

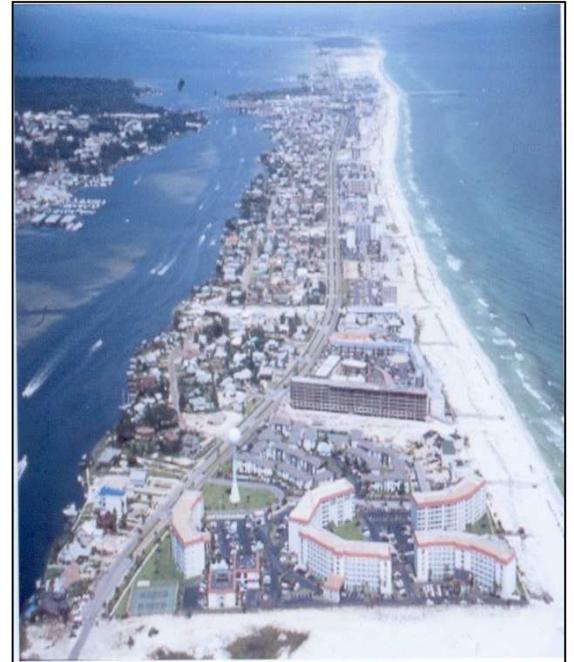
OKALOOSA ISLAND

THEN AND NOW



CIRCA 1965

The
History
of
Santa Rosa
and
Okaloosa
Island
1928 to 1995
-by Jim Simpson



TODAY

Note: The following information extracted from the 1970 Annual Report of the Okaloosa Island Authority and Florida House Bill 2307.

Santa Rosa Island is 45 miles long and covers the Gulf coastline from Pensacola to Destin.

In **1928** the Island was sold by the War Department (with the exception of the Fort Pickens Military Reservation) to Escambia County for \$ 10,000.

In **1938**, Escambia County conveyed to the Department of the Interior, without cost, all of the Island (except Fort Pickens) with the intent that the Department would develop the Island as a park.

In **1941**, the Interior Department conveyed the eastern half (a total of 4,300 acres in Okaloosa County) of the Island to the War Department for use as part of Eglin Field.

In **1948**, legislation was passed which deeded 875 acres of the Island to Okaloosa County. This land included the three miles of the Island located immediately south of Ft Walton Beach and the small island south of Destin. In making the transfer of title, the Federal Government retained the following restrictions and limitations on the property:

- Use of the land by the County or its lessees only for public recreational purposes.
- Right of the U.S. to use the property in the event of a national emergency without rental or other payments to Okaloosa County but subject to existing private rights and payment of just compensation for taking control over improvements on the property.

Excepted and reserved from the conveyance were perpetual easement interests for air space and access right of way.

In **1953**, by special act of the Florida Legislature, the Okaloosa Island Authority was created as an instrumentality of the County and vested with administrative authority over the portion of the Santa Rosa Island owned by the County.

Because of the limitations and restrictions held by the Federal Government in the original deed to the Island, financing was difficult for both

commercial and residential construction. U.S. Public Law 87-860 which was approved in **1962** removed these restrictions. As a result of this law, it was necessary for the Federal Government, through the Corps of Engineers to survey the Island and determine price.

In **1963**, the new Quitclaim Deed was delivered by the Corps of Engineers to the Okaloosa Island Authority. In turn, the Authority presented the Corps with a check for \$55,000. This transaction removed the limitations and restrictions on the property except for a 75-foot aerial easement.

In **1975**, legislation was passed by the State of Florida which abolished the Okaloosa Island Authority and transferred the duties and responsibilities of the Authority to the County Commissioners of Okaloosa County. This legislation also authorized the levying of ad valorem taxes on real and personal property on the Island and confirmed that all valid, existing restrictive covenants, easements, and zoning, previously established by the Authority shall remain in full force unless and until they are amended by the County Commissioners in the manner provided by law.

In **1995**, the County Commissioners approved allowing leaseholders to obtain fee simple title to their property. Island residents Sam and Joyce Hester were the first individuals to receive quit claim deeds to Okaloosa Island property.