



### Part 3: The Trail Blazers and Builders

By the 1920s, America's automobiles were prevalent and northerners wished to travel to and visit Florida. The Everglades have always been a challenge. However, there were other impediments. For one, it was Florida's laws that required local municipalities to fund in part or all the roadways. In the sources there are several references to the Trailblazers of Tampa and their desire to create a roadway to Miami. This photo program focuses on Barron Gift Collier and his efforts to make the Tamiami Trail from Naples to Miami a reality. In those early days it took weeks to travel from Miami to Naples and vice-versa. <seminoletribune.org>

"At this time, the state was running out of construction funds for the east-west portion and dropped the original deal. The following year, land entrepreneur Barron Collier, who had invested in millions of acres of cheap Southwest Florida wilderness, offered to bankroll the completion of the Tamiami Trail; like others, he needed that road to develop his holdings. A shrewd businessman, Collier's deal came only if Lee County would relinquish the land that he owned for the formation of a new county to be named after him. In addition, the road had to go through Collier's new county, where, in 1923, there was not a mile of finished highway." <seminoletribune.org>

Collier's desire to help build the Tamiami Trail came when he learned that Tampa wanted a connection to Miami. He owned 70 percent of the land in then Lee County, amounting to about 900,000 acres. There was opposition to Collier from a Miami tax collector, also a road entrepreneur. After many interactions to stop Collier, the governor of Florida, Cary A Hardee, sided with Collier. He got his county and poured millions of dollars in the Tamiami project. <gulfshorelife.com> (Checkout "Gulfshore Life" article.)

"In 1928, a motorcade including the original Trailblazers rolled into Everglade to hail the opening of the Tamiami Trail. As recounted in Andrews' memoir, Barron Collier greeted them with performers from the Ringling Circus, including acrobats and bareback riders; a contingent of Seminole Indians; and a musical band from Czechoslovakia. Mr. Collier died in 1939. His legacy is that he became the largest private donor to Everglades National Park. <gulfshorelife.com>

**Part 3 shares visual information learned at the Collier County Museum in Naples.**

### Trail Blazers: Pioneers in Southwest Florida

As more settled in Southwest Florida, everyday life and acquiring supplies was important. "Many pioneer families started off in a tent or Seminole-style chickee thatched with palm fronds. Other pioneer homes were called the Cracker house because it referred to descendants of the earliest white pioneers. Many were of Scotch-Irish ancestry. Their homes were built with whatever materials were at hand. Pioneers were careful to pick a high dry piece of land for their cabins or a sandy "island" in the scrub that wouldn't flood with every cloudburst. <display information>

Note there are several versions of the "Cracker" origin. One had to do with cattlemen who used whips as they drove cattle into open grasslands. The other was the sound of crushing or cracking corn to make grits, corn pone, bread, or hushpuppies.

Cypress wood and heart pine resisted termites and decay and were used for floorboards, planking, and structural timbers. Concrete was made by mixing lime, oyster shell, and sand. Crawlspace under shelters were used to help ventilate the house and allow chickens and hunting dogs shelter. They helped keep snakes and bug infestation. Most people slept under mosquito nets and burned smudge pots covered with damp fertilizer to minimize insects. <display information>







Coastal schooners kept families supplied from Key West and Tampa

"Tamiami Trail was a mind-boggling event. Across 76 swampy miles, more than 2,000 workers toiled for the better part of five years. If you laid all the dynamite used end to end, it would have reached all the way to San Francisco. The project, which spanned from 1923 until 1928, cost a mind-boggling \$8 million, which breaks down to about \$25,000 per mile...Crews worked 12-hour shifts and Collier turned the work into a competition, offering up prizes for the teams that worked the fastest...Amazingly, we didn't lose a single person during the construction of the trail."

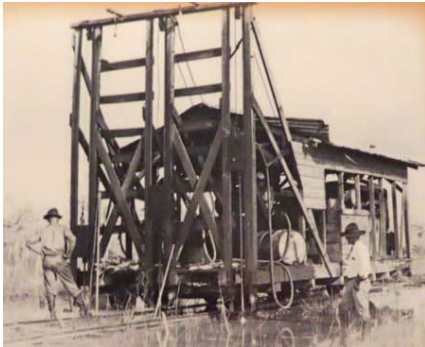
<archive.naplesnews.com>

## The Trail Builders

At the time of its creation in 1923, Collier County consisted of only a few isolated settlements and a total population of less than 1200 people scattered over a tropical wilderness larger than the state of Delaware. There was no electric power, telephones or telegraphs, and not a single mile of paved road.

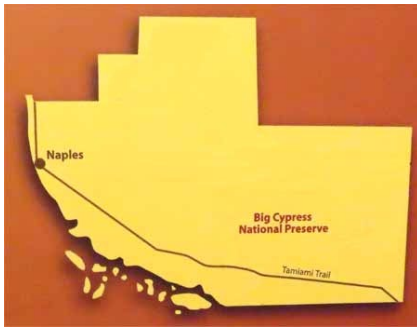


Drillers and Blasters used millions of sticks of dynamite and specially designed 30-ton drill car, blasting crews pounded the solid rock terrace into rubble. In all, 2,598,000 sticks of nitroglycerine dynamite were used on the Trail project.



Above is a "Walking" dredge in a 10 hr shift, 3 of these could average 80 feet. The Skimmer (right) was an early type bulldozer to level roadbed.





## Final Steps

A fleet of trucks and tractors smoothed and fine-graded the road surface to meet strict Florida Road Department specifications. No stone larger than 2-inches in diameter could be used within the top 6-inches of the road. The final step was an asphalt surface to seal the new road and prevent erosion.



"The official flag of the Tamiami Trail is red with a white band running across, and the Trail insignia in the center. It was designed by Colonel H.A. Dixon of Fort Myers. The red of the flag is symbolic of the uncharted wastes of Everglades hitherto inhabited only by the redman. The wide band of white represents the Tamiami Trail penetrating this domain, the invasion of the white man. In the center of this band is the official monogram, being the initials of Tampa and Miami, with Tamiami Trail at the top and bottom. The whole is enclosed by a double circle of black." Fort Myers Tropical News April 25, 1928



## The Trail's First Police

Monroe Station was one of six motorist aid stations manned and operated by the Southwest Mounted Police. The stations were placed at roughly ten mile intervals along the Trail at Belle Meade, Royal Palm Hammock, Fakahatchee or Weaver's Station, Turner River, Monroe Station and Paolita. Each station had a husband and wife team in charge, deputized by the County Sheriff. The wives sold gas, oil and soft drinks to travelers, while their husbands patrolled an assigned section of the road on motorcycle and assisted stranded motorists.

Barron Collier personally raised the police force and uniformed them in red coats he purchased from a Broadway stage production of the Royal Canadian Northwest Mounted Police.

The unit was disbanded in 1935 with the creation of the Traffic Enforcement branch of the State Road Department and later, the Florida Highway Patrol.

This is a four-part series:

**Part 1 Overview of Collier County Museums    Part 2 The Calusa – Spaniards – Seminole Wars**

**Part 3 The Trail Blazers and Builders    Part 4. Tour of the Naples Collier Museum Grounds**

**[Go to acuri.net – USA – Florida to see the programs under Naples, Florida](https://www.acuri.net)**

Sources: <https://colliermuseums.com/event/the-train-the-trail-and-the-origins-of-florida-tourism>, <https://www.gulfshorelife.com/2018/06/25/how-barron-collier-got-his-county>, <https://www.trailoffloridasindianheritage.org/collier-county-museum/>, <https://seminoletribune.org/blazing-a-trail-through-swamps-and-everglades/>, <https://lifeinnaples.net/magazinewp/2021/03/26/happy-93rd-birthday-tamiami-trail-by-lois-bolin-ph-d/>, <https://www.usf.edu/business/about/collier.aspx>, <https://esterohistoricalsociety.com/brief-history-of-estero/1923-tamiami-trail-blazers/>, <https://archive.naplesnews.com/community/a-look-at-what-it-took-to-construct-76-mile-tamiami-trail-as-we-celebrate-85th-anniversary-of-its-op-3315565>, <https://naples.floridaweekly.com/articles/building-the-trail-took-blood-sweat-and-mosquitoes/>, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/removing-the-cork-in-the-bottle-reconstructing-tamiami-trail-to-restore-water-flow-to-everglades-national-park.htm>, and <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/334193>.

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