

Sarah Gleason's Gift

It is a lovely, warm evening in this remote part of Florida and the beach as always is beautiful, one of the most beautiful I know. I had accompanied my husband on this trip because it is really the only way I can ever see George these days. He is so busy, obsessed is a better word, with his dream of connecting the lakes, and rivers inland from the coast. He and the Governor as well as the President believe that Florida's future is intimately connected to the creation of an inland waterway. It would greatly expand the potential for agriculture and cattle, and allow the much promised but so far unrealized potential of Florida to finally happen. The difficulties are formidable but that is what my husband is good at. He loves impossible jobs no matter what the cost is to himself and his family.

I bought the land many years ago, it was around 1871 I believe. So we have been involved with it for 14 years now.

The land was originally designated Section 16 and was granted to the State of Florida as "school lard". When the Florida Board of education decided it was 'excess' for their needs, it was advertised and my husband suggested I buy it using money I inherited from my father. I decided to purchase it with our friend, William Hunt. We bought the Section together, basically a square mile of land, for \$1.25 an acre and it included one mile of beach -- a beautiful beach. The idea was to develop it for houses and businesses but it just did not work out as planned. Between the recession and the general doldrums associated

with what is commonly called "The Florida Problem," there were very few buyers. The other problem is that Mr. Hunt died and his daughters and their husbands had no interest in developing the land.

William Linton, who had incorporated the Town of Linton, came to me three years ago wanting to buy my half interest. I was willing but had one reservation. Every time I saw this beach over the years, there was something about it that drew me. It was just too lovely to put into some kind of development scheme and I wanted to make sure it would always be there for the people in the town. My husband thought I was being 'female', but it was my money and that is how I felt. In October of 1895, I sold the land to William Linton subject to a mortgage. The deed had a provision that a strip of land, 150 feet to 200 feet wide along the beach across my half of Section 16, approximately 1/2 mile of the total, would belong to the public.

In 1896 William filed a survey for a row of 2.5 acre lots along the ocean beach. Those lots faced directly on the ocean except for the narrow tract I had reserved for public use. Things were finally happening and might have worked out differently if poor Mr. Linton himself had not unexpectedly died. His heirs were up against it and could not pay the mortgage, so two years ago in 1898 I foreclosed on the mortgage and ended up where I started with half of the land. That foreclosure voided the filing for the 2.5-acre lots. A year later, I purchased from the William Hunt children his undivided one-half interest in Section 16, giving me for the first time complete ownership of the property.

My husband, who is successful and wise in the way of the world, was excited about the potential to make a lot of money. The market for house lots and commercial development was finally beginning to turn and there were beginning to be buyers for this land. I would not yield, however, on the strip along the beach. I wanted it to belong to the public and insisted it be dedicated for that purpose. My husband and I argued about this at length, perhaps the most serious disagreement we have ever had. I guess I was on a mission of my own.

On October 27, of this year 1899, I filed in the Town of Linton notice to give free and full ownership of the entire section along the beach for absolute and forever public use.

The tide is low now, and the beach seems endless, the water shimmering in the late afternoon sun. Gulls, sandpipers, marbled kowtits, and all manner of sea birds are busy at their work. I walk among them and feel complete.

The mile long public beach in Delray, Florida, the result of the gift by Sarah Gleason in 1899, is one of the longest stretches of public access beachfront property in South Florida.