

History of Valparaiso

At the turn of the last century the area that is now Valparaiso was uninhabited forest land, owned by the Federal Government and opened for homesteading.

In 1901, Allen Brown Jr. established a homestead here and acquired title to 15,000 acres of timbered land. In 1909 the entire area was purchased by the Consolidated Land and Lumber Company for eight hundred dollars.



All of the area from Shalimar to Rocky Bayou, including the land that is now Eglin Air Force Base proper, was included in the 1901 acquisition.



A small settlement was established, built around a sawmill located near the north side of Tom's Bayou. Except for this settlement, the land was the same as it had been in 1890.

The settlement was visited by a Chicago industrialist, John B. Perrine, while on a boating trip along the Florida coast. Mr. Perrine wrote that he was impressed with the natural advantages, scenic beauty and healthfulness of this bayou

country. He called the area Valparaiso, a Spanish word meaning "Vale of Paradise".

Mr. Perrine never forgot this beautiful bayou country. By 1918, he had organized the Valparaiso Development Company and had purchased all the land originally acquired by Allen Brown. The area, which was once a part of Walton County, had been included in Okaloosa County when it was created in 1915. Perrine planned a model community and immediately petitioned Florida Legislature to grant a municipal charter. In 1921 this charter was granted and the City of Valparaiso was created.

Mr. Perrine dreamed of a city of 60,000 people and the city was platted accordingly — residential and commercial lots, streets and sidewalks, thirty-two parks, and an eighteen hole golf course. The golf course was sold to the Federal Government in 1950 and is currently maintained by Eglin Air Force Base.



Among the interesting and unique projects that were planned and put into effect was a community farm. Every purchase of a “villa” site received ten acres of farm land and was incorporated in the community farm, which was operated by the Valparaiso Development Company.

In spite of the natural advantages, Valparaiso was not self-sufficient. The most practical means of transportation was by water and the development company found it necessary to operate a transportation line, consisting of several boats and barges.

Mr. Perrine died in November of 1921 and rests beside his wife in Valparaiso Sunset Cemetery. Mr. Perrine’s experiment had not been financially successful and shortly after his death the Valparaiso Development Company was forced into Federal Bankruptcy Court.



Comparatively, little tangible evidence of Perrine’s great experiment exists. His residence at 85 Eastview Avenue is still in excellent condition. The Community Church, which he built and established, is in use and the building which housed his public school is now a community center. The park in front of the “Old” City Hall bears his name.

At this time, a Chicago financier, Mr. James Plew purchased the assets of the Valparaiso Development Company for 546,000 and also assumed some larger mortgages which were still outstanding. He then organized the Valparaiso Realty Company, with himself as President and his son-in-law, C. W. Ruckel, as secretary.

Mr. Plew was primarily instrumental in the growth and progress of this area. In 1935, he laid the foundation of what was to become Eglin Air Force Base. In that year he leased 137 acres of land south of Tom’s Bayou to the City of Valparaiso for the annual sum of one dollar. This arrangement made it possible for the Florida State Highway Department to pave the original

north-south and east-west runways on the Valparaiso Landing Field with the brand new mix-in-place asphalt process developed by Mr. G. E. Mitchell, a Valparaiso resident. The Valparaiso Landing Field was subsequently given to the Federal Government and was used as an auxiliary field for Maxwell Army Air Base. In 1937, Mr. Plew donated an additional 1500 acres for use as a gunnery range and the Federal Government made 340,000 acres of adjacent land available to the Army Air Corps. This entire area became Eglin Air Force Base.

The history of Valparaiso has become interwoven with the history of the Base. Many World War II pilots received gunnery training here and the Tokyo Raiders, under the leadership of General James Doolittle, trained at one of the auxiliary fields. Many of the Raiders were housed in the Valparaiso Inn (which is now where Bayshore Point is located) during their training at Eglin. The primary mission of the Base, during World War II, was to perform operational suitability testing for the Army Air Corps. Today many military and civilian members of Eglin Air Force Base make their homes in Valparaiso.



Today, Valparaiso's 6,534 residents live adjacent to the Eglin Air Force Base East Gate with approximately 500 residents living on Eglin Air Force Base itself. Valparaiso is bordered by Niceville on the North and Boggy Bayou on the East. The City is cut in two by Tom's Bayou which juts off from Boggy Bayou. Today, Eglin is one of the world's largest Air Force installations.