

# Affects of History on Orange Beach

800 words

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Calling a politician an opportunist is redundant. History is littered with politicians, kissing the ring-of-opportunity in public even as they roll their eyes in private, and so it is with the history of political opportunities that shaped our island. Once in a generation, politicians become leaders, assisting in the development of an affluent, safe, and debt-free city with a beautiful beachscape. Piloted by captains who want to achieve a sense of well being for their people. Grasping that opportunity is another matter.

Our history started with a fish, according to oral historian Gail Walker, curator of the Indian and Sea Museum in Orange Beach. Her ancestors were Creek Indians, having settled this area in the 1700s, founding the communities of Bear Point and Caswell. By the 1800s the idea of an orange beach germinated, prompting Gail's ancestors to plant orange-tree hybrids that were a cross between oranges and satsumas, beloved for their vibrant-orange color.

For Gail's ancestors the Civil War was about holding onto their land. Her great-grandfather Lemuel, being a full-blooded Creek Indian, enlisted in the Confederate Army in Ft. Morgan when he was 14 years old and marched to fight in Tennessee. He returned with two soldiers who later died from their musket-ball wounds. They are buried in the cemetery at Bear Point.

Lemuel rode his horse to Washington, DC, securing a land deed for \$200, signed by President Lincoln. The Creeks in Ft. Morgan somehow avoided the Trail-of-Tears March to Oklahoma when the Federal Government rounded up the Indian Tribes in Alabama after the Civil War.

The 1900s saw change. Gail's father was born in 1910 in Caswell, inheriting his family's turpentine business, milking the local trees for their sap, collecting it in barrels, and sailing it to Mobile where the pitch was converted into turpentine.

Her relatives also owned and operated the old Orange Beach Hotel. It consisted of hand-made bricks on the walkways and in the chimney, being destroyed in 2015 to create the Coastal Arts Center.

Gail's family were fisherman, founding the island's charter-fishing business when a chance encounter with a tourist in 1956 sent them offshore, landing a sailfish onboard a small boat, becoming the economic driver that it is today.

Building on the rich history we inherited requires caring, because the history of the people is also a history of the island's ecology. Hurting one hurts the other.

We are at a point in the economic-growth cycle where roads, population and infrastructure have more political bandwidth than protecting the environment, because we are taxing natural resources in a way we cannot reconcile. This level of development has

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never happened before. We do not know the consequences of continued approved-by-right construction on the beach.

Gail Walker's ancestors fought to hold onto their land. In different ways the ownership of property is as precious to us today. Instead of acreage, it is development on the beach. The slices of ownership are smaller than a 1700s land hold, but the desire for ownership is part of the human spirit.

With Gail's ancestors, the stress on the land was less, and that is the key issue. The City is satisfying the developers' desire for property ownership through planned-unit-developments, creating more intensity per acre than the beach has ever had before.

Mayor Tony Kennon told Fox10 News, "You can't stop the growth. It's coming whether you like it or not." Trying to find ways to create more developments, the chin strokers proceed, scratching it like a suppurating wound, finding the gray area, moving the goal posts, brow-beating the opposition into quiescence. Expecting anything different is hope over reality.

Saying you can't stop the growth, but at the same time voting to ban short-term house rentals in the neighborhoods with minimal-environmental impact is troubling, voting against the business interests of smalltime-property investors, voting against families who rent their properties for income, voting against families' rights to seek financial improvement through property rentals, voting against customers' rights to choose between a condo on the beach or a house in the neighborhoods is troubling.

I digress. Purchasing a large stretch of beach for Orange Beach residents to enjoy with their families, reducing the environmental impact, increasing happiness, making a better quality of life for the locals who live here is something Council needs to do. Once in a generation, politicians become leaders, assisting in the development of an affluent, safe, and debt-free city with a beautiful beachscape. Piloted by captains who want to achieve a sense of well being for their people. Grasping that opportunity is another matter.

ENDS.