



By Kevin Hemstock, former Managing Editor

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Jupiter was the Hub for Illegal Booze

*Story by Kevin Hemstock, Former Managing Editor
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Big Plans: Developers in Jupiter had big plans for the town, soon after it was incorporated, and the town was doing its part by providing services, apace, or in some cases before development. The plans coincided with a development boom in the state and in Palm Beach County. Big plans were in the works to develop Jupiter Island, Hobe Sound was being envisioned as the Hollywood of the East, and a Chicago speculator had just bought 8,000 acres in what is now Jupiter Farms.

A Palm Beach Times article reported in September 1925 that in Jupiter, a 41-25 vote by eligible town voters and residents of the nearby countryside approved a major road building project. "Six roads will be built and rebuilt and a bridge over the coastal canal constructed, according to plans. The Indiantown road is expected to be rebuilt and widened to 16 feet from ... Dixie highway to a point about nine miles west (of) Center street, Jupiter, will be improved and extended two miles; the canal bridge will connect the east and west sections of Wilson road and that road will be repaired..." the report stated.

A year later, a Times headline declared that "Construction Work Active At Jupiter": "Already a system of illumination has been installed on the Dixie highway, on the concourse and also on the road that leads all the way to the ocean front. The Florida Power and Light Company has had charge of the entire electric work in the city, including illumination, power, and transmission. "A water supply system is at present being installed which, it is said is capable of pumping an adequate supply of water through the homes of over 500 citizens."

A Nov. 6, 1925, article reported that Jupiter "will have every modern convenience, it will be carefully zoned with a restricted home building program, beautiful boulevards, 100 to 200 feet in width connecting with the new 120-foot Dixie Highway, plazas, shady parks, a civic center at the intersection of the concourse and Dixie Highways, the yacht basin and the yacht club, and buildings of architectural design that will harmonize with the natural beauty that now exists."



Town meetings were being held in a rented room of a local grocery store, and were later moved to the old school located near what is now Town Hall Avenue, where later town offices were built. But though it didn't have a town hall, the town paid for the construction of a jail, at a cost of \$1,376.59 near the Loxahatchee River on the west side of the railroad tracks.

Plans also were in the works for the "promenade," a road with a right of way of 200 feet to the beach along what is now Indiantown Road. This project did not go forward, unlike the water system and some of the road projects.

It wasn't long, however, before the bills started coming in, placing a heavy burden on Jupiter taxpayers. By 1927, residents were asking that at least some of the lights be turned off to save money.

Minutes of the Feb. 15, 1927, Town Commission meeting noted that a "note be drawn on the Town of Jupiter for 90 days" to take care of the bill for streets lights that was "past due." On May 3, the



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commission voted to "cut down on the number of street lights." Several of the early town minutes indicate that land was confiscated by the town because of back taxes owed, but in March 1927, the commission voted to repeal the ordinance levying taxes for 1925.

Anna Minear recalled in *The Loxahatchee Lament*, that "Jupiter had a big bust before the big depression of the '30's. After a land boom in 1924 and 1925, during which most of today's Jupiter streets were laid out, there was a land bust in 1926. It was kind of desolate, streets and sidewalks in the wilderness, as in Hobe Sound."

Jupiter Speed Trap: One concern of residents of the time was the reputation the new town was beginning to acquire as one of the worst speed traps in the state. The center of Jupiter was on the Dixie Highway to Miami and the town was augmenting its budget with the receipts of traffic fines.

According to the 1926-27 budget, almost half of the \$21,923 town income was funded by fines and forfeitures, compared to only \$5,939 received from property taxes. And while the local police officers were paid a salary, they also received a portion of fees recovered from tickets. Nearly every car passing through the town was stopped for speeding, it was said. One of the first town purchases was a police motorcycle.

Harlow Rood, now 91, recalled being stopped on Dixie Highway (now roughly Alternate A1A) for speeding over the 20 mph limit while driving the Model T Ford truck he used to haul mail to Indiantown. The ticket cost him a hefty \$35 at the time.

On Nov. 16, 1927, a Palm Beach County grand jury for the second time criticized the town, and recommended, as reported by the Times, "that the practice of molesting motorists in Jupiter by unlawfully arresting for speeding and stopping and searching their cars without authority be discontinued at once."

Carlin White, 93, said he recalls that on one occasion the Jupiter police "stopped six buses of Shriners on the way to the Shriners convention in Miami."

The Nov. 30, 1927, edition of the Times reported that the "notorious" speed trap in Jupiter was eliminated following two grand jury investigations and a shakeup in town government. The report stated: "Following a wholesale shakeup in official circles, the head of the Jupiter 'progressive' party now in power, announced the new policy of courtesy to the motorist, and complete eradication of the long-standing speed trap."

The scandal led to the firing of Police Chief A. B. Wilson, replaced by Fred Turner, whose position of commissioner of welfare included the post of police chief. Town attorney W.R.P. Maloney was "removed from office." Motorcycle officer D. D. Cook also was fired, replaced in that position by James E. Williams, who had been Jupiter's first "marshal" when the town was established.

Investigation of Town Finances : That wasn't the town's only problem. As the land boom of 1925-26 began to turn into bust, times went from good to bad, and people began to complain about property taxes. But where was all the money going? The records were sparse. City auditors noted at a commission meeting Feb. 6, 1927, that the town had assets of \$41,044.66 and liabilities of \$17,099.70, with differences being shown as overdue taxes. The commission appointed the town attorney to determine whether state law had been violated.

A Times article stated: "Work of the former members of the commission is being retraced, and books reread to discover the solution of the tangle. The books were said to be in such poor condition that difficulty was being met in following through the figures."



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A Nov. 1, 1927, audit by the firm of Winnell and Winnell, praised the town for its record keeping, then went on to describe various violations of state laws and the town's charter. According to the audit, the town's books showed that a paving contract had been given to an employee of the town. "In our opinion, this is very serious."

The audit could not make sense of the tax income from 1925 and 1926. The audit stated: "We found the tax rolls to be very much in disorder and we attempted to straighten out the entanglement. The attempt resulted in complete failure and if any satisfactory data is to be obtained pertaining to the 1925 and 1926 taxes the tax roll for 1926 should be rewritten and postings made to it from our analysis of cash collections of taxes for 1925 and 1926." Part of the audit included an inventory of material confiscated by the active police force. Items missing from the inventory included: two Studebakers, a motor boat, one Packard, a Ford Roadster and four pistols.

High taxes, financial irregularities and an over-zealous police force "damn near destroyed the town of Jupiter," White said.

And then, there was the booze.

Hot spot in the booze trade: In January 1919, the 18th Amendment was ratified and nine months later the Volstead Act made prohibition the law, making the manufacture, transport and sale of alcoholic beverages illegal in the United States. It was an unpopular law throughout the nation, and led to the rise of organized crime and crime figures such as Chicago crime boss Al Capone, who left his mark even in Florida, with a residence in Miami. Local folklore has it that Capone had a hideaway on the land that would eventually become the Burt Reynolds Ranch.

Jupiter was at a crucial juncture and was strategically located. It had an inlet, a river and was only 50 miles away from a country, the Bahamas, where liquor was legal. And Jupiter was bisected by a major trans-state roadway, the Dixie Highway, which crossed the river near the inlet.

Jupiter was a transportation hub for bootleggers:

Prohibition wasn't popular, here, or anywhere else in the nation. Add that to the burst of the land boom bubble in Jupiter, and it's easy to see that running liquor was easy cash for those experiencing tough times. No one was sympathetic to (prohibition)," said Carlin White. "They were trying to make a little money."

White said trucks would pick up liquor, brought in from the Bahamas at night. The contraband, packed in burlap bags or a "straw sack kind of thing," would be picked up at a local private dock and transported in the trucks west across the Intracoastal Waterway over the old swing bridge to Dixie Highway and then head south. The trucks White said, were the "biggest and the best" and sometimes there would be hundreds of trips per night. "Everybody overlooked it," White said, adding that most people in the area either didn't know about it or didn't care. And most of Jupiter's population was on the other side of the Intracoastal, and could not see or hear the activity. But White was living on the east side, at the Carlin House, which was a residence and winter inn near the place where the liquor would come in.

"We were kept awake many nights with those trucks going by the Carlin House," he said during an interview in January 2000. "When the weather was good, from sunup to sundown, it was a madhouse." White had several experiences with Prohibition. At one point, a boat he owned was stolen by a member of the Ashley gang and used in an attempt to bring liquor over from the Bahamas. On another occasion, the Town of Jupiter rented a boat from him to chase bootleggers. According to commission



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meetings of the time, White received \$35 for boat rental. He recalls that the town wanted to use his boat because of its speed, but, he said, he did not know until later that it was going to be used to chase bootleggers.

Some of the liquor was brought up the inlet and some was brought up on shore, said historian Bessie DuBois, in an interview before her death. It was quite a time, I'll tell you. There was a lot of liquor brought in that inlet," she said.

Locals also were making their own whisky, aka moonshine. A Feb. 3, 1928 edition of The Palm Beach Post reported the seizure of "one of the largest stills ever" 9 miles northeast of Kelsey City (Lake Park). The still, of about 1,000 gallon capacity, was shut down after a brief but hot gunfight between moonshiners and prohibition agents. Five people were arrested. About the same time, the paper reported, a still of about 500 gallons, and another of 80 gallons, along with 64 barrels of mash, were seized near Jupiter.

In the Loxahatchee Lament, Jupiter resident Elzie Lanier, now deceased, recalled Prohibition days. "During Prohibition days, there was a lot of bootleg activity in Jupiter. Boats came up river and planes landed on the beach road and elsewhere." Lanier recalled an occasion in which a plane landed in a pond south of Jupiter with 101 cases of liquor. And, he said, boats would haul 200 to 300 cases. There was plenty of home-made as well. "There were lot of stills around here. They used to catch quite a few, but the sheriffs were hauling as much bootleg as anyone," he noted.

The booze trade infected local law enforcement and ultimately politics. In Jupiter, the same audit that shows confiscated cars and guns missing also showed about 131 sacks of confiscated liquor missing.

On March 13, 1928, Jupiter Mayor Charles Bennet wrote a sizzling letter to the Town Commission, accusing the vice mayor, R. C. Albertson, and police officer James Williams, of making off with liquor seized from a bootlegger. The letter stated: "Nine affidavits in possession of the U.S. Treasury Dept. Special Agent P.B. Kenney show that R.C. Albertson and Jams E. Williams carted away from the scene of the seizure at Ruby Heights a considerable quantity of liquor which was not turned over to the proper authorities either Town, County or Federal."

And, the mayor concluded: "I recommend to you that Officer James E. Williams be discharged from the service of the Town of Jupiter. "I recommend to you that the office of Vice Mayor be vacated and a Vice Mayor appointed to succeed R. C. Albertson."

The blame for all of it, the mayor stated, rested with the commissioner of public welfare, J. F. Turner, whose commission responsibilities included the police department. "At our last meeting, Mr. J.F. Turner stated to you that the Inlet was still wide open that he was unable to get any co-operation from the Federal Officers and that Jimmie Williams had been a good Policeman and done all that could be expected of one man. "The number of boatloads of liquor entering the Jupiter inlet (sic) has been reduced by at least 70 per-cent in the past six weeks and no credit for it need be given the Jupiter Police force and if this Commission will carefully consider this report, I believe they will see why the Prohibition Officers (sic) have not Co-operated with the Jupiter Police Department. "I recommend that the office of Commissioner of Public Welfare be vacated and that a successor to J.F. Turner, Jr., be appointed."





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It's uncertain what came of this letter. Officer James Williams went on to work as a deputy for the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office. Fred Turner went on to become an alderman and later mayor, and probably the last mayor of Plumosus City, a town formed by farmers and fern growers dissatisfied with Jupiter. "It was a wild time," said White, who was Turner's stepson. "It was a very difficult time and nothing was normal. It was a very memorable period in one way, and a very difficult period in another."

Things changed dramatically in September 1928, when a hurricane destroyed or damaged most of the buildings in Jupiter. But the death knell of the brief Jupiter boom, after its quiet birth Feb. 9, 1925, came in October 1929, when the town, and the nation, were paralyzed by the Great Depression.