

Palm Beach County's Oldest Business

Lainhart and Potter Building Materials

by Martha McKenna

Since its inception in 1893, Lainhart and Potter Building Materials has become a staple in Florida construction. Originally founded by George W. Lainhart and George W. Potter, the business has served the needs of projects as grandiose as Henry M. Flagler's Hotel Royal Poinciana and as modest as adding a screen porch to a house.

After serving as a carpenter's apprentice for several years, George W. Lainhart, a native of Albany, New York, made his way to Titusville, Florida, and secured a government contract to carry mail and occasional passengers by boat along the east coast of Florida. After three years, he returned to New York briefly. A visit from his brother, William, convinced him he should return to Florida.

George W. Potter and his brother, Dr. Richard Potter, came to Florida from Cincinnati due to George's health.

George Lainhart and George Potter became active organizing and participating in civic duties. George Lainhart was also piloting mail boats, surveying land, and exercising his building skills. Eventually, Lainhart

was contracted to build an awesome estate with marble floors, mahogany staircases, and custom moldings for a Mr. McCormick. The home was later sold to Henry M. Flagler. In fact, Lainhart also constructed many of the other early buildings in the area such as the first schoolhouse (1886) and R.R. McCormick's house, Seagull Cottage (1886). These buildings were known for their durability, withstanding the test of hurricane force winds.

Both Lainhart and Potter collaborated in building Flagler's Hotel Royal Poinciana. Flagler, who hired the two carpenters, was so pleased with their work that he encouraged them to supply him with building materials in the future.

In 1893 Colonel E.R. Bradley advised George Lainhart to open a building

materials business to supply Henry Flagler and others. It was then, with the help of a loan from Bradley, that Lainhart & Potter Building Materials was conceived.

Flagler's railroad created a real estate boom which allowed L&P to prosper. The first lumberyard was on Gardenia Street in West Palm Beach. The yard included stables for the mules that brought incoming lumber from the docks at the end of Clematis Street.

In 1921, due to his failing health, Potter sold his interest in the company. Lainhart left the company's name unchanged out of respect for his partner. In the 1920s, a second land boom brought the need for a larger lumberyard, so the Gardenia Street location moved to a new site on 25th Street. A Jupiter yard was added in



The founders of Lainhart and Potter, George W. Lainhart (left) and George W. Potter (right). Courtesy Historical Society of Palm Beach County.

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Fleet of trucks belonging to Lainhart & Potter, ca. 1930s.
Courtesy Historical Society of Palm Beach County.



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1951.

L&P has volunteered in the community during major disasters such as the Hurricane of 1928 and Hurricane Andrew, the former being particularly devastating to the Glades. Many of the caskets for the victims of that storm were made at L&P, and company trucks were used to transport bodies to the mass

grave at Tamarind and 25th Street.

George Lainhart was still president of the company when he died in 1930 at the age of 84. The founders believed in service and quality products. Although they have long since passed, the company has honored their intentions for generations.

In 2012, after 118 years in business, Lainhart & Potter was purchased by

Marjam Supply Company. Marjam has offices in eleven states including five other Florida cities.

Martha McKenna is a descendant of George W. Lainhart.

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manifest destiny shape the Everglades or did Evergladesdestiny shape the past, present, and future of this amazing region?"

Christian Davenport currently serves as the Palm Beach County Archaeologist and Historic Preservation Officer for Palm Beach County. Since moving to Palm Beach County in 2005, Davenport

was the lead archaeologist investigating/recording 33 new archaeological sites in Lake Okeechobee during the 2007-2009 drought. In 2010-2011, he excavated sand and shell mounds at DuBois Park in Jupiter. Currently Davenport is researching the large ancient Indian earth mounds around Lake Okeechobee. Davenport's 800-plus page report on the excavations at Lake Okeechobee will soon be completed.

Selected References

Information for this article was gathered from:

The archives of the Lawrence E. Will Museum, Belle Glade, Florida.
Will, Lawrence, E. A. *Cracker History of Okeechobee*. West Palm Beach: Sir Speedy, 2002, fifth printing.
_____. *Swamp to Sugar Bowl Pioneer Days in Belle Glade*. Belle Glade: The Glades Historical Society, 1984, second printing.

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Made in France, the towel is available in limited quantities for \$20.

Jan Tuckwood is presentation editor of The Palm Beach Post in West Palm Beach, Florida. She is in charge of the features sections, the entertainment

sections, special projects and the design of the newspaper. The Post's features sections have won numerous awards, including the J.C. Penney-Missouri award for best feature section. Jan also worked as special sections editor, fashion editor and page designer of The Denver Post and, earlier, page one editor and assistant features editor of The Post.

Ms. Tuckwood edited and co-wrote three history books for The Post –Pioneers in Paradise, West Palm Beach, the First 100 Years, in 1994, Our Century in 2000, and Palm Beach County at 100: Our History, Our Home in 2009. In March 2001, she was named Cox Editor of the Year by Cox Newspapers, the first recipient of that award.

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was hospitalized in Ashland, Wisconsin, where he died on July 31, 1921, at age 65. At his death, Cory had authored at dozens of articles and books and was a gifted ornithologist and golfer.

Frank Chapman, of the American Museum of Natural History, said of Cory, "I have never met a man so gifted as Charles Cory. He had the inherent potentialities as well as the means to win mankind successes in a surprising[ly] widely different fields." Of his contributions to Palm Beach, one went up in flames and faded into the misty, forgotten past, however, his other contribution, golf, is still played in Palm

Beach on the very grounds Cory once walked. Indeed, Palm Beach County has over 170 golf courses and is known as the "Golf Capital of the World."

Unfortunately, during my research, I could not find any photographs of the museum and only a few images of Cory. It would be another 57 years before Palm Beach would have another museum, the nationally landmarked Henry Morrison Flagler Museum. Though Cory's museum is gone, his spirit is still felt in Palm Beach as golfers walk and play on The Breakers golf course.

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Education and has been on staff with the Historical Society since 2002. In 2001 he graduated summa cum laude from Florida Atlantic University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in history. Marconi is co-author of Arcadia Publishing's Images of American series: West Palm Beach 1893-1950 (2006) and Palm Beach (2009); co-author of Palm Beach County at 100: Our History; Our Home (The Palm Beach Post, 2009); and producer and co-writer of the Historical Society's documentary "Puddle Jumpers of Lantana: The History of the Civil Air Patrol's Coastal Patrol 3" (2007).