Carrabelle

City Chartered in 1893 by the Florida Legislature

The history of Dog Island and Carrabelle, Florida, includes a wonderful mix of Indians, shipping, bootlegging, logging and battles. This charming town was a fishing village prior to the Civil War, isolated from the rest of Franklin County by the lack of bridges and paved roads. After the war, it became an internationally known lumber town, shipping wood from the hundreds of thousands of acres of surrounding virgin forest. Turpentine, distilled from pine sap, was shipped via schooners from the natural deep water port on the Carrabelle River.

Dog Island has some evidence of human presence dating back as early as 8,000 years ago. The island also has a rich maritime history. The discovery of a 9th-century canoe is a testament to prehistoric mariners on the island. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the barrier islands became a haven of piracy and smuggling.

In 1528 the first Spanish expedition of Panfilo de Narvaez passed through the area on its way from Tampa Bay to the Rio Grande. Carrabelle, Dog Island, and St. George Island served as points to stage raids on local ports as well as San Marcos de Apalache in 1677 and 1682.

Dog Island and its two neighboring islands were discovered by the French in 1536 and named the Dog Islands, because wild dogs were found on them; the islands resemble a crouched dog, or the early ships put their common sailors - known as dogs - on the islands, before docking on the mainland, so they could not jump ship. Later, the two neighbors were renamed: St. Vincent, which is a Federal wildlife refuge, and St. George, which has a causeway and an airport and has developed into a seaside vacation community with shops, restaurants and beach rentals.

During the Civil War Dog Island was used by the Union Navy as a base for staging the blockade of Apalachicola. In 1838, the Dog Island Lighthouse was built on the western tip of the island. It marked the "middle entrance to St. George's Sound," between St. George and Dog Islands until its collapse by a hurricane in 1873.

In 1876, explorer Nathaniel Holmes Bishop of Medford, Massachusetts navigated the Crooked River through the lowlands to the Ochlockonee River. Then, in 1877, Oliver Hudson Kelly, also from Massachusetts, founded the town and named it Rio Carrabelle (Beautiful River). The following year the first U.S. Post Office was established with its address as Rio Carrabelle. By 1881 the population was between 500 and 600 people. Early settlers in the area, both Indians and early Europeans, hunted the bountiful game for food and furs, which were then shipped out of St. Marks.

Carrabelle's boom time came after the Civil War when lumber and naval stores were the most important commodities. In 1879, Carrabelle had the largest sponge fleet in Florida next to Key West. In 1875 the first lumber mill was established - cutting pine and cypress from up river and in swamps, and shipping it to the north and overseas. Ships, mainly schooners, would come through the pass and drop anchor behind Dog Island in Ballast Cove, so named because the ships would drop their ballast before sailing into Carrabelle to pick up their cargo. You may to this day, find ballast rock in the cove. By 1893 there were many lumber and saw mills along the Carrabelle River, and the downtown area was established around Coombs Mill, close to the mouth of the river. The town was incorporated in May, 1893, and during this time, the area flourished - docks were stacked high with lumber and turpentine.

On January 5, 1891, The Carrabelle, Tallahassee and Georgia Railroad was incorporated. It was established to connect Carrabelle northward through Tallahassee to the Florida-Georgia line. The railroad was incorporated with a capital stock of $ 1,000 and a land grant of 206,370.3 acres. The company owned 3 locomotives and 50 assorted railroad cars. As advertised, the C.T. & G. also stopped at Hilliardville, Crawfordville, and MacIntyre before arriving at Lanark. (In 1906, the C.T. & G. was sold to the Georgia, Florida and Alabama Railway)

There was a railroad station from which trains carried salted-down mullet and other goods to points north, as well as bringing in needed supplies for the residents. The railroad also brought tourists from

Tallahassee to stay at the Lanark Springs Hotel, a luxurious resort. The other side of the station was the steamboat depot. Here people could catch the daily paddle steamer, such as the *Crescent City*, to Apalachicola and St. Marks or the weekly steamships to St. Andrew's, Pensacola and points beyond.

The Crooked River Lighthouse guided mariners through the treacherous pass between Dog and St. George Islands from 1895 to 1995. After three short-lived beacons were destroyed by hurricanes on Dog Island, the Coast Guard chose land west of Carrabelle for the fourth structure. Completed in 1895, the site included two identical keeper's houses, one on each side of the tower.

The town's proximity to the coast made it particularly susceptible to hurricanes. A series of hurricanes hit the area during the late 1800's. On August 1, 1899, the second of the season hit Carrabelle head-on, destroying the town leaving just nine homes. Roughly 6 miles inland at McIntyre, only two mill boilers were left. The summer resort of Lanark Inn was said to be "blown into the Gulf". The Carrabelle, Tallahassee and Georgia Railroad was destroyed for a distance of 30 miles, and a locomotive was displaced some 100 yards off the track. Over fifty five ships were sunk or destroyed. The downtown was rebuilt in its present location, and many of today's larger buildings were built during the early part of the 1900's.

During Prohibition, much business was done by barter, and there was a brief period in which smugglers from the Caribbean unloaded their contraband near Alligator Point and hid in the nearby forest.

Between World War I and World War II, Carrabelle went into a severe economic slump. Fishing became the principal industry and along with the entire country, Carrabelle slipped into the depression.

By 1941, Carrabelle had become an important port for shipping oil. The oil was shipped from Texas, through the Inter-coastal Waterway to Carrabelle and then on to Jacksonville through a pipeline, where it was loaded on ships for delivery to Europe. The pipeline began at what is now known as Three Rivers.

Camp Johnson opened in September 1941 as Camp Carrabelle. It was later named in honor of Colonel Gordon Johnston, a well decorated soldier who served in the Spanish American War in Cuba with the Rough Riders, in the Philippine-American War, and World War I. The at 165,000 acre camp served as an amphibious training base housing around 10,000 troops at one time and rotating between 24,000 and 30,000 soldiers from 1941 through 1946. The nearby islands of Dog Island and St. George Island were used as landing points for exercises. Four separate camps comprised the complex: three for regimental combat teams, and the fourth for the headquarters and support facilities. A quarter of a million men were trained at the camp. For many it was the last stopover before going to the Pacific or European theaters. The camp was closed in 1946.

After World War II, Jeff Lewis, a Florida businessman, saw the potential in Dog Island as a vacation area and paid $ 12,000 for the island as a fishing camp.

In 1952 the Crooked River lighthouse was automated. Automation ended the need for keepers in In 1964, the Coast Guard sold both keepers' houses, and the buyers moved them from the site. One was lost by fire, the other is privately owned. Due to the dedicated efforts of many local residents, the Crooked River Lighthouse has been re-established as a working lighthouse and a replica of one of the keeper's houses serves as a museum and gift shop.

The Carrabelle area is going through another metamorphosis, from a sleepy fishing village to a vigorously growing economy for recreational boating and eco-tourism. The area is filling with quaint shops, superb local restaurants, cultural and artistic venues, and community activities. Come and see for yourself as we evolve and grow!

<u>Historical Figures born in Carrabelle:</u>
John Robinson (aviator & activist) Born February 24, 1903
John Jordan "Buck" O'Neil (Negro World Series champion 1942) Born November 13, 1911