

2. Background

Tavernier began as a farming community late in the 19th Century, and later, with the introduction of Henry Flagler's railroad connecting Key West to the mainland, it became a fishing village and a railroad town. Although the advance of the Overseas Highway (now US Highway 1) was partially due to the hurricane of 1935 that destroyed the railroad, the highway's origin dates back to land boom of 1921. Tavernier was mostly developed by the Key Largo Development Company in 1925. By 1928, the railroad was on what are today the southbound lanes of US Highway 1, and the Overseas Highway was on today's northbound lanes. The hurricane of Labor Day 1935 not only wiped out the railroad, it took the lives of over 420 people, many of whom were WW I veterans working on the bridges and roads of the Overseas Highway. By 1937, as Tavernier continued its unhurried development, Flagler's railroad right-of-way was bought and the reconstruction of a roadway to connect Key West with the mainland resumed.

In February of 1939 the nation was made aware of the Overseas Highway when President F. D. Roosevelt drove through Tavernier en route to Key West and the Caribbean. During WW II, Commissioner Harry Harris moved the bar he owned from the ocean side of the roadway to the bay side, knowing that the highway would be expanded to four lanes, thus favoring his and other new locations by facilitating the provision of on-site parking.

The historic district was created to preserve the unique and vital architectural character of Tavernier. Tavernier's history was recognized by Monroe County while contemplating a historic district for Tavernier in 1984. A subsequent survey conducted with the assistance of the Historic Florida Keys Preservation Board, identified 32 structures that contribute to the historic character of the Tavernier. In November 2003, the Historic Florida Keys Foundation (HFKF) commissioned a survey that identified 55 structures built between the early 1920s and the 1950s.

The Livable CommuniKeys Plan (LCP) -- Tavernier Creek to Mile Marker 97, was developed as an extension of the county's comprehensive growth management plan and responds to local community needs in the project area. The LCP recommended drafting guidelines for the historic district. The guidelines in this document respond to the goals outlined in the LCP:



Figure 3 Standard Oil Station ca. 1930
From the Collection of Jerry Wilkinson

Goal One: *direct future growth to lands that are most suitable for development, prevent sprawl into less developed areas and encourage preservation of environmentally sensitive lands.*

Goal Two: *preserve and protect the qualities of neighborhoods between Tavernier Creek Bridge and Mile Marker 97 – its small town unique character, lush natural environment and water orientation.*

Goal Three: *define, maintain and enhance the community character from MM 91 to MM 93.5, and*

Goal Four: *protect and enhance historic, cultural and archeological resources within Tavernier to maintain the integrity of the community's unique character.*

These guidelines are supplemented with the community participation and input collected during a four-day workshop (February 22 through 25, 2005) organized to help the consultant team understand the aspirations of the Tavernier community and review the goals and vision stated in the LCP.