

Wickham's Folly

By Diane Barile, South Brevard Historical Society

“Who needs a road out there on the prairie?” asked the other Brevard County Commissioners.

In the days before the Florida Sunshine Laws, elected officials did privately talk amongst themselves about issues coming before them for a vote. Usually, with no major objections, projects in one commissioner's district were approved by the others, knowing that projects in their realm would be approved when requested.

Joe Wickham lived in Brevard with his family since the 1920s. He farmed some land in Malabar with his father during the Great Depression. GI Joe served during World War II building airfields on some Pacific islands. Returning to civilian life in Eau Gallie, he was experienced with heavy equipment for clearing, grading, paving, and construction in low coastal environments like Brevard County. With the purchase of military surplus equipment, draglines, and bulldozers, Joe coupled his training, talent, and ingenuity to meet the development explosion of the 1960s and 70s. Joe Wickham was always friendly, a gentleman, generous, and accommodating to

family, friends and community.

Loved, he was called Uncle Joe by many, especially as he became County Commissioner. His office door was always open as he listened carefully to each visitor. Famous for his fish fries, he helped raise funds for people and community organizations. People told me, “If you want to get things done around here, go see Uncle Joe.”

During the population boom of the Space Program, without I-95, there were north-south roads. The Dixie Highway (US-1) stretched the length of Florida; the ‘Main Street’ of most East Coast Florida cities. Babcock Street stopped at Crane Creek. Minton Road served some ranches and farms. Running West, the Melbourne-Kissimmee Highway (US 192) carried a narrow-gauge railroad and cars across the St. John River, prairie, and marsh. North of the Kissimmee Highway, access was limited to dispersed homesteads.

Visionaries are not usually named in their own time, so Joe Wickham took quite a ribbing from the Commissioners and much of the community. The gossip was, “Have you heard about Wickham's useless road?” However, the town grew west from the coast, Wickham's ‘crazy road’ became Wickham Road. As you drive from US 192 to Viera, thank that great fellow and visionary who knew you would be there today. I guess visionaries must seem crazy at some point to get things done. ☺

