

# Punta Gorda Downtown History Guide



**Sandlin House**

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**

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 Collectors, 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.

Enterprise Punta Gorda also publishes the **Punta Gorda Waterfront Walking Guide**, the **Historic Mural Walking Tour Guide** and the **Punta Gorda Community Calendar**. Go to [www.enterprisepuntagorda.org](http://www.enterprisepuntagorda.org) for more information.



**Calostimucu**

This indian 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 an indian statue 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 the Indian and to raise awareness of the damage prejudice and injustice have caused.



**City Hall**

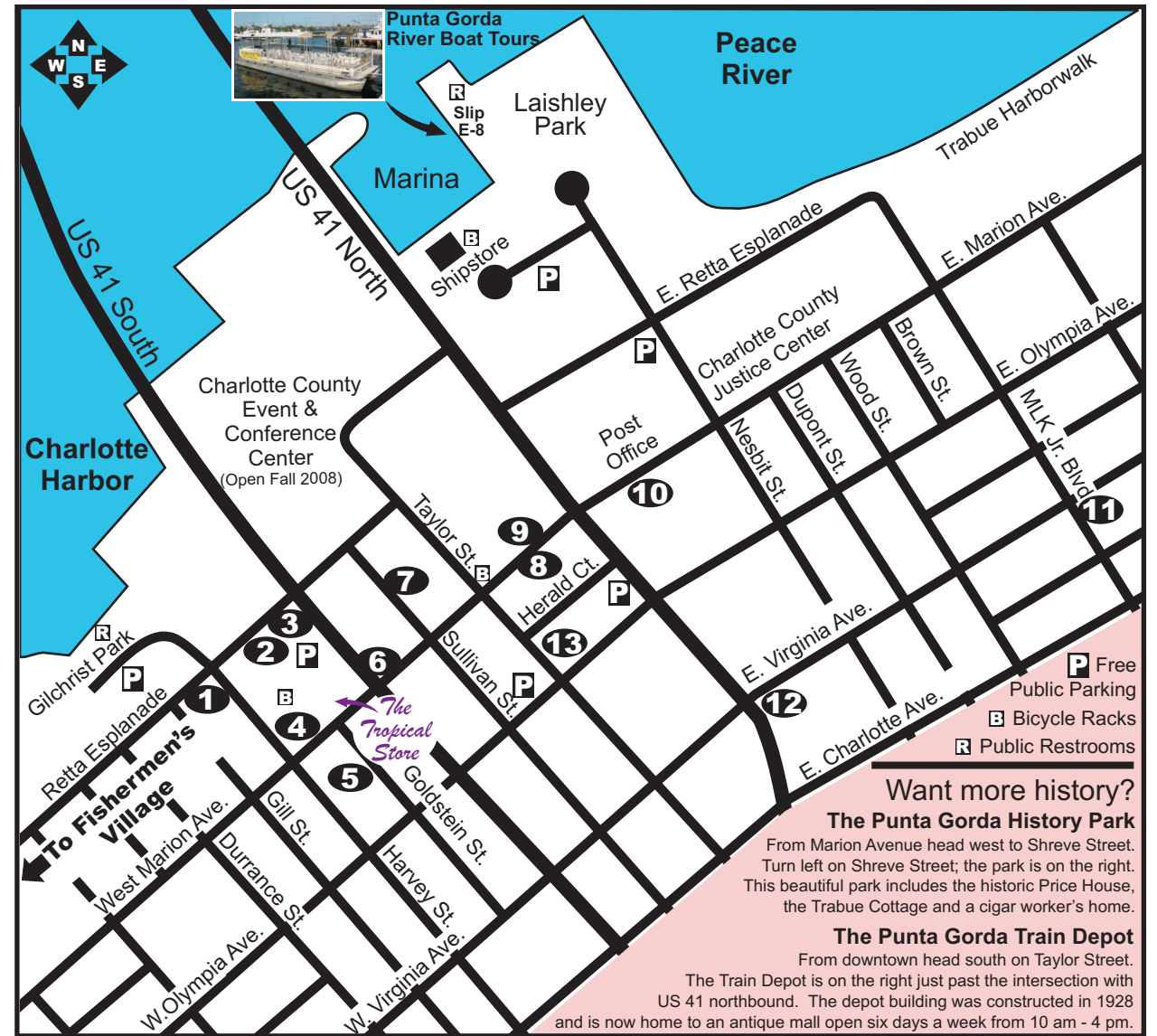
The town was originally named "Trabue" for the town's founder Isaac Trabue who platted the site on February 24, 1885. Punta Gorda was incorporated as a municipality on December 7, 1887. A majority of the thirty-four residents who voted in the incorporation election also voted to change the name to Punta Gorda which was the name of the point of land to the immediate west. The City of Punta Gorda is the only 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 needs.



**Early School House**

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.

# Map of Downtown Punta Gorda



## Want more history?

### The Punta Gorda History Park

From Marion Avenue head west to Shreve Street. Turn left on Shreve Street; the park is on the right. This beautiful park includes the historic Price House, the Trabue Cottage and a cigar worker's home.

### The Punta Gorda Train Depot

From downtown head south on Taylor Street. The Train Depot is on the right just past the intersection with US 41 northbound. The depot building was constructed in 1928 and is now home to an antique mall open six days a week from 10 am - 4 pm.

## Helpful Resources

### Enterprise Punta Gorda

941-575-9099 [www.enterprisepuntagorda.org](http://www.enterprisepuntagorda.org)

### Main Street Punta Gorda

941-575-9099 [www.mainstreetpuntagorda.org](http://www.mainstreetpuntagorda.org)

### Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce

941-639-3720 [www.puntagorda-chamber.com](http://www.puntagorda-chamber.com)

### Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce

941-639-2222 [www.charlottecountychamber.org](http://www.charlottecountychamber.org)

## Instructions for Safety

Always use the sidewalks provided. Use caution when crossing any road and always use the pedestrian crosswalks when available.

**The user of this guide accepts all risks.**

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# Downtown History Guide



**6**  
**Goldstein Building**

Ephriam 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 was damaged in the 1926 hurricane and structurally damaged in the hurricane of August 13, 2004, consequently the second floor was replaced. The Goldstein's home, which was next door, was the first home built by carpenters in Punta Gorda.



**7**  
**Punta Gorda Woman's Club**

Three local ladies groups consolidated and 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 facility 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. Other organizations also used the Club's rooms. The Tourist Club and the Parents-Teachers Association used the building for their monthly meetings. Frequently, the Peace River Federation of Woman's Clubs held all day meetings there. 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.



**8**  
**Merchants Bank Building**

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 of brick with white columns and presented a new image to the growing 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, the building has been occupied by various professional offices.



**9**  
**Town Clock**

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. Funds for the present street clock were raised by public subscription in 1990 when negotiations to buy the original clock back from Wauchula proved fruitless. Chimes ring on the half hour and hour.



**10**  
**Smith Arcade**

Henry W. Smith constructed the Arcade 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 space occupied included 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 a vital part of Punta Gorda's business district.



**11**  
**Blanchard House**

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 her 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 20<sup>th</sup>, 2002.



**12**  
**Punta Gorda Ice Plant**

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, Georgia and

Jacksonville. In 1891, Punta Gorda had its first ice manufacturing plant with a capacity of thirty tons per day. It was the first ice plant on this coast 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. The Florida Power and Light Company acquired the property in 1925.

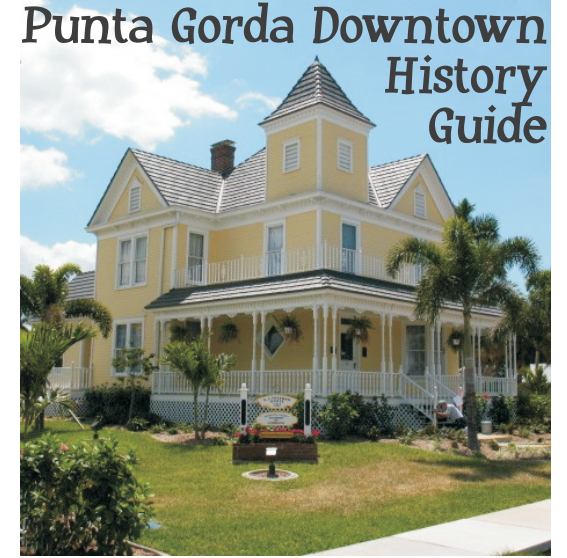


**13**  
**Charlotte County Court House**

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.

# Punta Gorda Downtown History Guide



**A walking guide to help you explore our historic downtown.**

This guide features thirteen historic landmarks important to the foundation and success of our community.

**For more information about the history of Punta Gorda:**

The Punta Gorda Historical Society is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization. Activities center on preserving historical structures, streets, and landmarks and presenting oral and written history of Punta Gorda.

Punta Gorda Historical Society  
118 Sullivan Street, Punta Gorda, FL 33950  
941-639-1887

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**While you are in Punta Gorda, take the time to visit:**

- |                                       |                     |   |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Babcock Wilderness Adventures         | Fishermen's Village | Military Heritage & Aviation Museum               |
| Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center |                     | Peace River Wildlife Center and Ponce deLeon Park |