

City of Punta Gorda Historic Guide



Blanchard House Museum

405 Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.



Old First National Bank

133 W. Marion Avenue



Punta Gorda Ice House

409 Trivium Trail



Punta Gorda City Hall

326 W. Marion Avenue



Punta Gorda Women's Club

118 Sullivan Street

Downtown Historic Guide

The City of Punta Gorda has a rich, diverse history. 1884 marked the beginning of modern settlement in Punta Gorda when, on the instructions of Isaac Trabue, surveyor Kelley B. Harvey laid out streets and blocks along the Peace River for the Town of Trabue. This newly platted area was originally settled, many centuries before European explorers landed in Florida, by the Calusa tribe. In the 15th century, Spanish ships explored our waters. In the years that followed, small Spanish fishing encampments were established along the coast. These early migrants traded cattle, fish, and other goods with Cuba. In the 19th century, after the Seminole Wars, pioneers settled the land growing crops and raising cattle that fed both U.S. and Confederate Armies during the Civil War. In the 1880s the railroad brought relative prosperity and many famous visitors to the area. Men and women from all over the world have walked along the harbor to view the magnificent sunsets and the majestic wildlife.



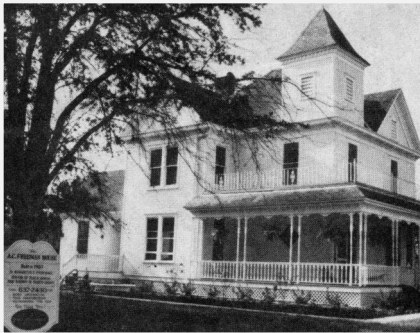
Sandlin House

401 W Retta Esplanade

This home was built circa 1893 by James L. Sandlin. In September 1893 it was described by an area newspaper as, "A house of the modern unique style design with porches on three sides, sharp angles and turns, painted gables, low projecting eaves and bay windows with an observatory on the roof which commands a beautiful view of all the surrounding country. The paint is of dark brown with grey trimmings, a stylish and pretty combination." Mr. Sandlin was from Hamilton County, Florida and moved to "Trabue" before it was incorporated in 1887, as Punta Gorda. He served on the first city council, later served as mayor. Other public service included, president of the Punta Gorda Pilot Commission and was donor of the land for the local Indian Springs Cemetery. In 1893 Sandlin was a wholesale and retail merchant and obtained his supplies by the Serafina C, a 44 ton schooner, every two week from Mobile, Alabama. His wife was Mary Seward, from another local pioneer Florida family.

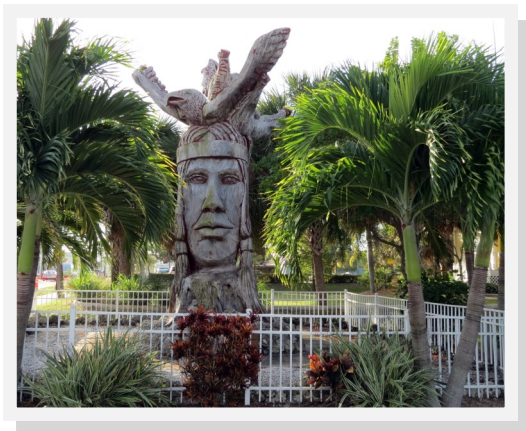
Augustus C. Freeman House

311 W Retta
Esplanade



A.C. Freeman came from Jasper County, Georgia to Punta Gorda in 1889 to work for the Florida Southern Railroad. Three years later he entered the mercantile business and became a grower of oranges and pineapple. Freeman held several local positions including Tax Collector, City Councilman and

mayor of Punta Gorda. He was elected sheriff of DeSoto County and served from 1904 and 1912. Freeman built this Queen Ann style home on East Marion Avenue in 1903 at a cost of less than \$900. After Freeman became sheriff he moved to the county seat at Arcadia. This beautiful home, now over a hundred years old and standing in its third location, was donated to the City of Punta Gorda by the Charlotte Community Foundation. The Freeman house reflects the historic nature of Punta Gorda and is a gateway to the City and its future.



Calostimucu (Native American Statue)

This Native American carving is carved from the trunk of a monkey pod tree that died in 1973. It was carved by Peter Toth, an artist who has vowed to create statues honoring Native American culture in all fifty states. The artist spent three months creating this unusual carving. It depicts a brave on one side and a maiden on the other. Over their heads is an emerging dream of a dying bison and an eagle trying to honor and raise awareness of the damage prejudice and injustice caused to native peoples.

City Hall



The town was originally named “Trabue” for the town’s founder Isaac Trabue who platted the site on February 24, 1885. Punta Gorda was incorporated as a municipality on December 7, 1887 in Desoto County. A majority of the thirty-four residents who voted in the incorporation election also voted to change the name to Punta Gorda which was the name of the point of land to the immediate west. The City of Punta Gorda played a pivotal role in pressuring the Florida legislature to split Desoto County into several counties including Charlotte County in 1921. Today Punta Gorda is the only incorporated municipality in Charlotte County and is the oldest local governmental entity or business. The city hall was built in 1926 and continues to serve the City’s as office space.



Early School House

215 Goldstein St



Punta Gorda's first public school was located in a community building where the First Methodist Church is located. The first building constructed to be a school was on Goldstein Street. Built in the 1890's, the one room frame structure accommodated the lower grades and was operated by the City of Punta Gorda. In 1902 the school was enlarged and a second floor was added. The September 1902, the enrollment totaled 226 which included 20 above the sixth grade. The next year was first year of junior high and in 1905 became Punta Gorda High School with a 12th grade in 1906. By 1909 it was apparent that a new school was needed. A site was donated by Governor Albert W. Gilchrist on the corner of Taylor Street and Charlotte Avenue. The new high school was opened in 1912.

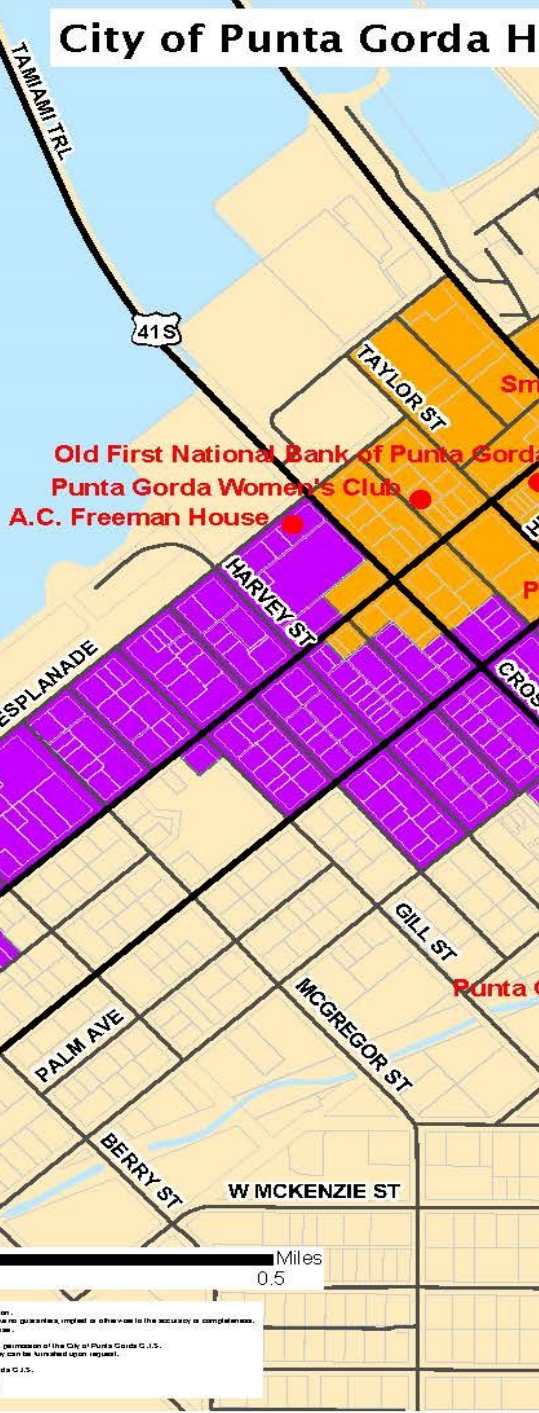
Goldstein Building

264 W
Marion Ave



Ephraim Goldstein and his family were one of the first to live in “Trabue” when they arrived in 1886. He was born in Germany and immigrated to New York City in 1864. Ephraim was an accomplished musician, he married Fredericka Pergament, and they moved to Savannah, Georgia. The Goldsteins and Jacob Wotitzky moved to “Trabue” and composed the first mercantile firm here. He participated in the election to incorporate “Trabue” as the City of Punta Gorda in 1887 and served several terms on the city council. Ephraim died in 1906. His widow, and son Harry, constructed this concrete block building in 1911. The blocks were poured on site by Clay Porter and this was one of the first concrete block structures in Punta Gorda. It housed Goldstein’s furniture store. The building received minor damage in the 1926 hurricane. On August 13, 2004 Hurricane Charley roared thru and ripped the 2nd floor off the structure. Rather than tear the building down the owner, a local architect designed and constructed a new 2nd story in keeping with the original design but meeting the needs of the modern world. The Goldstein’s home, which was next door, was the first home built by carpenters in Punta Gorda.

City of Punta Gorda H



Legend

- National Register Listed Structures
- National Register District
- Trabue Woods Historic District
- Downtown Historic District
- City Limits
- Streets



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Revised on November 2003 by Michael S. Austin
Using data from Charlotte County C.I.S. Department





Punta Gorda Women's Club

118 Sullivan St

Three local ladies groups consolidated to form the Punta Gorda Woman's Club in 1925. Judge William F. Cooper of Cook County, Illinois donated this Sullivan Street site and in June 1927, their club house was opened. The Mission Revival style building was designed to provide facilities for educational, cultural and civic events. A stage was provided for plays and a kitchen enhanced its use for dinners. Many musical programs were scheduled with both local and outside talent and a plethora of organizations also used the Club's rooms. The Woman's Club was also used for high school dances. For many years the Punta Gorda Library occupied a section of the building. The Punta Gorda Woman's Club did much to enhance the lives of the people of Punta Gorda & is still available for event rentals.



Merchants Bank Building

133 W Marion
Ave



The Merchants Bank of Punta Gorda commenced business April 9, 1912, with resources over \$75,000. The Merchants Bank was a competitor to the already existing Punta Gorda Bank which had operated since 1899. The new bank building was constructed in a Neo-Classical Revival style of brick with white columns and presented a new more prosperous image to the growing frontier town that was the City of Punta Gorda. The cost of the land and the construction of the building was \$3,500. The Merchants Bank converted its state charter in 1914 and became the First National Bank of Punta Gorda under which it grew and prospered until the economic crash of 1929, which caused the bank to close its doors as did many other banks both in Florida and the nation. Since then, this National Register of Historic Places listed structure has been occupied by various businesses



Town Clock

Marion Ave

This replica of a turn-of-the century street clock replaces the public clock over the First National Bank entrance. When the First National bank failed, the clock was moved to the Punta Gorda State Bank at the southwest corner of King Street and Marion Ave. That bank became First Florida in a new building and the clock was sold to a bank in Wauchula, FL, where the historic clock still resides. Funds for the present street clock were raised by public subscription in 1990 when negotiations to buy the original clock back from the bank in Wauchula proved fruitless. Chimes ring on the half hour and hour.

Smith Arcade

121 E
Marion Ave



Henry W. Smith constructed the Arcade in a Mission Revival architectural style popular during the economic “boom” of the 1920’s. Smith, a local business man and long time county commissioner was the developer. It was commonly called the “post office arcade” because the lead tenant was the United State Post Office. Other spaces in the building were occupied by a drug store, grocery store, doctor’s office, real estate broker, jewelry store, etc. H.W. Smith was a native of Lafayette County, Florida, moved to Punta Gorda with his family in 1902. He had successfully operated a grocery store and a bakery. The “Arcade” was and a vital part of Punta Gorda’s business district.



Blanchard House

406 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd

The Blanchard House, built in 1925, was home to Joseph and Minnie Blanchard. He was a steam boat pilot, and she a mail order bride. The house was purchased by Bernice Russell in 1997, after all of the Blanchard heirs were deceased. At her death in 1999, the house was donated to the Bernice Russell CDC by Bernice Russell's daughter, Dr. Martha R. Bireda, and her children. The house was moved from its original location, at 613 Fitzhugh Avenue, to its present location Emancipation Day, May 20th, 2002. Today the house is open regularly as the Blanchard House Museum of African American History and Culture of Charlotte County (<http://www.blanchardhousemuseum.org/>).

Punta Gorda Ice Plant

408 Tamiami Trail



The availability of manufactured ice was critical to Punta Gorda's early development. With the completion of the Florida Southern Railroad to Punta Gorda in August 1886, for the first time, rapid transportation was provided, fresh fish could be shipped north, packed in ice. The ice came by rail from Waycross, GA and Jacksonville, FL. In 1891, Punta Gorda had its first ice manufacturing plant. It was the first ice plant on this Gulf Coast of Florida south of Tampa. It was replaced in 1895 by Golden's improved ice machine with a 30 tons daily capacity. In 1913, the Punta Gorda Ice Company, added, on this site, a brick building 41 ft. by 41 ft. for cold storage.



Charlotte County Court House

226 Taylor St

Punta Gorda waged a 34 year political battle for a separate county and as a result Charlotte County was created by the state legislature in 1921. When Florida became a territory of the United States in 1821, Florida had two counties and what is now Charlotte County was part of St. Johns County. After several county changes and statehood in 1845, this area became part of Hillsborough County. Then, in 1856, it became part of Manatee County. DeSoto County was divided into five counties in 1921, and Charlotte was one of the five, being named for "Charlotte Harbor." The harbor was named for Queen Charlotte, the wife of King George III. From 1921 until 1928, the new county rented office space to serve as a court house. The new building's exterior was Georgian style with a touch of Italian and the structure cost \$200,000 to build. For many years the court house was occupied by the Sheriff, School Superintendent, Clerk of the Court, Tax Collector, Tax Appraiser, Supervisor of Elections, County Judge and county jail. This began to change as the county grew. When the Justice Center was built in 1999, the Court House was closed.



Train Depot

1009 Taylor Rd

The **Punta Gorda Atlantic Coast Line Depot** is a historic Atlantic Coast Line Railroad depot in Punta Gorda, Florida, United States. It is located at 1009 Taylor Road. Built in 1928, is the sole survivor of the 6 depots built by the Atlantic Coast Line in Mediterranean Revival style. The building which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was designed mainly to handle freight. The passenger area occupies a small portion of the northern end of the building. Separate ticket windows, waiting rooms and bathrooms reflect the segregation practiced at that time. The building was obtained by the Punta Gorda Historical Society through the generosity of Fred Babcock. Restoration of the building is complete. The Antique Mall is now in the large freight room. The Antique Mall features over twenty independent booths. There is a wide selection of antiques, collectible items and just fascinating stuff from the past. Income generated by the mall is used to maintain the building and keep it open to the public.



Punta Gorda History Park 501 Shreve St

The Calaboos

In 1886, Punta Gorda, or Trabue as it was known then, was a rough and lawless town. Wild and raucous cowboys and fisherman boozed it up Saturday nights and



the city fathers decided that something must be done. To this end the town built a portable cage with steel bars. The calaboose was the original town jail, and was placed on Olympia Avenue, across from the old county Courthouse near Herald Court. This primitive jail was found on the Parker Ranch some time ago, and with the help of local business people, has been restored and moved to the History Park.



Trabue Land Sales Office

Punta Gorda founder Isaac Trabue platted and began development of Trabue, later incorporated as Punta Gorda. This one-story, one gable, wood frame office became the town's first post office. He later added a kitchen and rented the cottage to winter visitors. The building was donated by Bob and Norma Henry and was moved to the History Park in November, 2000.

The Cigar Cottage

El Palmetto Cigar Co. flourished in the 1890's, but was defunct by 1901. Near their factory at Virginia and Cochran Streets were small cottages for their workers. After the company folded, Del Huckyby of Cleveland bought a number of the cottages and moved them to Brown and Wood Streets. Recent owner Mike Nicholson donated this cottage to The Punta Gorda Historical Society (Old Punta Gorda, Inc.) and on October 12, 1999 it was moved to the History Park.





Punta Gorda
FLORIDA