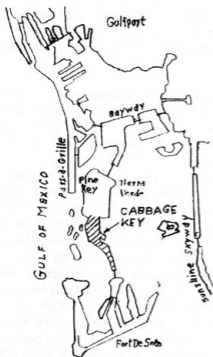


Cabbage Key

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An isolated island of mangroves and cabbage palms.

It is now a multi-billion dollar home for many of Pinellas County's wealthiest citizens.



From 1900 to 1952, it was the solitary home of Silas Dent, the hermit of Cabbage Key !!

I have recently spoken to a very successful Realtor of Pass-A-Grille and an excellent and detailed historian, Mr. Frank T Hurley. With his permission, the rest of this article is from Chapter 33 of his most interesting book, "Surf, Sand, & Post Card Sunsets".

Pinellas County Pages



Cabbage Key's Happy Hermit.

Bearded like a biblical patriarch, and looking like Santa Claus gone to seed, Silas was the Gulf Beaches' favorite all-time hermit. For nearly a half a century, he lived in a palm thatched hut in a cluster of pines. The loneliness of Cabbage Key's more than 200 acres agreed with him. Unlike most hermits, Silas liked visitors, and especially children. At Christmas time, he delighted in playing Santa Claus to the children. In those carefree days before World War I, when everyone knew all of their neighbors, it was a pleasure for Silas to rent a carriage, round up the children on the then island of Pass-a-Grille and of nearby Gulfport, and treat them to the Circus when it played at St Petersburg. En route to the Circus, Silas always stopped at his brother Noah's bakery on Central Avenue for a supply of cookies for his young guests.

Part of the Silas Dent legend originated from stories about his educated toes. Because he never wore shoes, his feet were so calloused that he could smash sandspurs with them! Once while Silas sat in front of the local Post Office, a boy asked him to sharpen his pen-knife. Silas obliged him by honing the knife blade on a calloused big toe. At other times, Silas would catch stone crabs by letting them seize his tough old toes!

Silas and Noah were young men when their father, Willie Dent arrived in Pinellas County in 1900 from Douglas, Georgia. Dent homesteaded Cabbage Key and took title to most of the island in 1912. There had been three

came. The ladies were a bit in favor of some civilization. Whenever a serious storm brewed, they would check into a hotel at Pass-a-Grille.

Margaret Wilson, a niece of old Silas, thought he was getting a mite old for hermiting. In 1950, she talked him into living with her family in Dania, Florida. On the first evening, Mrs. Wilson prepared a hot bath for her uncle. Against his will, Silas stepped gingerly into the tub - and fell and fractured five ribs. As soon as he recovered, Silas returned to his island home. "Civilization is too dangerous", he said.

In his older years, Silas became nationally known. He had brief parts in movies and was the subject of articles in "LIFE" and in other magazines. On Christmas eve 1952, the happy hermit died at St Petersburg hospital. He was 76! It is said that he is buried in the old Greenwood Cemetery.

Other stories about Silas Dent and his family can be found in the Pinellas Pioneers microfilms.

There are still many relatives of old Silas, the "Santa Claus in overalls", who are in Pinellas County.



Silas Dent - Hermit of Cabbage Key

Interested in Pinellas Pioneers?

*Go to Special Collections/Genealogy at the Largo Library
and ask to see the Pinellas Pioneers microfilms!*