

BREVARD COUNTY, FLORIDA :

A Short History to 1955

John M. Eriksen

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Sample: The Cape: Early Days

From Brevard County, Florida: A Short History to 1955

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During the 1890s, a prominent newspaper of the day, Titusville's *East Coast Advocate*, claimed to serve all of east Florida from Oak Hill to Miami. The newspaper headed all issues with the forty-four communities in the growing Indian River Country and beyond. Some of the communities listed were:

AURANTIA	FT. PIERCE	NARROWS	PALM BEACH
ANKONA	HEARTLAND	INDIANOLA	SHARPES
BRANTLEY	GEORGIANA	ROCKLEDGE	MERRITTS
COQUINA	LA GRANGE	MIMS	COCOA
COURTNEY	HEATH	HYPOLUXO	MIAMI
CLIFTON	HARDEEVILLE	MELBOURNE	OAK HILL
CITY POINT	ENOS	SEBASTIAN	ORCHID
CANAVERAL	EAU GALLIE	TROPIC	TILLMAN

Amid these mushrooming communities, northern sportsmen continued to stalk the county's fish and game. Brevard's abundant wildlife was augmented each winter by great flocks of northern fowl that arrived via an ancient flyway to rest in the seclusion of the Canaveral marsh. For years, the word had been spreading. Up the J.T. & K.W. rails to Enterprise, then steaming north on the St. Johns, the county's reputation for good hunting was reaching the crowded north. The good news was received by a sophisticated set of sportsmen and soon a vast amount of Canaveral marsh was purchased for the forthcoming visitors. Today, their former headquarters, the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, is one of the few seemingly untouched and undeveloped natural terrains in Brevard County. It may be largely undeveloped, however it was not untouched.

In October of 1890, as if to introduce Brevard County to the decade known as the gay nineties, the Canaveral Club was established by a few wealthy graduates of Harvard University. The young alumni formed a trust to create Brevard's first private country club for the rich and famous. The November 28, 1890 issue of the *East Coast Advocate* introduced its readers to the new club as follows: "It embraces many bayous, creeks,

ponds, peninsulas and islands, and will prove one of the very best selections that could have been made for the purpose for which it is intended—a game preserve, particularly for duck shooting. The Club is composed of some of the most solid young men of Boston, several of them being millionaires. The corporation will be very exclusive—in fact is so already; the membership fee is \$5,000...."

The bluebloods purchased nearly 18,000 acres of Cape Canaveral and the peninsula north of Merritt's Island "at the average price of about one dollar per acre.²⁵ Plans to construct appropriate quarters were not hindered by any lack of money. The main lodge was three stories tall with twenty rooms for members and guests. The club featured a large dining room, a wine cellar and a trophy room, and plenty of storage for arms and ammunition. In the distance, more modest outbuildings provided shelter for butlers and maids. The private grounds were graced with a swimming pool, and at the water's edge, the shallow-draft steam yacht, Canaveral, awaited the hunter's call. Atop the lodge, there was a spectacular view of both ocean and wildlife that flocked to the surrounding marsh. Still off limits, the site is now home to NASA's launch-pad 39A.



