

# Part I - Landings at 25 - Encore

## This series was first run in the 2005-6 Landings Eagle. It has been moderately updated.

By Irwin Starr

### Years as the A. Palmer Homestead

Little is recorded of the acreage now called The Landings from homesteading by the Stephen Drew and George Bronson families in 1869 and during its era as "the old Peck place." The 140 acres had picked up that nickname by the time it was purchased by Honore and Potter Palmer Jr. in 1911.

Brothers Honore and Potter Jr. were the sons of Chicagoan and Sarasota pioneer Bertha Palmer, referred to in the conventions of the time as Mrs. Potter Palmer. The Palmer family summer home was at what is now *Historic Spanish Point* just a few miles south of The Landings. Their house was described at the time in the *Chicago Tribune* as "a storybook house, like an illustration for a medieval tale, built over saltwater . . . flows . . . through an arched tunnel like a

northern style both inside and out. It will front on the bay 110 feet with a depth from 40 to 60 feet. The rooms will be large and airy, and piazzas will be on several sides. This will be the largest house on the bay, and one of the finest residences built this year. They called their homestead *Immokalee* said to be Seminole language for "My Home." (The community of Immokalee, Florida is 32 miles southeast of Ft. Myers as the crow flies, has a population of about 20,000 and is home to the Seminole Indian Casino.) Little detail and only one photograph, on a postcard circa 1916 (shown above), exist.

When mother, Bertha Palmer, died in 1918, brother Potter moved back to The Oaks. Honore bought out his share of Immokalee.

Wednesday morning, November 30, 1921 brought disaster as the Immokalee home was destroyed by fire, as reported the following day in the *Sarasota Times*.



Immokalee - Home of Honore Palmer

Venetian bridge." Her home was dubbed "The Oaks."

The sons, Honore, also known as *Cappy*, and Potter Jr. began construction on their property in 1911. Access to their first home is through what is now The Landings main gate, right at Kestral Park North and left at Peregrine Point Drive - go past

### IMMOKALEE HAS BEEN DESTROYED BY FIRE

Immokalee, the beautiful winter home of Messrs. Potter and Honore Palmer, on Sarasota Bay, with its rare paintings and art treasures is a heap of ashes and ruins, fire having broken out Wednesday morning. Sarasota's fire department responded to the call for help but it was impossible to save anything but a small part of the furniture, as the fire had gained sufficient headway before the engine arrived four miles down the bay.

The loss is estimated at \$60,000, partly covered by insurance. While different opinions are given as to the cause of the fire which broke out in the second story, no definite cause can be ascertained.

It is not yet known whether the Palmers will rebuild.

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Honore, by then sole owner of the home, chose not to rebuild. Instead he took over the caretaker's home, remodeling and expanding it - perhaps starting something of a Landings tradition!

The only existing description of that home came from a Chicago Tribune writer known only as Thalia. She is quoted in a Sarasota column entitled "Of This And That", by an also under-identified author, "Helen:"

*On its broad sunny acres is the low white country house of the Honore Palmers called Immokalee. .. It lives up to its name more truly than do most country houses. It looks lived-in and really has the feel of home. Its walls are lined with the paintings and drawings of the late Honore Palmer, Jr. It has both warmth of living and the fresh coolness which is delectable in houses in the semi-tropics.*

*The first house was razed by fire and this one was remodeled from the caretaker's cottage and in its luxurious enlargement the quiet*

*informality, of the simple white clapboard house has been kept.*

Based on the probate filings of Honore Palmer he and his wife, Grace Brown Palmer, lived in the caretaker's home until building a new residence in Immokalee in 1939. That home was built, quite possibly, on property now outside of The Landings on the Bay just north of Peregrine Point Drive in an area now called Kimlira. Honore died in March 10, 1964. Grace lived in the new home until her death April 18, 1966. Honore's will was not finally probated until about 1968.

What is now The Landings plus some nearby and adjacent properties are referred to in Palmer's probate as "The Homestead" and Parcel #1. Landings property owners will enjoy the probate appraisal of that property and improvements circa 1968:

- VALUATION:**
- Depreciated Value of Main House \$ 36,700.00



Grace Brown Palmer (Mrs. Honore Palmer), and Bertha Honore Palmer, at Lake County Fair, Lake Forest, July 1916. Chicago Historical Society



Honore Palmer Fm: Story of Sarasota M.E. Russell - 1946

• Depreciated Value of Ranch Foreman's House 17,100.00

• Estimated Salvage Value of Other Buildings 5,000.00

• Site Improvements 5,000.00

• Lane - 157.282 acres @ \$3,500 per acre 530,487.00

• TOTAL \$ 614,287.00

A bit less than a typical single family home was selling for at the height of the Real estate market in The Landings!

*Next time... after the Palmers.*

**Editor's Note:** Special thanks to the Sarasota County Historical Center, and to writer Mark D. Smith who wrote the

only contemporary piece we could locate on Immokalee.

Also to the County Clerk's Record Office for their assistance in locating Honore Palmer's probate documents.

## Part II - Landings at 25 - Encore

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A few year's after the death of Honore and his wife Grace Brown Palmer the homestead went into a family trust. The trust included an unwieldy 37 heirs. Many had tried to buy the property over the years but apparently lack of consensus by the heirs stalled any action.

In the late seventies real estate brokers were hearing the Trust was ready to move on the Palmer homestead property. Developers C & M Associates, "M" for Robert Morris and "C" for his longtime development partner Jaime Carrion, decided they wanted the property. Knowing there would be great competition for this prime land, near the water, near the city itself and a place of natural beauty, they made a risky decision. They would offer a very strong contract with no contingencies to let them off the hook and approximately four million dollars cash, payable in thirty days.

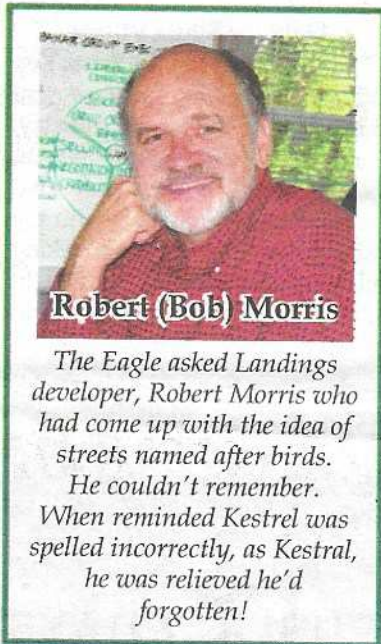
They won the property and Immokalee (a name they were originally intending to keep) was on its way to becoming one of the most desirable gated communities in Sarasota, The Landings.

Bob Morris is a developer known for maintaining as much of the natural surroundings as possible. He first develops the vision. He describes that process with an anecdote about development of the Siesta Dunes project on Siesta Key. The puzzle was how to handle the dunes. Flattening them would go counter to all he's sought to bring to developments. He and his toddler son Rob - now known as Robert A. Morris III, and manager of much of the construction activity at Phillippi Landings - were building sand castles on the Siesta beach. Well, Rob was building sandcastles while Dad was playing with sand representations for the new Siesta Dunes development. His sand models resulted in the

saving the natural landscape and providing a unique setting.

He entered his newly acquired Immokalee seeking the vision to take best advantage of the spectacular setting.

The first call was easy. Maintain the entry way and the primary road back to the original homestead. That road became Peregrine Point Drive with its canopy trees and the intricate Banyans. He also decided it was necessary to develop traffic islands on various Landings roads to take advantage of existing greenery.



**Robert (Bob) Morris**

*The Eagle asked Landings developer, Robert Morris who had come up with the idea of streets named after birds.*

*He couldn't remember. When reminded Kestrel was spelled incorrectly, as Kestral, he was relieved he'd forgotten!*

Then he came upon two unexpected obstacles. The prehistoric middens - essentially junk piles of early Indian residents and wanderers - and an eagle's nest. Morris says he "looked on these as assets, something to set his development apart from others."

At the time there were few regulations regarding disturbing such sites. But Morris, wanting to maintain the environment and insure no objections to the development, sought out professional opinions on both the middens and the eagle's nest.

Morris says the information "was exciting, letting me create something special."

structures over them on short stilts, retaining their contours, rather than leveling or digging broad foundations.

The eagle was trickier. Consulting the Audubon Society he learned 300 feet in all directions provides adequate protection of the eagle's environment. He learned eagles are fishers and need a direct route to water.

The result is the 600 foot diameter, 7.4 acre Eagle's Area, as it is referred to in the original covenants. But it also had an influence on the placement, and roof color of the Treehouses with their lush foliage, providing a fairly natural setting for the eagle's path from the nest to the bay.

Unfortunately the eagles are long gone with one brief nest building episode in 2008 - but no actual nesting or breeding. There have been visits since but no further nest activities. The visits are evidenced by photos in The Eagle over the last several years.

Morris was asked if the eagles nest language in the covenants contained any specific intent from his point of view. He recalled none other than language designed to protect the existing nest.

Those two decisions in place, Morris proceeded to build much of the perimeter wall and the guard gate. He wanted to develop an atmosphere of privacy. In fact, originally prospective purchasers had to make appointments to see the development. The sales offices were deep within The Landings to insure prospects would see the environment prior to seeing the models.

After laying out the road plan Treehouse construction began. He went on to develop both Carriage House I and II, the Portside Villas and The Landings Racquet Club. (Many are not aware, some of the property in the LRC area was not part of the original Palmer land purchase and was added later.)

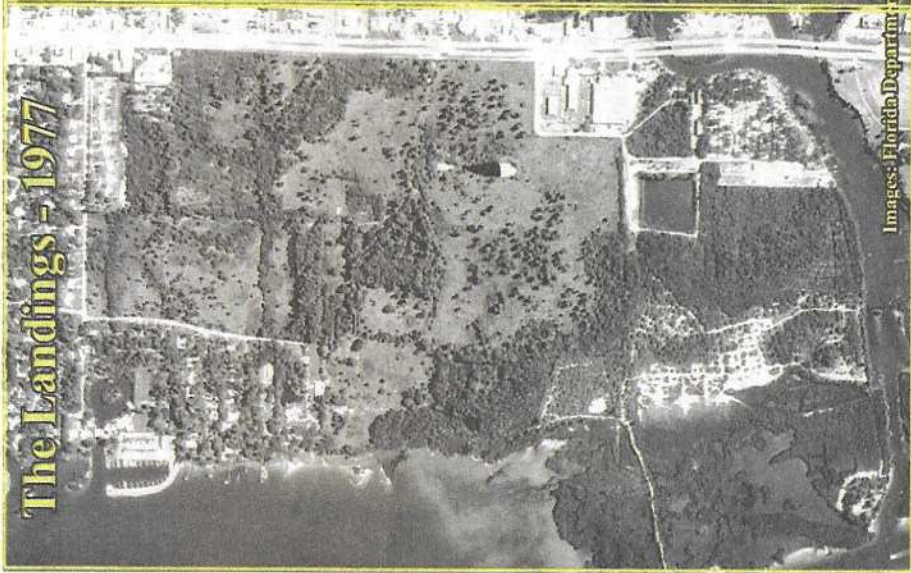
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of development interest rates spiked at 20% slowing sales substantially.

C & M, and Robert Morris laid out the original lots for individual, free-standing homes, but built none. People who purchased land could use an architect and builder of their choice, as long as the covenant guidelines were carefully followed.

Asked if, in hindsight, he'd have done anything differently, Morris' quick response was "not to have sold off The Landings Plaza area, but developed it myself according to the original plan." That plan called for a small village atmosphere, not the strip mall there today - another idea slightly ahead of its time, unfortunately.

What is he proudest of? "The Landings and Pelican Cove have aged very well. I think, because we were committed to fitting the environment. We wanted them to look like God had just dropped them there. What counts is what's left when you're done."



Images: Florida Department of Transportation

These Florida Department of Transportation pictures show the pre-development view and The Landings today. Easily spotted are remnants of the Potter buildings, the lake just outside The Landings where the kiddie part is located, the lake now centered among the Southern Carriagehouses and the path that became The Nature Trail. Mangrove expansion is also clearly evident.



The Banyans on Peregrine Point Drive were likely near the main entrance to the original Palmer home.



Today it is lush Peregrine Point Drive. When Morris first saw the property it was the main road where the Palmer home had stood.

# Part III - Landings at 25 - Encore

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The Ramar Group, after laying out the plans for the Treehouses, Carriage Houses and individual home sites began marketing The Landings to the potential buyers. It was Style & Class all the way. In 1980 The Landings west of Heron Way was called "future development," but did include specific plans for a club.

What follows is a reprint from *Sarasota Scene Magazine*, June 1980. It provides a strong sense of what The Landings was intended to be. It does have a slight ring of a good PR writer and was possibly "sponsored" content!

### The Landings Exclusive Elegance

The long awaited grand opening was held recently for The Landings, a posh community of single family homes and condominium residences designed and developed by the Ramar Group Companies.

The Landings' central location and elegant homes have already attracted many of Sarasota's elite. In fact, nearly \$15 million worth of property was sold to an exclusive waiting list prior to any advertising effort.

Located on U.S. 41 between South Gate and Gulf Gate, The Landings is the latest and most luxurious of the Ramar Group's eight Sarasota County projects. (The others include Pelican Cove, Bird Bay Village, The Plantation Golf & Country Club, Sandpiper Key, Siesta Dunes, Village Brooke and Castel Del Mare.) The Ramar Group is generally recognized as one of the leading developers in Florida and each of their communities is known for its special élan.

Yet, The Landings eclipses even the spectacular settings and elegance of Pelican Cove and Siesta Dunes, two of the Ramar Group's previous luxury communities, and promises to be

the most sought after address in Sarasota for years to come.

"The Landings is not for every-one," stated Ramar Group president and founder Robert A. Morris. "The Landings represents the Ramar Group's first venture into the top end of the residential market, and from the response we've received so far, there's not much question that The Landings will soon become the most exclusive and well thought of community in Sarasota."

The location of The Landings is one that has been envied and talked about for years. Not only does the property feature almost a half mile of frontage on US 41, but Roberts Bay and Phillippi Creek as its western and southern boundaries, respectively. It also boasts some of the most glorious natural foliage to be seen anywhere in Florida. Tall pines and oaks, date palms, wild orchids, incredible

ferns and more examples of exotic flora abound on The Landings 'nearly 300 acres. Much of the property is heavily wooded, but open meadow like areas may also be enjoyed, and throughout, the special Ramar Group Companies touch of environmental excellence and care is subtly displayed.

The site of The Landings has a rich and varied history. Nearly 4,000 years ago tribes of Caloosa and Timucan Indians made their home amid the land's primal richness. The majority of Sarasota's, however, identify The Landings' site most closely with Mrs. Potter Palmer. As most know, Mrs. Palmer was wealthy socialite from Chicago who "discovered" Sarasota in 1911, and played a prominent role in developing it as a prosperous resort agricultural community. The Landings acreage was included among her extensive real estate holdings locally.



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Continued from the previous page

The Ramar Group in partnership with Jaime S. Carrion acquired The Landings in 1978, and determined at that time to create with it a community of such beauty and unique character that it could not be equaled. The Landings is a balanced community of single family home sites and condominium townhouses and duplexes. All condominium residences will be designed and constructed by the Ramar Group and incorporate a surprising number of designer features.

"The top of the line in finishes and appliances has been used everywhere in The Landings' Treehouses and Carriagehouses," said Mr. Morris explaining that this special attention to detail is just one of the many factors responsible for The Landings' image of sophisticated quality.

The home sites of The Landings have received special attention, too. The extraordinary vegetation that adorns The Landings has added much to its feeling of a mature community. "In most residential areas," Mr. Morris noted, "you'll

find maybe 20 to 25 percent of the home sites have tree growth existing on them and the rest is just bare land. We're very fortunate to have a lush tree covering at The Landings; about three quarters of the home sites are wooded."

Extra care has been taken to see that the lots' spacious contours provide the perfect setting for imaginative homes which will truly reflect their residents' personality and the way of life offered by The Landings. "We don't really expect someone to build a replica of the Treehouses of the residences at Pelican Cove," said head architect, Robert M. Town. "Homeowners are welcome to build a Williamsburg Colonial house, for instance, as long as it's in good taste and is properly landscaped."

Single family homeowners at The Landings are free to choose an independent architect and contractor to design and build their homes, but Mr. Morris stressed that an architectural review board will inspect all plans before construction. He said this will not only ensure the highest standards

of building materials and design, but will also see that while every residence is compatible and complementary with its neighbors and The Landings as a whole, an abroad range of variety and individuality will be maintained, as well.

The Landings will retain its exclusivity once the Ramar Group's active participation in its development has reached an end, according to Mr. Morris. Unlike communities such as Bird Key, all roads within The Landings are private and will remain so. The Landings is a totally private and secure development, and only residents and visitors will be admitted past the guard house.

"With The Landings," Mr. Morris added, "we have created a lifestyle which will match the spectacular environment offered by the site itself, and one whose special mystique will endure." Certainly, Morris and his associates have created Sarasota's most exclusive community of luxurious style and gracious living.

# a gracious tradition continues

Live the glamour of a bygone era today at The Landings

The romance and excitement of an age gone by can be yours today at The Landings. The Landings reflects the historic charm and natural beauty of the Florida Coast. The Landings is an extensive holding of Sarasota patron Mrs. Potter Palmer. The Landings was also home to Calocoba and Timucuan Indians of their villages, in the loam of ancient middens, are scattered throughout the property, subtly high lighting its rich natural foliage and graceful contours.

The Landings' stately pines and oaks, abundant ferns and wildflowers, and the Ramar Group's painstaking attention to the smallest environmental detail recall the Indians' reverence of the land. The Landings contains elegant three bedroom Treehouse

and two bedroom Carriagehouse condominium residences as well as beautiful single family homesites. The Landings is a realtor's "Ramar" Florida as premiere developers of fine residential communities.

The Landings is... Treehouses, Carriagehouses and up to almost 300 home sites on Sarasota Bay... a low density, lushly landscaped community

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