

Limona
Gornto Lake
Lake Chapman

6 pgs

The following is an excerpt from:
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY
HISTORIC RESOURCES SURVEY REPORT

Submitted to:
Florida Department of State
Bureau of Historic Preservation

October 1998

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* These excerpts have been taken from the Historic Resources Survey Report with permission given by the Hillsborough County Historic Resources Review Board on December 15, 2003. The intention is to help provide targeted historical information on the water bodies in Hillsborough County.

Limona

Situated between State Roads 60 and State Road 574, west of Parsons Avenue to Lake Gornto, Limona developed into one of Hillsborough County's earliest "snowbird" communities. Immigrating from Madison, Wisconsin, in 1876, Judge Joseph Gillette Knapp was largely responsible for Limona's development. Arriving in Tampa on January 6, 1876, on the schooner "Dill," Judge Knapp settled into the Orange Grove Hotel where he met a man who extolled the virtues of an area east of Tampa. Within a week, Judge Knapp staked his claim on 160 acres of land in Township 29 South, Range 20 East, Section 15.ⁱ

Only a lightly traveled dirt trail connected the area to other communities when Judge Knapp settled in Limona. Along with C.D. Knapp and his wife, Judge Knapp moved into an abandoned, windowless and doorless log house. The land Knapp settled on had several orange saplings on it, which he replanted, creating an orange grove. With the help of hired hands, Judge Knapp cleared and grubbed the land, planting more orange saplings and corn. Within a few weeks after moving in, Judge Knapp christened his homestead Limona Farm. Limona is a derivative of the Spanish word for lemon, meaning a place where lemons will grow.ⁱⁱ

Within months of his arrival, Judge Knapp began writing of the benefits of Limona, Hillsborough County, and South Florida in out-of-state newspapers, including the *Wisconsin State Journal*, *Milwaukee News*, and the *New Mexico Independent*. As part of his self-appointed promotion duties, Knapp attempted to convince visitors to relocate to the area. By 1877, Knapp persuaded E.E. Pratt to settle down in Limona. Mr. Pratt had been sent by the Illinois-based Elgin Watch Company to find a retirement community for their employees. The company formed the Limona Park Association. Soon after purchasing property in Limona, Elgin employees followed in Pratt's footsteps. Additionally, Judge Knapp convinced several of his relatives, including his cousin Silas A. Jones, his nephew Philander Knapp, his niece Georgia Mead, and others to move to Limona.ⁱⁱⁱ

The settlement began taking off after this, for Knapp's efforts did not stop with mere promotions. He established Limona's post office on March 19, 1878. Because of the large tracts of pine trees in the area, sawmills opened, supplying lumber for the construction of newcomers' homes. As land was cleared people began farming the property. By the 1880s, farmers grew oranges, tomatoes, cucumbers, bananas, guavas, corn, grape fruit, sugar cane, cotton, pineapples, mangos, figs, and dates, as well as raised hogs and cattle. Enough families with children moved into the community for E.E. Pratt to petition for a public school at Limona on September 10, 1880. Dr. Pratt became a trustee of the school. On November 30, 1882, Judge Knapp, Dr. Pratt, J.L. Coe, George Chamberlain and G.K. Mead joined forces to form the Limona Academy Association. The purpose of the association was to create the Limona Academy of Arts, Letters and Sciences for area children. Knapp donated ten acres of his property to the association, while others gave money, materials, and labor to the advancement of the academy. Located at the corner of present-day Limona Road and Bates Avenue, the school building was staffed by volunteer teachers.^{iv}

Along with the success came problems. Tension arose between native Floridians and the newly arrived immigrants. Many Floridians did not file with the government the land they had settled upon. Consequently, when the immigrants arrived and filed for homestead, in many instances it was on property that natives considered their own. Additionally, many of the immigrants were fruit growers, whereas many of the natives were cattlemen, which made for volatile situations. As tensions heightened between the two groups, Judge Knapp and other newcomers received threatening letters, telling them to clear out of town. Despite having their lives threatened, most of the new homesteaders stayed.^v

By 1883, Limona's population reportedly grew to 400 with fruit and vegetables being the primary produce grown. Prominent community members included Judge Knapp, who served as Limona's postmaster, a Mr. Burdick who operated a saw and grist mill, a Mr. Ferris who ran a general store, and a Mr. Loring who served as the area's physician. Rev. Parker preached at the Methodist church. At least 34 families farmed in Limona. Farms ranged in size from F.C. Avey's, J.A. Davenport's, J.R. Kinsey's, Joseph Packer's and Mastrom Williams' ten acres each, to T.W. Jones' 440 acres. John Brandon, J.M. Brown, and C.S. Doolittle operated farms between 320 and 390 acres.^{vi}

Two important events for Limona occurred between 1883 and 1890. The first being the completion of the South Florida Railroad and the start of daily train service between Tampa and Plant City on December 10, 1883. A month and a half later on January 22, 1884, the entire line was completed, connecting Tampa to Sanford. Limona was approximately three miles south of the tracks. This line would spark the development of Tampa, Plant City, and much of the rest of Hillsborough County, while almost killing other communities such as Cork and Shiloh.^{vii} In 1885 Limona was described as:

situated in the central part of Hillsborough county, about 3 miles from the line of the S.F.Ry., by which it has connection with the city of Tampa, 10 miles distant. The place was first settled as a county settlement during the period of the Indian wars, and now numbers about 30 families. There are a number of fine orange groves just beginning to bear, this industry being well adapted to the soil. There are a number of lakes and ponds in the vicinity, including Lake Limona, covering 150 acres, and the Alafia river is but 4 miles distant, and is navigable for small boats to this point. The village contains a church, the M.E. (South) Rev. – Phillips, pastor, and a common school. There is much fine timber, and a good opening for a saw mill with facilities for the manufacture of crates for vegetables, fruits, etc.^{viii}

In 1890, the second and more important event occurred in Limona. The Florida Central and Peninsula Railroad laid tracks from Plant City to Tampa, going through the communities of Turkey Creek, Sydney, Valrico, and Limona. A year later E.E. Pratt had Limona surveyed with town lots and smaller business lots on both side of the tracks. Dr. Pratt filed the plat on September 26, 1891. By 1893 Limona became an express stop on

the railroad line. Recognizing the opportunity, Dr. Knapp opened a store for residents. Because of the railroad and because of the area's success with citrus, the Perkins and Poore company opened a large packing house in Limona in 1893.^{ix}

However, not everything fared well in Limona. With the coming of the railroad, the movement of people, and the improvement of county schools, the Limona Academy declined. The building shut its doors forever, and eventually burned to the ground shortly after the turn of the century.^x

Despite the closure of the academy, Limona prospered during the early part of the 20th century. In 1911 the community's population totaled 200. L. Tourtellette served as postmaster, operated a general store, and managed the Citrus Exchange. T.M. Britton had a naval stores operation, C.B. Brown was a stock breeder, J.E. Cook was a poultry breeder, T.A. Lake was an orange grower, Mrs. R.C. Poore was a baker and J.B. Withers managed the Limona Stone and Cement Brick Company. Seven years later 250 people resided in Limona. R.M. Martin took over as postmaster and operated Limona's only general store. A.P. Stucky now owned the naval stores operation while M.D. Polston became a cotton grower. Mrs. G.K. Mead owned a dairy and C.A. Dunham served as the area mason. Stock and poultry breeding and orange growing were the primary pursuits of area farmers. Community residents formed the Limona Home Improvement Association. In 1914 they bought a piece of property and constructed a building for the association around 1916. In 1928 or 1928, the building burned to the ground. The same year the building burned the association built another one that still exists today. The association served as an important center for the community where ice-cream socials occurred, the Limona Women's Club held meetings, and teen dances took place.^{xi}

By 1925 Limona's population had skyrocketed to 500. It had a United Brethren Church, and L.E. Tourtelotte returned as postmaster and operator of Limona's only general store. Tourtelotte also served as manager of the Limona Citrus Growers Association. A.P. Stucky continued to operate a naval stores enterprise. Orange growers and stock and poultry breeders continued to prosper in Limona. C.A. Dunham continued to be a mason and Mrs. G.K. Mead still owned her dairy. Residents could now get anything they needed notarized by J.W. Babbitt.^{xii}

The depression hit Limona hard. In the 1930s Limona was described as "little more than a railway depot and a post office." Most of the area roads were unpaved throughout the 1940s, no street lights existed, and few residences had telephones. Eventually, the railroad shut down the train depot. Those people that remained in the area, however, refused to sell their property. Even with the decline in the improvement association's enrollment beginning in the 1960s, Limona residents held on to what they had. However, Limona's post office was closed in 1964 with mail delivered from Brandon. During the same era, Brandon growth swallowed up much of Limona, causing the community to lose much of its identity to non-residents.^{xiii}

With the growth of Brandon, Limona's population expanded. In 1990 the community's population was 5,350 residents who lived in 2,220 homes within 2.21 square miles.

Today, Limona exists east of present-day I-75, west of Parsons Avenue, north of State Road 60, and south of Windhorst Road.^{xiv}

i. Marlene Boggs, "'Citizens' of Limona Issued Threats to 'Yankey' Newcomers," *Tampa Tribune* October 28, 1990, 6H; Mark Gale, "Home Improvement Group Becoming a Victim of Apathy," *Tampa Times* December 19, 1979; Leland Hawes, "Judge Joseph Knapp Settled Limona Late in 19th Century," *Tampa Tribune* October 28, 1990, 6H; J.G. Knapp, "Our Florida Letter," *The Sunland Tribune* August 4, 1877, 1,4; J.G. Knapp, "Past, Present, Future," *The Sunland Tribune* January 12, 1882, 2; U.S. Department of the Interior, "General Land Office, Automated Records Project, Pre-1908 Homestead and Cash Entry Patents."

ii. Boggs, "'Citizens' of Limona Issued Threats to 'Yankey' Newcomers," 6H; Hawes, "Judge Joseph Knapp Settles Limona Late in 19th Century," 6H; Knapp, "Our Florida Letter," 1,4; Knapp, "Past, Present, Future," 2; Morris, *Florida Place Names*, 149.

iii. Boggs, "'Citizens' of Limona Issued Threats to 'Yankey' Newcomers," 6H; Hawes, "Judge Joseph Knapp Settled Limona Late in 19th Century," 6H. Fortunately, *The Sunland Tribune* reprinted many of his articles. See "Our Florida Letter," *The Sunland Tribune* August 4, 1877, 1; "Our Florida Letter," *The Sunland Tribune* August 17, 1878, 1; "Florida," *The Sunland Tribune* October 12, 1878, 1; "Florida," *The Sunland Tribune* June 12, 1879; "South of 28^o" *The Sunland Tribune* April 23, 1881, 2.

iv. Bradbury and Hallock, *A Chronology of Florida Post Offices*, 48; Knapp, "Past, Present, Future," 2; J.G. Knapp, "South of 28^o," *The Sunland Tribune* April 23, 1881, 2; Theodore Lesley, "Limona Academy, 1882," *Horse & Pony* September 1, 1970, 2; "Limona Academy Association Minutes of the Director's Meetings" (on file USF Special Collections); "Limona Items," *The Sunland Tribune* July 6, 1882, 3; "Limona Matters," *The Sunland Tribune* July 30, 1881, 3; D.B. McKay, "Group Seeks Holders of Limona Land Shares," *Tampa Tribune* February 21, 1960, 15-E; "South of 28^o," 2; Tampa and Vicinity," *The Sunland Tribune* April 6, 1878, 3; *When History was in the Making*, 5.

v. Boggs, "'Citizens' of Limona Issued Threats to 'Yankey' Newcomers," 6H; "Limona, June 21st, 1880," *The Sunland Tribune* July 1, 1880, 1.

vi. *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1883-1884*, 360. The 400 figure population is somewhat circumspect, for this would make Limona the third largest community in Hillsborough. While believing Knapp was successful in his attempts to promote Limona, this population figure is doubtful. Additionally, if the number of families is correct, then the average Limona family had nearly 12 people in it. This is quite large, throwing more doubt into the figure. In Webb, *Webb's Florida, Historical, Industrial, & Biographical*, 58, states that about 30 families live in Limona, supporting the 34 families figure given in *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1883-1884*, 360. .

vii. Bruton and Bailey, *Plant City*, 73-77.

viii. Webb, *Webb's Florida, Historical, Industrial, & Biographical*, 58.

ix. Bruton and Bailey, *Plant City*, 101-102; Clarke, *The Gate-to-the-Gulf (Tampa) City Directory, and Hillsboro County Guide, 1893*, 208; "Limona Sprays," *Tampa Weekly Tribune* November 17, 1893, 5; Plat Book 1, page 45, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Hillsborough County, Tampa, Fl.

x. Lesley, "Limona Academy, 1882," 2; Allan Smith, "Brandon Rotarians Begin Planning for Limona Academy Fund Effort," *The Brandon News* May 17, 1967, 1.

xi. *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1911-1912*, 274; *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1918*, 347; Gale, "Home Improvement Group Becoming a Victim of Apathy;" Michelle Jones, "Recalling Life in Limona," *St. Petersburg Times* November 6, 1989; Ellen Knight, "Lemon, Lime, \$1

Here, 50 Cents There: ‘The Limona Improvement Association’” *East Hillsborough Tribune* May 2, 1977, 3-E; Limona’s population appears to have gone on a roller coaster ride between 1883 to 1911. In 1883 it supposedly reached 400, then in Clarke, *The Gate-to-the-Gulf (Tampa) City Directory, and Hillsboro County Guide, 1893*, 208, the population dropped to 75, and then in 1911 climbed back up 200. As I have argued previously, the 1883 figure seems too high. If the 1883 figure is taken out of the equation, then the ups and downs turn out to be a steady increase that was fueled by the railroad development.

xii. *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1925*, 509-510.

xiii. Federal Writers’ Project, *Seeing Tampa*, 125; Gale, “Home Improvement Group Becoming a Victim of Apathy;” Knight, “Lemon, Lime, \$1 Here, 50 Cents There,” 3E; The Planning Commission, *Central Hillsborough Communities Plan*, 34; Tania Spencer, “A Village Holds Its Own Amid Suburban Sprawl,” *Tampa Tribune* October 18, 1997, 8-Brandon.

xiv. The Planning Commission, *Central Hillsborough Communities Plan*, 6; Spencer, “A Village Holds Its Own Amid Suburban Sprawl,” 8-Brandon.