fishing and turtle nesting, and to have the dredged material used to nourish and renourish the island's depleted beaches rather than disposing of it offshore. Bob Searles has spent an extraordinary amount of time, energy, research and diplomacy on the issue of dredging - and on the wider subject of beach erosion - and working with

Creighton and Chauncey he was able to influence the timing and nature of the dredging projects. Bob has developed an outstanding expertise on beach erosion and is widely known as "The Sand Man."

■ In 1994, concerned that the island might receive less support from the county governments because of budgetary pressures and the insistent demands of urbanization in Port Charlotte and Ft. Myers, GICIA undertook a thorough study of the possibility of incorporating Gasparilla Island into a municipality. On the recommendation of a committee of citizens, the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council was retained to make the study and to spell out the steps that would have to be taken to achieve incorporated status, if that should ever seem the route to take. The Council's report concluded that incorporation at the present time would probably not serve a useful purpose, having in mind the "municipal" services we already supply ourselves (water, sewer, library, town park/bike path, clinic and fire protection). The study spelled out in some detail the necessary steps to attain incorporated status and the likely cost of them, and it is in GICIA's archives where it is available for possible future study should circumstances change.



In association with the Woman's Club, GICIA initiated plans last year to restore the Amory Memorial Chapel, the place of worship for what was once a sizable African-American community.

American community, but was abandoned when the effects of the flooding from the "No Name Storm" largely destroyed the community.

■ In 1995, the Association, in a joint project with the Woman's Club, took the first steps toward restoration of the old Amory Memorial Chapel at the south end of the island on the drive leading into the State Park and the old lighthouse. That chapel is a part of our history which should be preserved as a reminder of times past. For years, it was a place of worship for a sizable African-



Today, GICIA Executive Director Chauncey Goss and Executive Secretary Trisha Lowe field a steady stream of questions and requests for help on a variety of matters.

Over the years, GICIA's office has on a day-to-day basis filled a big part of the vacuum which would otherwise exist because of the absence of local government and the remoteness of the county agencies. Every day, Trisha and Chauncey field a steady stream of questions and requests for help on matters both large and small, complex and simple: complaints about speeding on Gasparilla Road; questions about trash collection schedules and recycling; questions, requests for help, and complaints about zoning, building permits, building codes, and claimed violations; pleas for help to control beach erosion in particular spots; questions about mangrove law and complaints about violations; how to register an out-of-state automobile; how to appeal property tax assessments; how to apply for a homestead exemption; how to register to vote; what to do about traffic on the bike path; parking in the village (GICIA owns more than 75 downtown parking spaces); how to prove ownership at the bridge to qualify for a reduced fare - and on and on in a variety and volume that would put any city clerk's office to shame. If GICIA had not come into being twenty-five years ago, we would have to invent it now.

Presently, as GICIA begins its twenty-sixth year of service as an association of island property owners, there are more than enough significant issues to keep it busy.

We continue to struggle with questions about how best to soften the impact of growth on the island. Even with the protection of the Act, it is quite evident that continued development has had -

and is continuing to have - a very large impact on the island. (Another six-hundred and fifty-six units are yet to be constructed.) Our remaining open spaces and vistas are disappearing as new houses are constructed. Can we create an effective conservancy program to preserve some of those spaces and vistas when land values have become so high? Is there some way to moderate the volume of the traffic on the bicycle path during high season when day-trippers are at their peak so that residents of the island are not deprived of their ability to enjoy it?

In short, there is plenty of work to be done.

So long as Boca Grande continues in its present status, GICIA will play its part in the conservation, preservation and improvement of Gasparilla Island, and we look forward eagerly to the next Twenty-Five Years.

"We have something special in the GICIA, because it is our government operating on a very efficient basis, with a minimum number of people on our payroll and backed by 900-plus members who give not only financial support, but willingly of time and effort."

-Walter Ringer

Past Presidents of GICIA

Stan D. Donnelly
1972

Wyman M. Miller

1973, 1976, 1980, 1981

Jack M.Q. Petersen

1974, 1975

H.L.T. Koren

1977, 1978, 1979, 1982, 1983, 1984

Robert L. Searles

1985, 1986

William G. Lerchen

1987, 1988, 1989

Walter M. Ringer

1990, 1991

John W. Heffernan

1994

Samuel W. Murphy

1992, 1993, 1995, 1996



Walter M. Ringer



Robert L. Searles



John W. Heffernan



Stan D. Donnelly



Samuel W. Murphy

GICJA's past directors celebrated the organization's 25th anniversary at a special dinner February 13, 1996.
 Photo by Dusty Hopkins.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS BY YEAR OF ELECTION

All terms are three years unless otherwise noted

February 1971

Donnelly, Stan D.
 Ffolliott, Peter (1 yr)
 Griswold, G.J.L. (2 yr)
 Jewett, Edward H. (1 yr)
 Junkin, Lois S.
 Miller, Wyman M.
 Polk, Darrell (2 yr)
 Sharp, Bayard
 Smith, Norman (1 yr)
 Smith, Ted (2 yr)

March 1972

Beall, Warren
 Fowler, Virginia
 Hollingsworth, Amor

March 1973

Fugate, D.O.
 Moore, Roy
 Petersen, M.Q.
 Spurgeon, Bill
 Hammond, Toddy
 (replaced D.O. Fugate, who
 resigned)

March 1974

Brownell, Spencer
 Fell, P.S.P.
 Griswold, G.J.L.
 Reed, Kay

March 1975

Hammond, Toddy
 Lasell, Chet
 Leeson, Robert
 Miller, Wyman M.
 Junkin, Lolo (replaced Toddy
 Hammond, who resigned)

March 1976

Freeman, Joe, Jr.
 Koren, H.L.T.
 Paine, Eustis

March 1977

Amen, Irvin H., Jr.
 Foehl, Chas A., Jr.
 Marshall, Louise
 Petersen, M.Q.

March 1978

Cunning, Palmer
 Junkin, Lolo
 Ketcham, Russell
 Kuhl, Velpeau

March 1979

Carroll, Dave
 Futch, Freddie
 Koren, H.L.T. (1 yr)
 Miller, Wyman M.

March 1980

Anker-Simmons, R.S.
 Batsel, Guy
 Foehl, Mace
 Wiener, John P.
 Junkin, Lolo (replaced R.S.
 Anker-Simmons, who resigned)

March 1981

Koren, H.L.T.
 Kuhl, Velpeau
 Paine, Eustis
 Pugh, Joan

March 1982

Baldwin, Bill
 Futch, Mark
 Hanley, William

March 1983

Dorsey, Dennis
Foehl, Charles
Junkin, Lolo
Seitz, Barbara

March 1984

Italiano, Nelson A.
Koren, H.L.T. (1 yr)
Lerchen, Edward H.
Miller, Wyman M.
Searles, Robert L.

March 1985

Brown, Edward C.
Houghton, Nina
Ringer, Walter

March 1986

Koren, H.L.T.
Mallard, Margaret
Moore, Donna
Paine, Eustis
Miller, Wyman

March 1987

Hayden, Joseph P.
Kuhl, Nell
Lerchen, William
Marsellus, John
Morrison, Angus (replaced
John Marsellus, who resigned)

March 1988

Italiano, Nelson II
Junkin, Lolo
White, Frank
Murphy, Samuel (replaced Nat
Italiano, who resigned)

March 1989

Bracken, Elsie
Miller, Wyman M.
Ringer, Walter
Seitz, Barbara

Kuhl, Nell (replaced Barbara
Seitz, who resigned)
Futch, Mark (replaced Wyman
Miller, who passed away)

March 1990

Eberle, George F.
Searles, Robert L.
Sholley, Nancy F.
White, William B.

March 1991

Magratten, Dorothy
Miller, Pat
Murphy, Samuel

March 1992

Futch, Mark
Heffernan, John
Hooker, Greenie
Kuhl, Nell

March 1993

Butts, Fred
Coale, Edward
Peoples, Robert
Seifert, James

March 1994

Brookhart, Josephine
Robbins, Nathaniel
Searles, Robert L.

March 1995

Bishop, Doris
Murphy, Samuel (2 yr)
Seiglaff, Peter (2 yr)
Sholley, Nancy

March 1996

Burke, Charlie
Fitzgerald, Dick
Gambling, John
White, Bill