

I. General Background

The site of the Stranahan House, the former trading post and campsite sits along the New River in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. In 1893, the area was a complete wilderness. There were no permanent white settlers. But in that year, the first road was opened through that part of Florida, and a stage coach line was founded to carry passengers over that road between Lantana (near Palm Beach) and Lemon City (now part of Miami). The stage coach company hired a young man from Ohio named Frank Stranahan to operate a ferry to carry passengers across this river. Frank decided to start a trading post to trade with the Seminole Indians, who lived up the New River in the Everglades and he opened a tent camp for stage coach passengers and the Seminoles to spend the night.

A few years later, the railroad came to Fort Lauderdale, and this attracted farmers to the area. The farmers brought families, and their children needed a school. A young woman named Ivy Cromartie was hired from Lemon City as the first school teacher in a one room school house in the woods. She and Frank Stranahan met, fell in love, and married. They built the house now known as the Stranahan House Historic Museum and lived in the house for the remainder of their lives.

Because of the river, the house, the former trading post and campsite are where they are. Because of Frank and Ivy Stranahan, the residents of the house, the trading post and campsite, the City of Fort Lauderdale is where it is. So the entire history of the region, from the era of the stage coach, and Indian trading post, and the coming of the railroad, and the one-room school house, all the way up to the modern "Venice of America", is encompassed in this location.

The Stranahan House, trading post and camp site were the home of Frank and Ivy Stranahan, who have been titled by Susan Gillis, a leading historian on Fort Lauderdale, as the 'father and mother' of the City of Fort Lauderdale, Florida.¹ The Stranahan's trading post and campsite incorporated the present day properties identified in the Stranahan House Study Act of 2007- the Bill before you. Why are the Stranahans, their house, trading post and campsite important not only to Florida, but to this nation?

As stated by Dr. Harry A. Kersey, Jr., "perhaps the most significant factor underpinning cross-cultural relationships that existed in the 20th century began with the positive interaction between Seminoles and white traders. The Florida experience [between the Stranahans and Seminoles] is one of the few bright spots in Indian history during the last quarter of the 19th century."² Frank Stranahan was one of the city's earliest permanent residents. He was an entrepreneur and a proprietor of the trading post and the overnight camp for stage travelers coming from all over, as well as the Seminole Indians, who came to trade by paddling their canoes up the river into a slough that ran through the campsite. He was known among the Seminoles for his honesty in dealing with them, even extending credit to them when necessary.³

While Ivy Stranahan's accomplishments and service to the community are addressed more fully in section II below, it is important to note that, she was a legendary advocate for the Seminole Indians; she taught many to read and write on the very grounds of the campsite. As Dr. Harry A. Kersey, Jr. wrote, she befriended the

¹ Gillis, Susan, Fort Lauderdale, the Venice of America, Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2004.

² Kersey, Jr., Dr. Harry A., Stranahan's Trading Post and Overnight Camp on the New River: Why was it Important?, p.1.

³ Kersey, Jr., Dr. Harry A., Stranahan's Trading Post and Overnight Camp on the New River: Why was it Important?, p.2.

Indian youngsters and allowed them free run of her house.⁴ According to Historian Susan Gillis, when she convinced Seminole Annie Tommie's family to move to the newly created Dania Reservation in the 1920s, she literally saved the tribe from termination by the U.S. government.⁵

Notably, “[i]n 1930 [Ivy] was invited to testify before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee of the Committee on Indian Affairs when it met at Dania Reservation. Her presentation touched on most of the major social and economic ills of the Indian people and noted that few Seminole children were ready to enter school because of their poor hygiene and limited academic preparation.”⁶ Then, in March 1954, a joint hearing of the House and Senate Subcommittees on Indian Affairs was held in Washington to consider the Seminole termination bills. Due to illness, Ivy Stranahan was unable to travel and testify at the hearings.⁷ However, “[a]lthough ill health prevented Ivy Stranahan from attending the Washinton hearings, Congressman Rogers made sure that her written statement was entered into the record.”⁸

The list of accomplishments by these founders of Fort Lauderdale is long. Certainly, one of their greatest accomplishments was their ability, through the operation of their trading post and campsite, not only to found a diverse city, but to create a relationship of respect and trust between an otherwise hostile nation of the Seminoles. This relationship was long lasting between Ivy Stranahan and members of the Seminole Tribe and served to aid the Seminoles with education, clothing and even survival from termination by the U.S. government.⁹

The Stranahan House, trading post and camp site are clearly identified with both Frank and Ivy Stranahan. It is where Frank lived and worked prior to marrying Ivy. And it is where Ivy lived for over 70 years. It is the location where the City of Fort Lauderdale, Florida began.

As for the structure on the trading post and campsite, Stranahan House, ca. 1902, is the oldest existing building in the City of Fort Lauderdale. It is part of the city-zoned H-1 Historic Preservation District. The house and its site have been named to the National Register of Historic places. It is now a museum. In March 1989, the Stranahan House was listed on the Florida Master Site File¹⁰ as number 8BD64. The adjoining property was named to the Florida Master Site File as site file number 8BD3280. The properties were then merged by the State into one Master Site Plan, file number 8BD259, on March, 15, 2005, because the State considered it one Site. This documentation, while not part of the printed record was provided to the subcommittee prior to today. In addition, the city designated the house, trading post and camp site as a city historic landmark in July 2007.¹¹

II. Additional Background (Prepared by W. Tucker Gibbs)

- a. The Stranahan House, trading post and camp site is a significant reminder of the cultural heritage of the City of Fort Lauderdale, the State of Florida, and the United States of America.**

⁴ Kersey, Jr., Dr. Harry A., *The Stranahans of Fort Lauderdale*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003.

⁵ Gillis at p. 33; Kersey, at pgs. 120-145.

⁶ Kersey, at p. 138.

⁷ Kersey, at pgs. 140-143.

⁸ Kersey, at pgs. 140-143.

⁹ Gillis at p. 33; Kersey, at pgs. 120-145

¹⁰ Florida Master Site File Documentation, copy submitted to Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands on 9/25/07.

¹¹ City of Fort Lauderdale Resolution 07-111 Historic Designation.

The camp site provided the opportunity for all segments of the late 19th century community to gather and interact thus providing the area's "... first center of commerce, tourism, and even education and interaction with local Native Americans, formerly hostile to the very name Fort Lauderdale."¹²

Stranahan's trading post and camp became the center of the incipient community; it was the commercial hub with the establishment of the trading post and the overnight facility for the stage passengers, and Stranahan's New River ferry was the essential land transportation link in the area.

This was the site on which Seminole Indians stayed and traded with Frank Stranahan. This was the beginnings of a relationship with the Stranahans that forged a trust that heretofore did not exist. This was more than just trading with the Seminoles. According to Florida Atlantic University Professor of History, Dr. Harry Kersey, "It was a very important turning point, if you will, in Indian and non-Indian relationships."¹³ And it happened on this site "...in the camp and in and around the camp, the overnight camp."¹⁴

The trading post and overnight camp attracted travelers as well as the area's first tourists - sportsmen who came to enjoy the amazing fishing and hunting opportunities available. It also influenced new residents to come to the frontier community.

In 1899, Frank Stranahan, entrepreneur, proprietor of the trading post, the overnight camp, the New River ferry, postmaster and banker for the little New River pioneer community, met Ivy Cromartie of Lemon City. Miss Cromartie had been hired as the first schoolteacher for the area. Stranahan courted Ivy that year (1899) and in 1900 they married. This was a critical event in the heritage of this community. As Dr. Kersey states, Ivy Stranahan was "perhaps the most crucial element" in the Stranahan relationship with the Seminoles culminating in her political advocacy on their behalf.¹⁵

The trading post and camp site were the point of connection between all segments of the early community of Fort Lauderdale. It was at this particular place during the 1890s that the foundations -- cultural and political -of this community were forged.

b. The Stranahan House, trading post and camp site is identified with Frank and Ivy Stranahan who significantly contributed to the history of the city, state and region.

"The Stranahan House, trading post and camp site were the home of Frank and Ivy Stranahan, arguably the 'father and mother' of the modern city of Fort Lauderdale."¹⁶

Frank Stranahan was one of the city's earliest permanent residents. He was entrepreneur, proprietor of the trading post and the overnight camp for stage travelers, the New River ferry, postmaster and banker for the little New River pioneer community.¹⁷

¹² Gillis, Susan, Fort Lauderdale, the Venice of America, Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2004, at pgs. 16-17; Kersey, at pgs. 65-72, Kersey, Jr., Dr. Harry A., The Stranahans of Fort Lauderdale, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003, at pgs. 65-72.

¹³ Testimony of Dr. Harry A. Kersey. Transcript, City of Fort Lauderdale Historic Preservation Board, March 5, 2007, pgs. 38 and 37.

¹⁴ Testimony of Dr. Harry A. Kersey. Transcript, City of Fort Lauderdale Historic Preservation Board, March 5, 2007, pgs. 38 and 37.

¹⁵ See also, Kersey, pgs. 130-145.

¹⁶ Gillis, Susan, Fort Lauderdale, the Venice of America, Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2004.

¹⁷ Kersey, pgs. 100-114.

He served as city councilman and was active in the incorporation of the City in 1911 and the development of the young community until his death in 1929.¹⁸

He contributed land for the Fort Lauderdale's Woman's Club, which hosted the first library in town; the property for what would be the Dillard School, the first to serve the black community; as well as the capital to complete the town's first tourist hotel.¹⁹

Ivy Stranahan was Fort Lauderdale's first school teacher and served as a tangible reminder of the community's pioneer era until her death in 1971.²⁰

She was a legendary advocate for the Seminole Indians; she taught many to read and write on the very grounds of the campsite. When she convinced Annie Tommie's family to move to the newly created Dania Reservation in the 1920s, she literally saved the tribe from termination by the U.S. government.²¹ Former Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall honored her further in the late 1960s by recognizing Ivy as the 'First Lady of Fort Lauderdale' principally for her decades of service to promoting the improvement of the life and education for the Seminoles and for her respect for their culture.²²

She was at the forefront of the women's suffrage movement in Florida. She was active in the conservation arena and instrumental in establishing the Everglades National Park.²³ As County Welfare Chairman, her voice was key in the ratification of Florida's Homestead Exemption Act in 1934. She served on the Board of Provident Hospital, which served the city's black community. She was a founding member of the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society.

The Stranahan House and trading post as well as the camp site were established and operated by Frank Stranahan. This operation spread over the present day properties identified in H.R. 3120. The Stranahan House, trading post and camp site are clearly identified with both Frank and Ivy Stranahan. It is where Frank lived and worked prior to marrying Ivy. And it is where Ivy lived for over 70 years. It is the location where this man and later with his wife helped to build the modern city of Fort Lauderdale.

c. The Stranahan House, trading post and camp site includes a building with distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials found throughout the tropics.

Stranahan House, ca. 1902, is the oldest existing building in the City of Fort Lauderdale. It is part of the city-zoned H-1 Historic Preservation District. The house and its site have been named to the National Register of Historic places. It is now used as a museum. The city designated the house, trading post and camp site as a city historic landmark in July 2007.

¹⁸ See City of Fort Lauderdale Application for Historic Designation at Tab A, page 7, Kersey, Jr., Harry A., *The Stranahans of Fort Lauderdale*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003, at pgs. 100-114.

¹⁹ Kersey, Jr., Dr. Harry A., *The Stranahans of Fort Lauderdale*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003, at pgs. 100-114.

²⁰ Gillis, Susan, *Fort Lauderdale, the Venice of America*, Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2004, at pages 19 and 27; Kersey, at pgs. 115-129.

²¹ Gillis at p. 33; Kersey, at pgs. 120-145.

²² Fort Lauderdale High School, *Stranahan's People*, Fort Lauderdale, 1975.

²³ US House of Representatives, *Establishment of Everglades National Park, Hearings before the Committee on Public Lands, House of Representatives, Seventy-First Congress, Third Session, on H.R. 12381, To Provide for the Establishment of the Everglades National Park in the State of Florida and for Other Purposes*, Washington, US Government Printing Office, 1931.

Stranahan House is a wood frame, two story structure, having a steeply pitched hip roof with small shed dormers. It has a T shaped foot print. Incised (under roof) two story porches surround the larger river facing portion of the house on three sides. Similar porches surround the rear portion of the building. The first floor river facing facade is divided into three units or sections with a centered double door entrance and matching bay windows on either side of the entry. The large double hung windows opening onto the verandas were likewise characteristic of the late nineteenth-early twentieth century Architectural style valuable for the study of a period or method of construction.

In 1901, Frank Stranahan commissioned Ed King, the community's first contractor to build a proper residence on his lot. King constructed a two story frame vernacular building sometimes referred to as the "Cracker Style" house, facing north toward the New River in its place.

The house is an excellent example of a type of early 20th century folk architecture indigenous to parts of the southern United States. The construction style allowed for adequate ventilation in the heat and humidity of South Florida before air conditioning, and provided a comfortable spot for visiting Indians to sleep in its early days as a trading post. Indeed, according to Dr. Harry A. Kersey, Jr., while allowed to camp anywhere on the campsite, the Seminoles were even allowed to sleep on the porches and could freely interact with the visitors at the overnight camp, if they wished.²⁴ The high pitched roof was designed to withstand hurricane force winds and has stood the test over the years. The house is of sturdy "Dade County Pine," a southern heart pine nearly extinct today. The interior features original pine floors and paneling as well.

III. Conclusion

The Stranahan House, trading post and camp site and the people who lived, worked and traded at that site became what is today the city of Fort Lauderdale. It was the vision of Frank Stranahan and his fellow settlers along with his and Ivy's honest relationship with the Seminole and African-American communities that gave Fort Lauderdale its start as a true American community. The birth of Fort Lauderdale happened at the Stranahan House, trading post and camp site. That is what makes this site important not only to the people who forged this community and who live here today, but to the nation. These people and this site is an exemplar of how the honesty and good will of individuals can lead to the development of a vibrant city. That heritage should be memorialized by the passage of the Stranahan House Study Act of 2007.

²⁴ Kersey, Jr., Dr. Harry A., Stranahan's Trading Post and Overnight Camp on the New River: Why was it Important?, p.2.

