

# History

## The tale of Olde Naples Pier

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NAPLES HISTORICAL SOCIETY DOCENT

**F**irst came the hotel, and then the pier. In January 1888, there was, as yet, no pier.

Before it, the Naples Company used the fastest steamship on the coast, Capt. Merritt's Fearless, which the company purchased. This ship, which ran from Punta Gorda to Naples, entered through Gordon Pass and sailed up into Naples Bay, according to the company's promotional brochure.

However, during low tides, passengers had to be shuttled ashore by "lighters" out in the Gulf, which featured some troublesome sandbars.

In June 1888, a construction contract was awarded to Capt. James Canty, in Fort Myers, for a 600-foot, T-shaped wharf in the 18-foot water

on the Gulf side, facing the hotel. Pilings and timbers were off-loaded in the surf and towed ashore.

When the hotel opened in January 1889, the wooden pier had just been completed and was where passengers and freight were loaded and unloaded, and was a fishing site, too.

The post office was located at the foot of the pier, where it stayed until 1922, when an accidental cigarette fire destroyed the building and part of the pier.

A combination boardwalk and tramway, fitted with rails, extended from the foot of the pier along Pier Street, now called 12th Avenue South, to the hotel. A cart could easily roll out materials and luggage, and children loved getting on for a push.

By 1909, a bathhouse and changing rooms were available; freight lifts had also been added. Then, unwell-

come guests arrived.

The hurricane of 1910 almost destroyed the pier and kept the hotel from opening in 1911. It was rebuilt 100 feet longer, with two wings, forming a "V."

A 1926 hurricane severely damaged the pier and pushed saltwater into all the cisterns and wells. It also delayed the building of the Tamiami Trail. In 1935, there was a Labor Day hurricane.

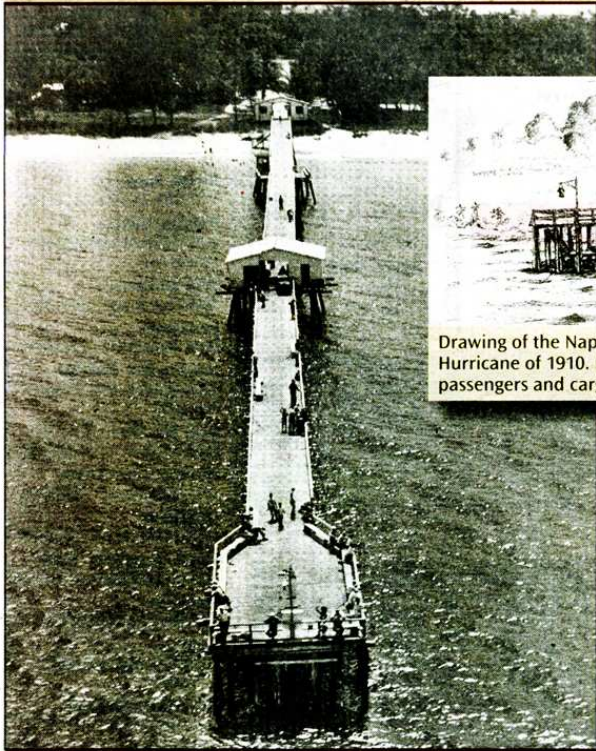
But, it was the hurricane of 1944 that caused the pier to be completely rebuilt to sturdier standards; 100 feet longer, in 22 feet of water. It was then a recreation pier, with dancing, fishing and sunset viewing being paramount.

Hurricane Donna rolled over Naples in 1960, and the pier collapsed under the force of Category 5 winds and water. That spelled the

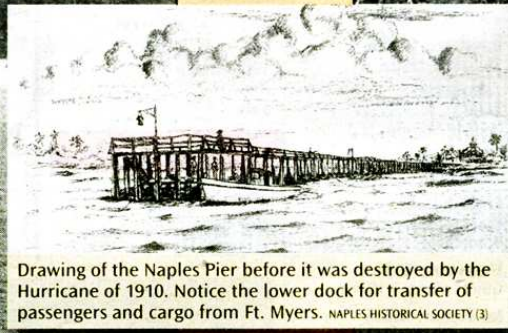
death of the hotel. Philanthropists Mr. and Mrs. Lester Norris paid some \$130,000 to rebuild the pier again, rather than add the cost to the tax rolls. Ten months later, the pier was back, still the heart of Naples.

Visitors and community members can learn about the Naples Pier and many other notable Naples structures and characters with a docent-guided tour of the The Palm Cottage house museum. It is open for tours from 1 to 4 p.m., Wednesday and Saturday. Information 261-8164.

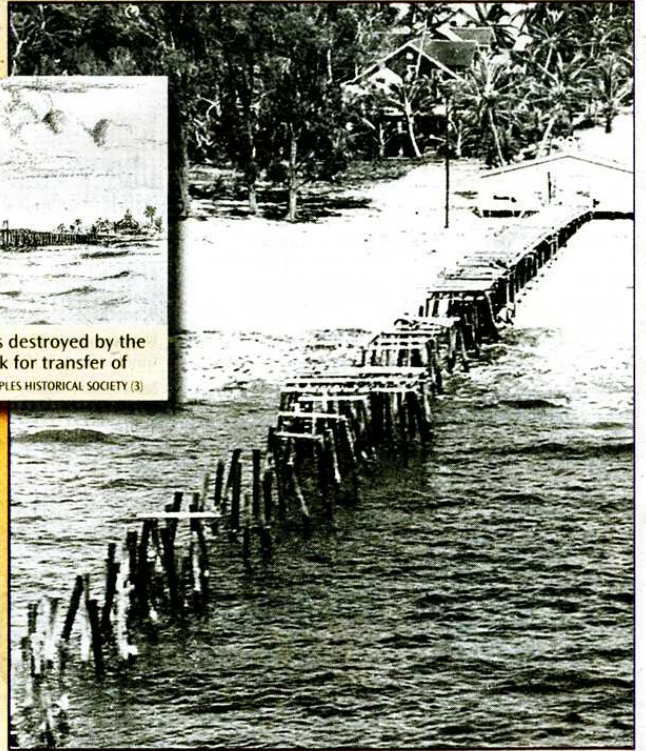
Sources: "The Founding of Naples," Jamro and Lanterman; "Florida's Last Frontier," C. Tebeau; "Naples," Frazer; "When Peacocks Were Roasted," Reynolds; Naples Company promotional brochure, 1888; "Historic Naples," Behrens; "The Timepiece," Vol. XI, No. 3, Naples Historical Society.



The pier, just prior to Hurricane Donna, in 1959. Notice the maintenance truck driving on the middle of the pier.



Drawing of the Naples Pier before it was destroyed by the Hurricane of 1910. Notice the lower dock for transfer of passengers and cargo from Ft. Myers. NAPLES HISTORICAL SOCIETY (3)



When Hurricane Donna rolled over Naples in 1960, most of the pier collapsed under winds and waves of the Category 5 hurricane.