



Story by Kevin Hemstock, Managing Editor (Town of Jupiter 75th Birthday Special Edition 2/9/00)



## Plumosus City was a Protest Against Jupiter

It was only by chance that Skip Gladwin scooped up the papers from among the burned-out remains of the office building of the Pennock Plantation, 30 years ago, after the plantation had been closed up. He was attracted to the fire on his way home from work. "I was going home from work and saw the smoke. There was a pile of stuff, burning material," he said last month.

When he first looked at the papers, he didn't know what they were. He certainly didn't know that what he saved from incineration was the last vestige of a town that was born out of protest to Jupiter, and died due to lack of interest 30 years later. The papers, some handwritten, some typed, some singed by the fire, were some of the minutes of Plumosus City, named after a fern that for a while was one of the chief exports of the area.

Plumosus City was formed twice: once in 1929 and again in 1930, according to the incorporation papers. It included land along Center Street and north of that road to the Loxahatchee River. It also included large tracts of undeveloped land west of Delaware Boulevard, and south as far as Frederick Small Road. It included most of Pennock Point. In fact, much of the city was comprised of lands owned by Henry S. Pennock, one of the largest employers in northern Palm

Beach County at the time, with a dairy and Pennock Plantation.

Pennock apparently joined other residents of the time, primarily fern growers along Center Street west to what is now Central Boulevard, in protesting Jupiter's taxes and in moral outrage against that town's speed trap scandal which led to two grand jury investigations - and financial mismanagement. "The idea was not to pay Jupiter taxes," said Richard Bassett, in an interview last year. He now has possession of the minutes, and for good reason - Bassett's father was Amos Bassett, who, at one time was a member of Jupiter's original Town Commission and also was the second mayor of Plumosus City.

Amos Bassett also had a fern farm and worked for Pennock. "I think (Jupiter) had big ideas. This was a boom time," said Richard Bassett. But the boom soon busted, he said and "people didn't want to pay taxes."

Nurseryman Roy Rood remembered hearing about Plumosus City and knew that it was formed over concern about Jupiter taxes. "The whole reason for it was that Jupiter farmers were afraid these guys were going to go crazy with taxes," he said.

That's when many of the residents - primarily the fern growers such as Pennock, J. F. (Fred) Turner, Andrew Sullivan and Nathan Trowell, decided to take their land out of Jupiter and create a new town.

The plumosus fern was big business back then, said Carlin White, whose stepfather, Fred Turner, had about 10 acres north of Center Street, where he grew the popular fern, a transition cash crop after the pineapple business collapsed due to disease and imports. "When the pineapple business went sour, they shifted to the fern business," White said. The ferns were grown in "sheds" under a translucent material rigged up on poles. At harvest, they were packed in ice and shipped by train to New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and Detroit. They had to be shipped by train because boat or truck did not get them to the florist quick enough to keep them from wilting. They were most commonly used as a backing for flower arrangements. The ferns would fetch about \$2 per 20-sprig bundle and were sold in 80-bundle boxes.

"My stepdad figured out how to raise it in a very light green color and it was very popular in New York, Chicago and Detroit," White said. "No one ever knew how to raise it in that light green color." The fern business began to slow down after the Depression hit. "The fern industry was hit because the northern florists were selling fewer flowers," recalled Anna Minear in *The Loxahatchee Lament*.

There is no record that there was ever a property tax charged in Plumosus City. The city was operated from the office at Pennock Plantation. Meetings were held monthly, with the first recorded meeting July 25, 1929, when the city was officially incorporated. At that meeting a mayor, five aldermen, a city clerk and a marshal were selected. They were: Mayor A. R. Roebuck; aldermen W. E. Gibson, H. S. (Harry) Pennock, H. A. (Herb) Pennock, J. H. Freeman, and W.T. (Bill) Bogardus, Jr. Pennock Plantation Manager Lloyd Minear was chosen as city clerk, and former Jupiter police officer Torrence W. Force was chosen as marshal.

Present at the meeting were 27 people living in the being incorporated and that represented two-thirds or more of the qualified electors required for incorporation, according to the incorporation records.

### **1930s-era town sparked by objections to high taxes and speed trap**

It is uncertain why the city was incorporated twice, though it may be that there was a dispute between Jupiter and Plumosus City over boundaries. But on May 22, 1930, another legal incorporation took place. In both cases, John Ziegler - ironically, Jupiter's first mayor - was the attorney representing Plumosus City during its incorporation proceedings.



**Plumosus Fern**

At the second formation meeting, the following were elected: for mayor, Amos Bassett; and aldermen Lloyd Minear, Fred Turner, Bill Bogardus and W. H. Stephens. All were elected for two-year term except Minear and Stephens, who received one-year terms. Minear was appointed clerk, and Force was again chosen as the marshal.

After that, the monthly meetings showed little municipal action taking place. In fact, they were usually just meetings to say, officially, that there was no business to conduct. The meetings were then adjourned.

At the first regular meeting, June 25, 1930, the minutes stated: "The bill for advertising, \$43.65, was approved and ordered paid to the Lake Worth Leader as soon as Mayor Amos E. Bassett raised the funds." And an ordinance committee, with Minear, Stephens and Turner, was formed.

At the meeting of July 22, 1930, it was reported that there was enough money to pay the \$6.77 charge for filing the incorporation papers, and to pay off the bill at the Leader. Also at that meeting, it was agreed that the meeting place for the Board of Aldermen would be at the office of Pennock Plantation and take place the third Wednesday of each month at 3:30 p.m.

On June 24, 1931, the meeting confirmed the results of the June 22 election for two alderman and the mayor. The election had 13 qualified voters who cast ballots. Elected were Bassett for mayor and H. A. Pennock and Lloyd Minear as aldermen. Force was again elected as marshal and Minear was elected clerk.

At the election of Dec. 28, 1933, no one voted, and the board "decided on a motion by Amos E. Bassett, seconded by J. F. Turner Jr., that the present elected officers be retained and another election be called in June 1934." The last set of minutes in the book saved by Skip Gladwin, was dated May 16, 1934.

The state census, taken in 1935, showed 37 residents of Plumosus City, but several, including the Fred Turner family and others, were missed by the census taker.

One of the last official acts of the Plumosus City government was the approval of the plat for Penn Park, south of Center Street, including the north ends of Pittsburgh Drive and Philadelphia Drive located in the town. The plat was signed by Mayor J. F. Turner, Jr. and City Clerk Amos E. Bassett. As the minutes of the meeting, the papers were stamped with the town seal.

The city existed until June 18, 1959, when the state Legislature passed a bill (Chapter 59-1756) officially abolishing the "Town of Plumosus City" and arranging for any funds remaining to be turned over to the county and making the land unincorporated.

Since then, a reference to the defunct town occasionally turns up on old deeds and plats. Sometime in the 1970s, Carlin White recalls, a resident of the former town had zoning difficulties in Jupiter because of references to Plumosus City. The residents asked White, mayor of Jupiter at the time, if he would take care of the problem.

Much of the land that once was part of the former town has been annexed into Jupiter, which grew into a vibrant community, unlike its undeveloped sister. Some of the land remains in unincorporated Palm Beach County. When it was gone, the memory of this little town, born of rebellion, wilted like a fern in the hot sun, but for a chance encounter with a demolished building, a burning pile of stuff and a man who snatched up a little notebook of papers.

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