

1-1-2008

***Yesteryear I Lived in Paradise: The Story of Caladesi Island* by
Myrtle Scharrer Betz**

James Anthony Schnur
University of South Florida

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Recommended Citation

Schnur, James Anthony (2008) "*Yesteryear I Lived in Paradise: The Story of Caladesi Island* by Myrtle Scharrer Betz," *Tampa Bay History*. Vol. 22 : Iss. 1 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol22/iss1/16>

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vexingly close.

Pilgrim in the Land of Alligators, which reflects Klinkenberg's apparently insatiable curiosity and his respect for the unusual folks he interviews, cannot be fairly accused of boosterism, so the author deserves to be cut some slack for such claims as, "it is hard to imagine anything better than sitting on the sand . . . and toasting a St. Pete Beach sunset with a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice in late January" (142). Readers will be tempted to take the bait (what about devouring fondue in Zermatt, while gazing up at the Matterhorn?). They may also wish for some comparative perspective. Of course "Florida has always been a place for starting anew" (54), but so is California; and so is the United States itself. After a while, when no argument stitches together these thirty-nine easy pieces--many of them a little too easy--into a theme that lingers in the mind, or into an analysis that demands a critical response, the appeal of local color begins to fade. This collection, for all of its charm, shows a trace of condescension toward a readership that is expected to be satisfied with entertainment but is not also challenged--at least on occasion--to think. Klinkenberg's vocation as a journalist is no alibi. After all, the analyses of the best reporters and columnists are enviably superior to what most academics produce. The bizarre byways where the author hangs out also distract him from getting at the source of his discontents: the relentless overdevelopment that has reduced the state's landscape to a stupefyingly banal homogeneity. In pursuit of an interesting story, he is often on the road. But his book lacks road rage.

STEPHEN J. WHITFIELD
Brandeis University

Yesteryear I Lived in Paradise: The Story of Caladesi Island. By Myrtle Scharrer Betz. New and enlarged edition (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 2007. xv, 191 pp. An appreciation by Christopher Still, foreword to first edition, foreword to second edition, foreword to new edition, preface, photos, illustrations, birds seen on or around Caladesi Island, timeline by Terry Fortner, acknowledgments, about the book. \$30.00 cloth, \$20.00 paper)

In May 2008, Stephen Leatherman proclaimed that Caladesi Island State Park possessed the best beach in America. Known as "Dr. Beach," this environmental scientist from Florida International University had ranked Caladesi highly for years. With this honor, Caladesi joined its Pinellas barrier island brethren Fort DeSoto Park on Mullet Key as an award winner, now retired from competition, that can bask in the glow of surf, sand, and sunshine.

Long before Dr. Beach sifted the sand and tested the tidal flows at Caladesi, early visitors to coastal Pinellas islands sought safe harbor and abundant sources of

food. Hog Island, the name given to Caladesi in the 1800s, became a popular stopping place for fishing rancheros and small boats sailing between Gulf coast destinations. Henry Scharrer, a native of Switzerland who came to America as a young man with a sense of adventure, sailed to the island during stormy weather in the early 1890s and stayed the next forty-four years. He improved the land, married, and applied for a homestead; he also celebrated the birth of a daughter on Hog Island in February 1895 and named her after the wax myrtle trees that surrounded his remote home.

In *Yesteryear I Lived in Paradise*, Myrtle Scharrer Betz tells the story of her native island by offering a biographical portrait of her father. As she approached her eighty-seventh year in 1981, Betz started to compile a life's worth of adventures "without any research, purely from memory" (3) to share with her family. Originally published in 1984 and reissued in 1991, the 2007 edition published by the University of Tampa Press combines her vignettes with new sources located by granddaughters Terry Fortner and Suzanne Thorp. Readers familiar with earlier editions will appreciate the addition of copious family photographs that capture life on the remote island, Fortner's excellent thirty-page timeline that provides context to Betz's narrative, and the appearance of noted Florida artist Christopher Still's *Caladesi Sunset* on the cover.

Henry Scharrer arrived in New York City in April 1883 at the age of twenty-three. In a brief first chapter, Myrtle Betz describes her father's transcontinental adventure from his work as a farm hand in the Midwest to his travels to San Francisco. Scharrer arrived in Tampa by 1887 with plans to work for a while and perhaps visit South America. While helping to build Henry Plant's Tampa Bay Hotel, he acquired a small tract of land near Sulphur Springs, and purchased a boat named *Anna*. After raising *Anna* from the water and repairing her, Henry sailed into Tampa Bay, past Egmont Key, and along the Pinellas Peninsula, choosing to harbor at the southern shore of Hog Island as a storm approached. The next morning, as he walked along this uninhabited coastline, he realized that he had found his Florida dreamland. He obtained citizenship, improved the land, carved a channel, and planted crops. Henry celebrated when he received a land patent from President Grover Cleveland in 1897.

After describing Henry's marriage to Catherine "Kate" McNally in April 1894, Myrtle personalizes the narrative by referring to Henry as "Father." Kate quickly disappears from the narrative since she passed away in 1902, when Myrtle was only seven years old. Betz described the busy, rough, and isolated life she led growing up with her father. In addition to her many domestic tasks, Myrtle became a tomboy who assisted him with fishing and tended to the livestock and crops. Though it was isolated from the coastal communities of Clearwater and Dunedin, all was not idyllic in their paradise: They regularly encountered poachers and occasionally returned from boat trips to the mainland to find their home and personal belongings in shambles. Most of her childhood education occurred on the island, though she later rowed a boat to the mainland to attend school.

Henry remained at the center of the narrative as Myrtle reached adulthood. After she married Herman Betz in 1915 and moved away, Myrtle realized how deeply

she missed the island. She returned after World War I and witnessed the wrath of the October 1921 hurricane that carved Hog Island into Caladesi (on the south) and Honeymoon (on the north). As time passed, Henry enjoyed the creature comforts of his battery-operated radio and early airboat, and he welcomed Carl Sandburg, Eddie Rickenbacker, and numerous visitors who appeared during inclement weather. Although Myrtle and Herman returned to the mainland as their daughter reached school age, Myrtle frequently visited her father. When he became ill in late 1934, they brought him to Dunedin to convalesce. Myrtle's narrative ends with Henry's passing on December 23, 1934, and the sad news that thieves and vandals had ransacked and removed many of her most precious family treasures from his island property.

Many early Pinellas histories emanated from the pens of settlers who witnessed the dramatic transformation of the peninsula. Notable authors such as John A. Bethell, Walter P. Fuller, Karl H. Grismer, and M. W. Moore imbued their narratives with boosterism and celebrated the developers and investors who transformed the terrain. Though Myrtle Scharrer Betz had in common with many of these authors a lack of formal academic training in history, her narrative differs greatly in its focus on the environmental aspects of coastal living in the days before tourism. In this memoir written later in life, she recalls the "snapping sound [that] came from shrimp and the splashes [that] were lady fish feeding on the shrimp" (81). A checklist documents her assiduous efforts to track and band birds that visited the island between 1918 and 1935. Long before her passing in January 1992, Betz became an advocate for preserving Caladesi and undeveloped areas of Honeymoon Island. Although she died before Dr. Beach's proclamation about the island, Myrtle's lifelong passion for defending her birthplace and its history preserved a landscape worthy of honor.

JAMES ANTHONY SCHNUR

University of South Florida St. Petersburg