

Pinellas Passport: Your Ticket through Time Travel History Kit

Thank you for selecting this history kit to use in your classroom. This kit and others from Heritage Village are designed to help you enhance your students' studies of Florida and Pinellas County's rich and diverse history.

The information below combined with the artifacts and photograph banners will give you the tools that you need to set up a classroom exhibit and create a variety of hands-on learning opportunities. It is a trip through time using primary and secondary resources as a travel guide to Pinellas history.

Have your students explore the Pinellas Peninsula through four enduring historical themes: *Tourism, Coastal Living, Community Life and Agriculture.*

Those who settled the Pinellas Peninsula arrived in pursuit of the Florida Dream. Today this vibrant county covers 280 square miles and is rimmed by 588 miles of coastline teeming with natural resources and beauty.



During the last ice age, the Peninsula was much wider with the coastline 100 miles further west. Native Americans populated the area as early as 12,000 years ago. Gradually a complex, sophisticated society of Native Americans flourished, enjoying the rich marine and land resources.

The Spanish encountered them by 1528 and within a short period of time the native cultures were decimated. The Spanish called this land, rich with pine trees, *Punta Pinal*, Point of Pines, later simplified to *Pinellas*.

Little is known about the next 200 years. For much of the 1700s the Pinellas Peninsula was deserted, but visitors to the coastal areas included Cuban fishermen, English and Spanish map making expeditions, occasional pirates and a few Seminole Indians.

By the 1840s, a handful of homesteaders had taken up residence. The Orange Belt Railway arrived in the late 1880s, stimulating population and community growth amidst the pine tree landscape and mangrove coastlines. The rich land shaped the local economy – from cotton and shipping to citrus, cattle, sponging and tourism.

The Three C's: Cotton, Cattle, Citrus

If you think all that ever grew around here were oranges...think again. The Pinellas Peninsula has a deep agricultural heritage.

High quality Sea Island cotton was the main cash crop shipped from this area at the time of the Civil War. Early settlers also raised cattle and livestock. Later, large cattle ranches spread for thousands of acres on the Peninsula. Farmers grew a wide range of produce including sugar cane, cabbage, sweet potatoes, navy beans, pumpkins, peppers, corn and watermelon.

But it is citrus that stirs memories of the Pinellas Peninsula lined with groves of oranges and grapefruit. The creation of railroads and improved transportation networks fostered the large-scale production of citrus. Urbanization since the end of World War II has transformed the land that once supported rich, diverse agricultural products.

Life on the Coast

The Pinellas waters have long been a source of sustenance, relaxation and livelihood. Native Americans feasted on bountiful shellfish. Cuban fishermen with native peoples netted large catches of mullet for sale back in Havana. Some early settlers operated shipping businesses to transport goods north to Cedar Key and south to Key West while others engaged in boat building.

The discovery of sponge beds in the Tarpon Springs area in the 1870s brought Bahamians and Key West “Conchs” followed by Greeks transforming the community into the “sponge capital of the world.”

Commercial fishing was big business by the 1890s, with fish houses and ice plants built along the waterfront. Tasty grouper is the area’s signature catch, with much of the nation’s supply being routed through Pinellas.

Drawn by the warm gulf waters, vacationers and winter visitors have enjoyed sport fishing, sailing and recreational water activities, which continue today.

Following the Florida Dream

Over time, the Florida Dream has meant different things to different people. The warm sunshine, long growing season and beautiful beaches attracted people from many social, cultural and ethnic groups, as well as from many parts of the globe. They came to Pinellas looking for a better way of life.

For some it was the opportunity to eke out a living, whether by working the soil or by harvesting the ocean. Others came for the promise of health, warmth and leisure. Still others saw a place where they could affordably retire and live out their days in a tropical setting.

People of every color, religion and nationality still flock to Pinellas – for job opportunities, for the comfort of a welcomingly diverse population, and, as always, for the sun, the sea and the balmy weather. While change abounds, the Dream remains...

Visiting Paradise

The love affair with the Pinellas Peninsula as the perfect getaway destination began in 1885 when the lower portion was dubbed “Health City” for its ideal climate, temperature and beautiful waters.

By 1900, the wealthy arrived by steamboat and railcar and wintered lavishly in places like the Belleview Hotel in Belleair where they could enjoy Florida’s first hotel golf course - all six holes! More modest accommodations awaited travelers to the “Ideal City by the Sea.” There they might lodge at one of St. Petersburg’s 43 boarding houses or at hotels like the Detroit or the Clarendon.

Americans took to the road after World War I in their Model T’s and a nation of vacationers was born. They journeyed from the Northeast and Midwest, enjoying the amenities offered by the many cities and towns on the Peninsula. Tin Can tourists pitched tents from Tarpon Springs to St. Petersburg.

The popularity of road travel flourished in the post World War II years. In the 1950s, St. Petersburg, Pinellas County’s largest city, hosted a quarter of a million winter residents. “Sparkling Clearwater” boasted of its miles of white sandy beaches, its excellent fishing and the thrill of beach combing for seashells.

Families flocked to Pinellas like never before and made lasting memories. Northerners continued their love affair with the Pinellas Peninsula with an ever-increasing number wintering and visiting paradise.

*To learn more about how the Pinellas peninsula and Florida history through the four historical themes of **Tourism, Coastal Living, Community Life and Agriculture** take your class on one of the many field trip experiences offered at Heritage Village. Loads of fun and a great learning tool! While there, be sure to visit the **Pinellas Passport: Your Ticket Through Time** exhibit.*