

DAY OLD CHICKS

Bred and hatched in Ft. Lauderdale from pollorum-tested hens from R. O. P. dams with egg records of from 200 to over 300 eggs.

New Hamshires . . . 17½c

Barred Plym. Rocks 17½c

These chicks are produced in modern air-conditioned incubators, that hold the temperature exactly at 99¾ degrees, thereby assuring a much huskier chick.

Why buy chicks from the North that arrived chilled, half starved and weak from exposure?

**"DIRECT FROM INCUBATOR
TO YOU"**

**HATCHES TWICE WEEKLY
FREE DELIVERY**

Jack Pedersen

2103 N. E. 4th Ave.

**"Third Place North of
Middle River"**

19—Poultry, Supplies

HUNDREDS of young plump hens, 38c lb. Young roosters, Pollorum tested, 30c lb. Broilers, 38c lb. Wonderful laying hens, \$1.50 each. Jack Pedersen, 2103 NE Fourth Ave., Wilton Manors.

JUST FINISHED—Two-unit Duplex,
tile roof. Three rooms and bath in
each apartment. Tile bath and sinks,
with built-in cupboards. Select oak
floors and Venetian blinds throughout.
Prewar construction and materials
used. \$9,500. Jack Pedersen, 2103 NE
Fourth Ave., Wilton Manors.

Veterans Home Building Plan Offered By Retired Inventor

By PHILIP WEIDLING
[Daily News Staff Writer]

New hope for the veteran who really wants a new home is being offered by John Pederson, 2111 NE Fifth ave., owner of nearly 1,000 lots in the Wilton Manor subdivision north of this city. Pederson's proposition is this: the veteran can take over one or more of his lots, paying Pederson \$25 per month for two years. For this amount Pederson will furnish all the materials

needed for the veteran to build a two-room house to the point where the roof is on it, the weatherboarding in place and the house is, roughly, livable.

At the end of the two years the veteran can either pay Pederson the original price of the lot (\$450 to \$1,000) or can take a 50-year lease at the price of five and a half pounds of creamery butter, paid in cash, each month.

Pederson says that once the house is built to a certain point it is possible to get a bank loan on it that will enable the vet to complete it. He says that by wiring it himself and putting in his own plumbing this can be done for \$200.

Pederson, in addition, offers the veteran expert advice in all phases of construction of the house.

Inventor by Trade

An inventor by trade, Pederson is still young and energetic. He has built many houses in the Wilton Manor section and has watched homes he sold for as low as \$2,500 zoom upward in sales prices to \$15,000. "But I don't mind that," he says, "people live where people are; and I've still got plenty of lots."

The explanation of the "five and one half pounds of creamery butter phase of his contract is simple.

"We may have an inflation that will see the dollar go down to three cents in value," he says. "We may, conversely have a bad depression. The price of butter will reflect this as well as anything and it will make the rent actually amount to the same comparative value it represents now."

Pederson says the current high price of housing is utterly false. "I've built houses myself, and I've felt just like the contractors feel. Why should they build a house for you for \$6,000 and watch you sell it for \$12,000? They can sell it just as easy as you can, and make all the money themselves."

False Prices

The false prices have been built up largely, he said, by the fact that wealthy men who come to Florida can actually afford to pay outlandish prices. "They're in the high tax brackets, anyhow," he says, "and if they come down here and look for a house to rent every year, and then pay the kind of seasonal rents they have to pay, it costs them as much, within a few years, as buying the house does. Suppose they do have to sell at a 50 percent loss eventually. Look what they have gained by having their own house."

He admits that this makes it tough for the veteran in this location. "I'm doing my best to help them out," he says.

Despite current conditions, he thinks Ft. Lauderdale will be one of the largest cities in the south when housing becomes available. "I used to be in the rubber business," he said. "I know that this is the logical place to manufacture rubber tires. The raw materials pass our very doors, going both ways. Yet, here, factories can be built needing no heat, with 365 working days a year and plenty of sunlight to work by. It's just a housing problem for workers. It's never nearly been solved as yet, but we're working on it."

HUNDREDS OF BUILDING LOTS

Buy One Lot and we will Give you Two More additional lots
of the same value.

FREE

Lots on Andrews Ave.	\$1,675.00	each
Lots on N. E. 1st Ave.	\$1,350.00	each
Lots on N. E. 2nd Ave.	\$1,575.00	each
Lots on N. E. 3rd Ave.	\$1,575.00	each
Lots on N. W. 1st Ave.	\$1,200.00	each
Lots on N. W. 2nd Ave.	\$1,350.00	each
Lots on N. W. 3rd Ave.	\$1,350.00	each

The above lots are 50 x 135 feet.

Other lots as low as **\$250.00** each.

Yes! It is true that if you act at once you will receive three lots at the price of one lot. Warranty deed and full abstract; title insurance can be had. F.H.A. District. Most of these lots are high and dry and bulldozed. Many are on or near the bus line, and near school and churches. Paved streets, electric and water. Some of the lots will be sold for less than tax assessment values. Although lot sales are greater than ever before we have cut the prices with the hope of volume sales.

JOHN P. PEDERSEN, Owner

2111 N. E. Fifth Ave. (Wilton Manors)

Phone 2528-W

Broward Sun

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Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
Permit No. 20

Park — Highland Estates — Wilton Manors — Progresso — Plantation Homes — Davie — Dania — Hollywood — Hallandale

Fort Lauderdale, Florida, October 21, 1948

\$3.00 Per Year—10c a Copy

“Secession” Plans Revealed at Council Meeting at Manors

**Notice Served on Mayor;
Council Appropriates
Funds To Fight Suit in
Hearing Set for Oct. 30.**

At the regular monthly meeting of the Wilton Manors city council last Friday, Oct. 15, William J. Robinson read a notice served on Mayor Dave Turner stating that John Pedersen, and others had filed a petition in circuit court seeking to be excluded from the Village of Wilton Manors. No specific reasons were given in the notice for the action.

On the motion of Art Chabot, Robinson was appointed to defend the village when the case comes before the court on Oct. 30th. In the interim, a committee has been appointed to investigate the ownership of lots in the disputed area, qualification of lot owners, and the attitude of the people in that section as to how such a move would affect them.

The necessary funds were authorized by the council to defend this move.

Acting on another motion made by Robinson, a committee was also appointed to interview all property owners in the specific section, who had not signed the petition, asking that either a written or oral declaration of their stand on the proposed “secession” be given the village clerk before the next council meeting. Appointed to this task were Art Chabot, Brown, Perry Mickle and Clayton Leaver.

The council also:

Authorized payment of \$48.50 for recently installed traffic signs in the village.

Tabled for further consideration the request for an increase in the fee charged for plumbers licenses in the village.

Received applications for the Nov. 2 village election from James Boyd and J. Marvin Brown, running for councilmen, and Katherine V. Johnson, clerk.

Heard a report from Clayton Leaver that six occupational licenses and four liquor licenses have been issued since the last meeting.

NOTICE OF ELECTION

Village of Wilton Manors

Pursuant to the Ordinance made and provided and the motion of the Village Council, there will be an election held on the 2nd day of November, 1948, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., in the temporary Village Hall, located at 2005 Wilton Drive, Wilton Manors, Florida, for the purpose of electing two Councilmen, a Clerk and Marshal to serve for a period as provided in said ordinance. All persons qualified under Section 17 of said Ordinance as candidates should be voted upon. All persons desiring to become candidates shall comply with Section 17 on or before the 10th day preceding November 2nd, 1948.

THE VILLAGE OF WILTON MANORS

By Catherine V. Johnston,
Village Clerk.

Oct. 21, 1948.

Because Wilton Manors has incorporated we are disposing of property at reduced prices.

17 Lots, 50 x 125 ft., \$450 each. 20 acres directly across street from Wilton Manors School Site. County paid over \$3,000.00 per acre for school site before streets were paved and bulldozing was done. Our property is bulldozed and street is paved. Price today should be twice as high as when County bought, but our price is only half of what County paid. We are also offering 54 acres at Andrews Ave. and 26th St. at \$100,000. 40 acres are staked and platted. Also large new home ideal for funeral home, price builder's cost, plus lots.

**Hundreds of lots in Ft. Lauderdale \$100 and up.
50 Ft. Lots N.E. 2nd Ave., near school, \$450
Good Business Lots \$5,500, value now \$750**

**Lots on Sunrise Blvd., \$350 and up - 50 Ft. Lots two blocks from Holiday Park, \$750 - Insurable titles, Warranty Deeds
For Rent, 4,800 feet floor space at less than
five cents per ft. per month**

JOHN P. PEDERSEN

N. E. 5th Ave. and 21st Ct.

PHONE 6363

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SELLING OUT LOTS LEAVING TOWN

50 Ft. Lots on N.E. 5th Ave.

\$250._{up}

50 Ft. Business Lots on N.E. 4th Ave.

\$750

135 Ft. Frontages on Sunrise Boulevard

\$350._{up}

Hundreds of Lots at

\$100._{up}

Lots on Many Paved Streets

\$200

50 Ft. Lots in Wilton Manors
within $\frac{1}{2}$ Block of New School

\$385

**4 $\frac{1}{2}$ ACRES ON
ANDREWS AVE. AND
N. E. 26th ST.**

\$7850

ACT FAST!

These Lots Are Selling Quickly
At These Exceptionally Low Prices!

Lots Can Be Seen Anytime
Including Sunday

JOHN P. PEDERSEN

2111 N.E. 16 AVE.

PHONE 6383

OWNER WILL SACRIFICE

Because of having left town and being unable
to properly manage modern C. B. S.
store building containing:

**6
LARGE
STORES**

Each containing 1200 sq. ft. of floor space
and all fronting on N. E. 26th St., between
5th and 6th Avenue

**IN
WILTON MANORS**

Building is located on, and price includes all of business
zoned Tract "A" of Sunset Manors, on which there is
room for an additional 6 stores because of its 254 ft. of
frontage on N. E. 26th Street.

**PRICE
\$35,000**

JOHN P. PEDERSEN, PHONE BOCA RATON 9291

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BROKERS PROTECTED



Wilton Manors



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NE 5 AVE

























John P. Pedersen

John P. Pedersen and his wife Lillian arrived in Wilton Manors from Racine, Wisconsin after John, a builder, injured his back in a fall from a roof in the early 1940s. Stopping first in Tampa, they continued on to Wilton Manors. Initially, the Pedersens wintered in Wilton Manors and returned to Racine for the summer. Their two children, Jack and Shirley, did not attend school here, because their parents did not want to pay \$15 to register their car in Florida. Shirley reports that they attended the beach, instead.

Some years before they arrived in Florida, Lillian had hit on the idea of making curtain tie-backs, and the project grew from a home-based business into a profitable operation. Her customers included Montgomery Ward, and Sears and Roebuck. Although Lillian only completed sixth grade and Pedersen the seventh grade, they were both very astute business people.

Upon arrival in Florida, Pedersen began purchasing tax-delinquent property. He bought these properties on the Fort Lauderdale Court House steps for no more than \$8 or \$10 a lot. He did not buy waterfront property, as it was too expensive at more than \$15 a lot.

During the war, Pedersen could not purchase building materials for homes to build on the land he was purchasing. He could, however, purchase building materials to build chicken coops to support the war effort, which he did. At the end of the war, he threw out the chickens, cleaned up the coops, adding kitchens, bedrooms and bathrooms, and sold them as starter homes to returning soldiers and their families. At least two of these chicken coops remain, at 430, and 436 NE 21st Court.

In 1943, the Pedersen family lived at 90 NE 21st Court, and Pedersen had a business interest in the sub-division of Lazy Lake, across the street. Lazy Lake, to this day not part of Wilton Manors, was platted in 1942. Lazy Lake was famously the quarry for the Towers and a number of other structures, leaving a big hole in the ground which was filled to create a lake. Pedersen thought it needed goldfish, so he dumped something in to kill, what turned out to be many more than expected, resident fish. Dorothea Mickel reports that the stench permeated the neighborhood. Pedersen tried to talk her boys into cleaning up the mess.

Pedersen lived in several locations in Wilton Manors. Most spectacular is the home he built for himself at 2125 NE 5th Ave in 1947. His son Jack modified commercially available plans. The dining room's front wall is curved and all windows. The large living room sports a large fireplace, and there is a small atrium on the way to the back yard, where there was a little pool. There was no central air conditioning. Both Pedersen and his wife Lillian were fascinated by elegant movies and much of the decoration was inspired by the glamor of Hollywood.



John Pedersen Tending chickens at one of his "chicken coops", 1940s (WMHS - Pedersen)

Not readily apparent to visitors were the one-way mirror from the master bedroom closet into the living room or the secret room behind the fireplace. The secret room held not only goods still in short supply after the war, but also cash. Pedersen also buried cash in the little atrium. He built a larger replica of the house in Boca Raton.



Modern view of Pedersen House, built 1947 (WMHS - Little)

Pedersen was in attendance at “the Big Meeting” where residents voted to incorporate as a Village in 1947. The transcript indicates that Pedersen opposed it. Highland Estates and Lazy Lake had already been exempted. Pedersen was not enthusiastic about including some of his land. At the time, he was one of the largest private land holders in the Fort Lauderdale area, and tremendously powerful. At one point, Colonel

Robinson, moderator of the assembly, asked if Pedersen were threatening the meeting.

When asked if Pedersen had voted for or against incorporation, his daughter responded that he probably did not vote at all. She said he never voted because he thought that the Electoral College was a sham.ⁱ

In 1950, Pedersen found Mizner’s 1926 “booming” Boca Raton, now a sleepy town of fewer than 1,000 residents. He thought it would be the perfect locale for a wild animal park where exotic animals roamed free in lush surroundings. He bought 300 acres and sent his son, Jack off to eastern Africa to acquire the animals. He returned with more animals than had ever been in a single boat shipment from Africa. Florida Senator George Smathers was instrumental in clearing their arrival with the Port Everglades authorities.

Pedersen’s daughter Shirley and son-in-law George Schneider grew many of the 55,000 plants needed for the park at the Schneiders’ nursery at 2524 NE 5th Avenue, where the Marvilla Condominium now stands.

The park became Africa U.S.A. It predated Walt Disney’s Wild Kingdom by 18 years, and Disney was an admirer. There were a number of celebrity animals, including Princess Margaret, a baby chimpanzee who made numerous appearances on the Jack Paar television show. Princess Margaret was treated like one of the Pedersen children. She would kiss on command! Jack Paar, and friends such as Frank Sinatra, dined at the Pedersen home in Boca.

The park operated between 1953 and 1961, when Boca, which had grown prosperous following the success of Africa U.S.A., crowded it out. The property is now the Camino Gardens subdivision.

Pedersen was focused and relentless. He had three objectives: to become a millionaire, to bring a piece of Africa to the US, and to live to be 100. He was more than a millionaire and created Africa-USA. He died in 1996 in his 100th year.

ⁱ Shirley and George Schneider, interviewed by WMHS, 9 May 2009.

HUNDREDS OF BUILDING LOTS

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of the same value.

FREE

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Lots on N. E. 2nd Ave.	\$1,575.00	each
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JOHN P. PEDERSEN, Owner

2111 N. E. Fifth Ave. (Wilton Manors) Phone 2528-W

Advertisement in Ft. Lauderdale Daily News - November 20, 1948, most likely for lots in Ft. Lauderdale



N.E. 5th Ave. looking north toward N.E. 21st Ct., ca. 1948. The Pedersen estate home (2125), with unique bay windows, is left center, and one of his "chicken coop"-style houses (2117) on the far left.

Arriving in Ft. Lauderdale in the 1940s, John Pedersen began purchasing tax-delinquent property on the Courthouse steps--often for no more than \$8-10 a lot. But, because of WWII, he could not purchase materials to build homes on that land. Instead, "to support the war effort", he built identical structures as chicken coops. After the war, he cleaned up the coops, added kitchens, bedrooms and bathrooms and sold them as starter homes to returning soldiers. In that era Pedersen was one of the largest landholders in the Ft Lauderdale area. He lived and had an office in several locations in Wilton Manors. Most unusual is his 1947 home at 2125 NE 5th Ave, with its unique curved bay windows and interior features. By 1950 Pedersen turned his attention north to Boca Raton, where he bought three hundred acres and built Africa USA, as well as a copy of the 5th Ave house. In life he had three objectives: to become a millionaire, to bring a piece of Africa to the United States and to live to be one hundred—he accomplished all three. (Adapted from "Wilton Manors-From Farming Community to Urban Village")



Mr George And Shirley Schneider
2857 Ashley Dr W Apt B
West Palm Beach FL 33415-8240

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13 MAY 2009 PM 3 T



Doug Blevins
2031-C
Wilton Drive
Wilton Manors,
Florida 33305



Included items donated to Wilton Manors Historical Society by Shirley Schneider through Doug Blevins, after visit to Blevins home with Ben Little and Mary Uim.

2009

Dear Doug,

Thank you all for such a wonderful wonderful day! Not only were you an extraordinary great host but along with it you had that charisma to hold everyone's attention and make them feel so welcome!!

Now, you must forgive an old lady for not remembering exactly facts about the house! After we left - my husband reminded me that my father had put those book shelves in what we called the library.

Also I couldn't remember the fireplace and arches in the living room looking so plain until George reminded me that they were built with "pink" slump brick, so someone must have painted over them. You really put a lot of work and money into the place, — and it showed!!

I found a lot of snapshots which George will copy and send to you. One is of the dining area with the valences and festoons. Ben wanted one of Dad when he was young, so I'm sending that along with one of him as his nineties.

Also Ben might be interested to know that I found a snapshot of Dad with his truck outside of the "Chicken House!"

I asked my son to go through my books to look for more pictures of the house. Hope he finds them. The snapshots I found are all small but you can at least get an idea of what it looked like.

Thank you again Doug for your beautiful hospitality. Not everyone would have taken a tour with us through your place so we could go back down memory lane. Love, Shirley



1950 - This picture was taken before they replaced the rockers with the two leopard barrel chairs in front of the window. Its hard to make it out, but there is one standing lamp behind one of the lamps on the end table. Mother used that for light when she did her handwork!



The back patio



Only showed this to you so you could see the two brick pillars before you stepped down into the patio out in front



Wanted yo to see how he zig-zagged the patio wall. Thought it would be straight.



This is the patio outside of the living room.



This is awful of mother, but wanted you to see what the park looked like across the street from the blue duplex [ed.-now Jaycee Park]. It was all palms and high weeds! Mother is "posing" on the driveway of the south side of the duplex.



Wanted you to see a close-up of one of the lamps in the living room. One lamp was a man and the other was a woman. The color of the shade was coral to match the color of the duchess couch on the other side of the room.



Dad and younger brother by the pool



Wanted you to see the grill work on the screen door .
That's my dad's younger brother.



The valance and festoons were green with coral moss fringe. The Elfers and Osingas, who owned the Wilton Manors Furniture Store, are sitting with us at the table.



Dad at 92 (many face lifts and a wig on)

The images on the following pages are included from the WMHS collection. The first two are from original images provided to Ben Little by Shirley Schneider at about the same time as the ones on the previous pages. The last image is from a postcard in the WMHS collection--date and source unknown.



©Wilton Manors Historical Society--permission/attribution required for re-use. Reprint of original donated by Shirley Schneider, 2009, captioned: "This is Dad with the chickens and one of the 'Chicken Houses'. This house was on the west side of the blue duplex [2117 NE 5th Ave]."



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Reprint of original donated by Shirley Schneider, 2009, captioned: "This is the second house we lived in [2103] . It was next door (south) of the blue duplex (which we later lived in) across from your house [2125 NE 5th Ave]. The park was across from it [Jaycee Park]. We had sidewalks!"



Wilton Manors

***2009 - Mary Ulm notes from Blevins tour of Pedersen house with
Ginger Pedersen (granddaughter) and Shirley Schneider (daughter)***

The swimming pool used to be a goldfish pond. John Pedersen loved goldfish.

John Pedersen built the house and also built the same house at Africa U.S.A., but each room was much larger. Jack Pedersen drew the plans for the house. Boca house torn down in mid 60's.

There was a two-way mirror on the side wall of the living room.

Glass doors to the closets.

Gold-plate along the swales.

Porch toward the yard, off the living room was dirt and Pedersen buried the earnings from Africa U.S.A. there

Secret closet off the kitchen where they stored coffee, sugar, rationed goods during WWII.

Shirley lived in a duplex across the street and her parents lived on the other side of the duplex. Those were the chicken coops. There were 3 or 4 chicken coops

First house they lived in was across from Lazy Lake. She was 17 years. Then moved next door. Something about dynamiting.

No two tress the same. At the end of NE 21st ct was all sand. Someone told her dad that if he kept letting people use the land it was not going to be his any more.

Original windows. Jack Parr at Africa USA

Backyard.

She went to Tampa and Ft. Myers school, came down in 1941. Think we came to 1944 as the year they got to Wilton Manors. Pedersen did not wish to buy an auto tag, so the children did not go to school.

Confirmed story told my Dorothea Mickel about fish at LL pond.

Dated Bobby Mickel

Pedersen had stores on NE 26th Street; put a nursery in, Miss Jordon's School.

Described the towers as an eye sore. Made the place look cheap to drive through those crumbling towers.

Her dad's rival was Al Hagen. The Pedersen's associated with the Richardson's. Hagen put in concrete, so Pedersen put in terrazzo at the nursery, not to be out-done. Came down from Wisconsin to Florida, but kept his job, because he said you had to have two jobs

Pedersen gave all the land for Holliday Park

Bought lots for \$5, that's how he got the land in Wilton Manors

Shirley was 12 and her brother was 15 and he took us out of school

Danish, pure, all the way back. Racine Wis is where all the Danes landed.

Very determined that you could learn anything.

Three things he wanted to do in his life. Build a place where animals could roam free in the US, become a millionaire, and live to be 100.

Happiest day in his life was to go to the circus. 1903, walked to the part of town where the circus was. He asked if he could have a job so that he could see the circus. He was turned away several times. Finally a man approached him and asked was he the little boy that wanted a job so that he could see the circus. Said yes. Told him to come in the tent and sit and not move. They put on a show for him.

Not a religious man, but when the Jehovah's witnesses would go door to door, he would invite them in and try to convince them to become atheists.

Tea totaler. Had a theory that alcohol collected at the top of your brain and if you drilled a hole in the top of your head, you could burn a flame.

Lillian Pedersen died in 1996.

The rumor that the house was a funeral home is not true.

Africa USA built in 1953. Thinks that Doug's house was sold in 1952.

Green light trailer park on Andrews near 10th and a RR track.

George Schneider came to Florida in 1948 at age 24 for the first time, then again for good the next year Halloween 1949.

Had speakers out in the yard, not at the towers to play the Christmas music.

Lenore was Shirley's best friend

Snookie Chumley and her parents were who they sold the house to, across the street or next door? Could be up at LL

Several stories about playing practical jokes on her father.

history

Africa U.S.A. is a true American success story. How did some Florida scrubland become a world famous theme park? Read the full story here!

The Beginning of a Dream

Racine, Wisconsin is a medium-size midwestern city, home to many inventors and entrepreneurs. In 1897, John P. Pedersen was born in Racine, the son of Danish immigrants. [Click here](#) to read about the Pedersen family history.

Being the seventh born child in a family of nine children did not leave much for John. He vowed that he would make something of himself, in spite of having only an eighth grade education. After serving in World War I, John married Lillian Nelson, another Racine native and they headed west to California. They lived in the Imperial Valley where they tried farming in the desert heat. The landscape reminded the Pedersens of what Africa might look like. They imagined African animals roaming across the California land. As their money was running out, John landed a job with the Southern Pacific Railway. With the money they saved, he sent Lillian back to Racine to have their first child. Jack Pedersen was born in Racine in 1923. John soon returned to Racine to be with his family

Curtain Tie-Backs

Back in Racine, John worked a few hours a week in an automobile body factory, but the Great Depression was beginning to take effect. By this time the Pedersen family had grown to four, with daughter Shirley born in 1926. Lillian was quite talented with crafts, and made small items called "curtain tie-backs." These crafts were sewn from scraps of cloths and were quite popular with friends. The Pedersens decided to see if they could market the tiebacks to larger stores. John went to Chicago and sold the curtain tie-backs to all the major Chicago department stores such as Montgomery Ward and Sears Roebuck. With these contracts the Unique Novelty Company was born. Their curtain tie-back designs were protected under patent number 1,818,578, granted August 11, 1931. Over 60 people were hired to make the curtain tie-backs.

Milmine Road Development

With the proceeds from the curtain tie-backs, John bought land in suburban Racine and built affordable housing for Racine workers. His two bedroom houses cost \$1000 to buy, and he built 70 houses for rental properties. He became well-known for his "one cents sale" - if you bought one house you got another for one cent!

On to Florida

While working on a house, John fell off a roof and injured his back. Lillian suggested that a warmer climate might help, and the family was on the way to Florida. The Florida of the 1930's was mostly untamed jungle, and land was cheap after the great land bust. John bought land throughout South Florida and built many developments such as Wilton Manors in Fort Lauderdale. The outbreak of World War II brought home building to a halt - materials were severely rationed. This only caused John to become more creative. He built houses under the guise of "chicken coops". They were essentially houses without interior finish work where the Pedersens raised chickens for the war effort. When the war ended in 1945 the "chicken coops" were cleaned up and finished and sold to returning GI's.

The Dream Realized - Africa U.S.A. is Born

John and Lillian never forgot their dream of having an African wildlife park and botanical garden. As Jack and mother Lillian were driving in Boca Raton, they came

across some grasslands dotted with pine trees and sable palm that looked like an African savannah. John looked at the land and the tiny town of Boca Raton and commented "This is the deadest town I have ever seen. I am going to wake up this town." John purchased the 300 acres in 1950 from the City of Boca Raton and Palm Beach County Commission. The land was originally homesteaded as an orange grove by the Raulerson family, one of the original Boca Raton pioneer families. The transformation to an African Jungle began. Miles of canals and lakes were dug. An artificial waterfall and geyser were engineered by Jack Pedersen utilizing huge pumps to propel the water. Over 55,000 plants were added to the landscape to give that jungle look. All that was missing was the animals.

Safari in Africa - Gathering the Animals

Jack flew to British East Africa to begin the process of animal collection. Working with Dr. Cecil Cade and his son Richard, Jack spent seven months in Africa collecting rare Grevy's zebras, ostrich, cranes, wildebeest, zebra, and gazelle. Special permission was granted to capture the Grevy's zebra as they are almost extinct in the wild. Jack endured many illnesses while in Africa including malaria and tick fever. The animals were loaded onto the African Planet steam ship as a modern day "Noah's Ark." The ship left the port of Mombassa and sailed nine weeks across the Atlantic to Port Everglades, Florida. Richard Cade accompanied the animals aboard ship and helped transition the animals to their new home in Boca Raton. [Click here](#) to see pictures sent by Richard Cade. Florida Senator George Smathers was instrumental in getting permission for the animals to arrive at Port Everglades. It was the largest shipment of animals ever to leave Africa aboard one ship. The crates that held the ostrich had to be constantly rebuilt to allow for the fast-growing creatures. Although the ship endured many storms at sea, the animals arrived safely. The unloading of the animals was quite a media event and the animals were transported to their new home in Boca Raton.

Africa U.S.A. Opens to the Public

On March 10, 1953 Africa U.S.A. opened its doors to the public. The admission to the gardens areas was free, and the Jungle Train Tour was 95 cents. Many major newspapers did full-page write-ups because of the uniqueness of the park - a zoo with no cages where the visitors could safely interact with the animals. Many animals were added by purchasing animals from other zoos such as camels, elephants and giraffe. The herds began to grow as the animals adapted to the South Florida climate.

"Moneybags" - The Troublesome Giraffe

In the 1950's, it was difficult to import giraffes directly into the United States due to strict regulations from the Department of Agriculture. The Department also refused to let Africa U.S.A. import giraffes because they were a "private" zoo. A giraffe was purchased by Africa U.S.A. from Kenya but the Department of Agriculture refused to release him to Africa U.S.A. So off to court they went. Jack Pedersen flew to Washington D.C. and assisted Africa U.S.A. attorney Ernest Tucker in arguing before the U.S. Court of Appeals. The court held that Africa U.S.A. had just as much right to have a giraffe as any public zoo. [Click here](#) to read the court's decision. The poor giraffe was quarantined 18 months in New Jersey. The court battle cost over \$17,000 in legal fees so the giraffe was named "Moneybags". The Department of Agriculture still was not through. They billed Africa U.S.A. \$2,100 for the giraffe's food. Back to court they went and again Africa U.S.A. won. These victories against the Department of Agriculture would prove costly later on.

Africa U.S.A. Celebrities

Many animals were very popular at Africa U.S.A. The cheetahs Mojah and Mbili, the giraffes Moneybags and Champ but above all Princess Margaret. Margaret was a baby chimp adopted by the Pedersen family and raised in their home like a child.

The baby chimp was trained by John Pedersen, who had a natural gift in training animals. Margaret was most famous for kissing people. John trained her to do this by first having her kiss picture in magazines. She learned her cue - "Kiss the pretty lady" and Margaret would kiss the women first. During the day Margaret had her own "house" in the Africa U.S.A. administration building. [Click here](#) to read more about Princess Margeret

Another popular "celebrity" at Africa U.S.A. was pin-up queen Bettie Page. [Click here](#) to see some famous shots of "Jungle Bettie".

A Growing Boca Raton and Africa U.S.A.

As the 1950's continued. Africa U.S.A. became more and more popular as a tourist attraction with 300,000 visitors a year. John Pedersen had succeeded, perhaps too well, on putting Boca Raton on the map. Housing developments such as Boca Isles began to spring up around the Africa U.S.A. property. Many residents complained about the noise and traffic that Africa U.S.A. contributed to. A legal battle over the path that Camino Real would take ensued as the City of Boca Raton tried to condemn land. John Pedersen argued that the crooked path that Camino Real would take was dangerous but he was overruled by the city council. At about the same time the legal "victories" against the Department of Agriculture were to take their toll. Even though no animals had been directly imported from Africa for years, African red ticks were supposedly found on some animals. The Department insisted on spraying and several animals fell over dead where they stood. This and the Camino Real situation made John Pedersen realize that his welcome in Boca Raton was over. He sold the Africa U.S.A. attraction and a corporation ran it for two years. After they failed to make payments, John took the property back and ran it during its final year of operation. Several developers were anxious to buy the land.

The Closing of Africa U.S.A.

Africa U.S.A. was sold and closed its doors on September 4, 1961. The animals were sold at auction to zoos around the country. John Pedersen was 65 at the time and tired of fighting city hall. The Africa U.S.A. era had come to an end. The Pedersens retired to Lake Worth until 1971 when they moved to Australia. They returned to Lake Worth in 1974 to be near family. Lillian Pedersen died in 1985 but John Pedersen reached the age of 98. Never to be outdone, his last moment of glory occurred in January 1996 when he appeared on the front page of his hometown newspaper back in Racine. He had written to the paper with a mini-biography of himself. When his fantastic tales of a "one-cent" housing sale and running an African wildlife park turned out to be true, John Pedersen had his last bit of fame. [Click here](#) to read a synopsis of John's life written by his daughter, Shirley Pedersen Schneider.

Africa U.S.A. Today

The property that was Africa U.S.A is now the Camino Gardens subdivision. As seen on the Africa U.S.A. Gardens page, much of the lagoon is intact with the geyser base still visible.

Africa U.S.A. was the real Florida at its best - a little tropical, a little kitschy, but a lot of fun for all who had the privilege to visit.

[Click here](#) for pictures of the 50th Anniversary of Africa USA Event.

If you would like an extensive database of Africa U.S.A. pictures, brochures, the theme song and an extended MPEG movie, please [click here](#).