



## “Plumosus”

It was a Town, It is a Plant, It is an FPL Substation, But Why is it Important to Jupiter's History?



When you drive down Center Street in Jupiter today, your first thought is probably not agriculture. But for 30 years *Asparagus Plumosus* (AKA Asparagus fern) was a large part of Jupiter’s economy, with as many as 30 shippers, and ferneries as large as 9 acres!<sup>1</sup> There were ferneries on both the north and south sides of the Loxahatchee River, usually within a mile of the river.<sup>2</sup> There were several fern growers along Center Street, west to the area that is now Central Boulevard.<sup>3</sup>

What is the plumosus fern and why was it grown in Jupiter? It was used as a decorative green in flower arrangements. It looks like asparagus and is in the same family – it really isn’t a fern at all!

According to Jupiter pioneer Harry Jackson, when pineapple growing in the Jupiter area died out after heavy freezes in 1917, more people started ferneries. Usually grown up North in greenhouses, the Northerners thought Plumosus would grow in Florida under a lath shed without the expense of heating a greenhouse.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Abraham Pennock, and his sons Henry S. and Herbert, were members of a family that established a large florist business in Philadelphia in 1865.<sup>5</sup> According to Henry’s daughter Shirley Pennock Floyd, in 1895 Henry and Herbert came to Jupiter and established the second modern fernery in Florida.<sup>6</sup> Jack Ziegler said his grandfather Thomas Ziegler was another Philadelphian who came to Jupiter to grow pineapples and then ferns.<sup>7</sup>

Bessie Wilson DuBois said the Wilson family also came to Jupiter in 1914 from New Jersey to grow plumosus, as Mr. Wilson was a wholesale florist.<sup>8</sup>

Nauman Carlin, daughter of Captain and Mary Carlin, also decided to start a fernery on property near the Carlin House hotel. William Carlin White in his book “History of the Carlin House” recounts the following: “*Asparagus Plumosus*...could be started by

seed and grew fast enough to be harvested in less than a year. When it was gathered, it was to be arranged into bunches of twenty sprigs to a bunch, with the stems wrapped with paper and placed in water over night. It could then be packed in paper-lined boxes, ninety bunches to a box. Before the box was closed, however, a large piece of ice should be added. The boxes could then be taken to the railroad where they would be shipped to several cities in the north." According to Mr. White, Nauman's fern business was quite successful.<sup>9</sup>

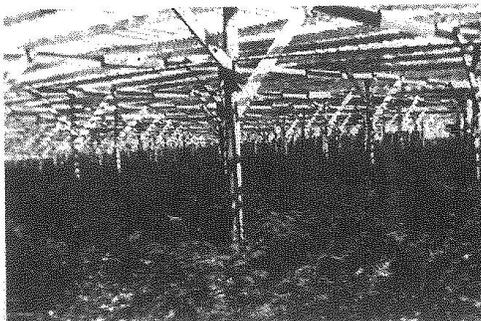
The Pennock Plantation on Center Street had nine acres of ferns, and the Wilkinson's had about six acres.<sup>10</sup> Dr. William Wilkinson explained his father moved to Jupiter to raise chickens, but had to change his plans because the land he had bought in Philo Farms sight unseen was under water! He went to work for Pennock Plantation Fernery and eventually purchased 130 acres on the river and started his own fernery.<sup>11</sup>

Fred and Emily Carlin Turner also had a fernery. It was located on what is now Turner Quay off of Center Street.<sup>12</sup>

Mr. Amos Basset remembered 60 boxes of plumosus being shipped in one day, and William Wilkinson remembered his father shipping 24 boxes. The days before Christmas and Easter were the busiest, and there were 30+ shippers in Jupiter at the peak of the industry.<sup>13</sup>

The adjacent picture was taken in 1927. By 1929, many growers decided to take their land out of the Town of Jupiter, due to high taxes, and the Town's infamous speed trap scandal. The growers incorporated a town named "Plumosus City." It remained on the books until 1959, when it was formally abolished by the State Legislature, and the land reverted to unincorporated Palm Beach County.<sup>14</sup> Most of "Plumosus City" has now been annexed into

Jupiter.<sup>15</sup> For more about Plumosus City, visit: Anti Jupiter.



**FERN SHED** — The fern industry brought several newcomers to the Jupiter area. The *Asparagus Plumosus* fern was originally grown in the north in greenhouses by florists to use as decorative green to go with flowers. Here it could be grown under a lath shed where the expense of heating a greenhouse could be eliminated. It was packed in ice and shipped to florists all over the east. At one time there were 50 shippers from Jupiter. The largest was Pennock Plantation with about 9 acres and Wilkinson with about 6 acres.

By 1929, the Depression came to Jupiter, and the fern industry was hit hard because northern florists were selling fewer flowers.<sup>16</sup> But there may have been a second reason for the demise of the fern industry.

"The Florida Entomologist," the "Official Organ of the Florida Entomological Society," contained two articles about cicadas severely damaging *asparagus plumosus* in the Jupiter area. J. W. Wilson's articles in September and December 1930 explained cicada nymphs had affected fern

production since 1928.

One article stated many growers had "attributed the trouble to the effects of the hurricane of 1928 because the plants never seemed to recover and grow well after the sheds had been blown upon them". Although growers were seeing cicada skins since 1928, they didn't link the problems with the plumosus to the cicada nymphs until 1930.<sup>17</sup>

So the Plumosus fern industry vanished from Jupiter, along with many other aspects of small town life so fondly remembered by Jupiter's Pioneers in the book "The Loxahatchee Lament."

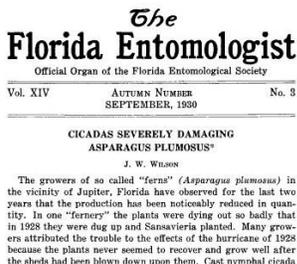
By 1966, the fern industry had been gone for a long time. It was last mentioned in a Resolution adopted by the Jupiter Town Council. Resolution 1-66 declared as a nuisance a "decaying fern shed" that was "in falling or dangerous condition detrimental to the public health, safety or general welfare of the Town of Jupiter."



Sometimes the reminders of the end of an era can be sad. But as you drive down Center Street today, take a moment to remember the glory days of the "asparagus plumosus" in Jupiter!

Remember that many people settled this area just to grow this member of the asparagus family.

One more note. Today three counties in north-central Florida still supply 80% to 85% of all the cut fern foliage in the United States! Pierson, Florida is the “fern capital of the world.” Other types of ferns are more popular than asparagus plumosus, but pioneer Jupiter’s heritage lives on in north-central Florida.<sup>18</sup>



**The Jupiter Town Archives is very interested in learning more about the fern industry in Jupiter. If anyone has any documents pertaining to the fern industry, please contact the Archives at (561) 741-2340. We would love to have documents, or we can scan and return them.**

**Footnotes**

1. “The Loxahatchee Lament”, (Vol. 1, © 1978 The Stuart News Company, © 1978 Cary Publications, Inc., All Rights Reserved) Page 55
2. “The Florida Entomologist” Vol. XIV #3 September, 1930
3. Story by Kevin Hemstock, Managing Editor As Published in The Jupiter Courier, Town of Jupiter 75th Birthday Special Edition Wednesday, February 9, 2000
4. “The Loxahatchee Lament”, (Vol. 1, © 1978 The Stuart News Company, © 1978 Cary Publications, Inc., All Rights Reserved) Page 55
5. “A Guide to the GreatGardens of the Philadelphia Region” by Adam Levine
6. “The Loxahatchee Lament”, (Vol. 1, © 1978 The Stuart News Company, © 1978 Cary Publications, Inc., All Rights Reserved) Page 82
7. “The Loxahatchee Lament”, (Vol. 1, © 1978 The Stuart News Company, © 1978 Cary Publications, Inc., All Rights Reserved) Page 58

8. “The Loxahatchee Lament”, (Vol. 1, © 1978 The Stuart News Company, © 1978 Cary Publications, Inc., All Rights Reserved) Page 95
9. “History of the Carlin House” by William Carlin White, edited by Lillian M. White, Copyright 1988 William C. White
10. “The Loxahatchee Lament”, (Vol. 1, © 1978 The Stuart News Company, © 1978 Cary Publications, Inc., All Rights Reserved) Page 55
11. “The Loxahatchee Lament”, (Vol. 1, © 1978 The Stuart News Company, © 1978 Cary Publications, Inc., All Rights Reserved) Page 48
12. “The Loxahatchee Lament”, (Vol. 1, © 1978 The Stuart News Company, © 1978 Cary Publications, Inc., All Rights Reserved) Page 66
13. “The Loxahatchee Lament”, (Vol. 1, © 1978 The Stuart News Company, © 1978 Cary Publications, Inc., All Rights Reserved) Page 55
14. Story by Kevin Hemstock, Managing Editor As Published in The Jupiter Courier, Town of Jupiter 75th Birthday Special Edition Wednesday, February 9, 2000
15. Story by Kevin Hemstock, Managing Editor As Published in The Jupiter Courier, Town of Jupiter 75th Birthday Special Edition Wednesday, February 9, 2000
16. “The Loxahatchee Lament”, (Vol. 1, © 1978 The Stuart News Company, © 1978 Cary Publications, Inc., All Rights Reserved) Page 78
17. “The Florida Entomologist” Vol. XIV #3 September, 1930
18. American Profile.com “Pierson, Fl” by Ann Mikell