

Davis Islands and the Depression

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Though far removed from the scene by 1930, Davis's influence, and that of his plans for Davis Islands, were still followed by Davis Islands, Incorporated and the firm's resident vice president, Lauriston G. Moore. Working on the Davis Islands development since 1925, Moore served as director of the contract department for DP Davis Properties. When Stone & Webster purchased the Islands from Davis they kept Moore, who would serve the company in various capacities, including vice president, from 1931 until 1945. The company also retained Edith Davis (no relation to David), who was the office manager for D. P. Davis Properties and Davis Islands, Inc. from 1925 until her death in 1952.

When Moore assumed the vice presidency of Davis Islands, Inc., which included site management for the absentee owners, the entire property consisted of 115 structures, including 92 homes, 11 apartment buildings, 2 hotels and 10 commercial and public buildings. Of the 51 streets that currently run through Davis Islands, only 17 were listed in the 1931 city directory, indicating that the remaining 34 had not been completed. While the Spanish, Italian and Mediterranean Revival styles still dominated the built environment, some humbler styles began emerging, with the approval of Davis Islands, Inc. The most prevalent of these new styles was red brick, with the Kornell Apartments building, located at 25 Davis Boulevard, a prime example. Built in 1928, the two story, box-shaped building represents an era on Davis Islands when less expensive building materials and simpler construction techniques dominated blueprint pages.

Despite the slumping real estate market, work continued on the Davis Islands project. As a result, definite improvements could be seen by 1936. By this time, only nine Davis Islands

streets remained absent from the pages of the city directories and work progressed on the new airport at the end of the Islands. Growth in the real estate market continued at a slow pace during the first half of the 1930s, with the addition of only nine homes and one hotel. A club house for the development's nine-hole golf course also added to the slowly climbing building tally.

One of the biggest building projects on the Islands, perhaps second only to Tampa Municipal Hospital, was the construction of the "Downtown Airport," begun in June 1934. The airport soon received a new name ■ *Peter O. Knight Airport*, in honor of the savior of Davis Islands and one of the most influential Tampanns of that or any time. The project, one of many funded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), sat at the southeastern end of the Islands. Though first proposed in 1930, the idea did not come to fruition until four years later.

Davis Islands seemed, during its early years, to be the perfect location for civic and government leaders to spend public funds. In addition to the hospital and Peter O. Knight Airport are, the late 1930s saw the beginning of another public project, one that would have converted most of the southern end of the Islands with a park and museum commemorating the Spanish - American War. Property for the project, located on the waterfront near the airport, was acquired by the City of Tampa, Congressional support was sought and granted and plans were drawn for a \$500,000 building and memorial park encompassing forty acres of land. Delays soon set in, and, like many projects begun at the cusp of the 1940s, the project never materialized. Ironically, a museum and park commemorating one war, and the veterans of that war, was delayed and ultimately abandoned to support the men and women fighting in another war -- World War II.

As Tampa emerged from the 1930s, even with world war looming on the horizon, life

was beginning to improve. The *Tampa Daily Times*, on March 15, 1940, pointed to the increase of housing construction throughout Hillsborough County as an indicator of better times, stating that ■building in Tampa and Hillsborough County is at a new post-boom peak.● The paper was quick to point out that the statistics did not include ■big government building programs, including slum clearance projects here.● At the end of 1940, a *Daily Times* headline announced a ■13-Year High Reached Here In Building.● The story explained that, in the first 11 months of 1940, 287 homes had been built in the City of Tampa.¹

The people of Davis Islands felt the effects of the city's growth. By 1941, the Islands included 175 homes, 15 apartment and hotel buildings and 13 commercial and public buildings, for a total of 203 structures. The growth of the housing market on the Islands, with 74 new homes built since 1936, extended into previously unoccupied territory. Streets in the lower half of the Islands, such as Marmora, Severn, Erie and Lucerne, started to receive attention from home builders. It would still take a second land boom, following World War II, to really reignite growth on the Islands.

¹ *Tampa Daily Times*, March 15, 1940; December 30, 1940.