



The Birth of an Industry

In 1937 Lewis and Mary Piner along with their daughter Corella moved from Morehead City, North Carolina to Fort Myers, Florida. Lewis soon moved his family again. This time to Pine Island, where he and his wife, together with friends Jesse and Velma Padilla, revolutionized the fishing and seafood industry. Both families purchased property on what was called The Fill. We know it today as Matlacha.

I am sure there was a collaboration of minds one evening where Piner and Padilla realized an opportunity to capitalize on the booming fishing industry in and around the Pine Island Sound. Their idea was to offer local fishermen and crabbers a place to off load and sell their catches and then provide easy access to trucks loading the processed seafood to haul off the island. It all came to fruition in the early 40's. Lewis and Mary Piner started the Piner Seafood Company and a few years later Jesse and Velma Padilla opened the Pine Island Marine Supply as well as the Pine Island Fish Company and Icehouse.

Lewis and Mary Piner employed over 150 people from Pine Island and Fort Myers, making them the largest employer ever in Matlacha. The Piners even supplied transportation, via bus, to those employees who lived between Fort Myers and Pine Island. Most of the employees in the processing plant were women and, as relayed by Corella to author Mary Kaye Stevens, there were young underage girls employed as well. Their time was added to an adult's time card so as to not have difficulties with inspectors and authorities. Piner processed, on average per day, 3,000 pounds of crab and 500 bushels of scallops! Meanwhile next door, the Padilla's icehouse freezer and docks facilitated a means for local fishermen to off load and sell their catches thus eliminating the fish houses and run boats in the sound.

Piner soon grew weary of the trek from Saint James City on the southern end of Pine Island to The Fill. So in 1947 directly across from the Piner Seafood Company, he built a bungalow for his family. Next to the family home he

continued on Page 36



Saint James City Civic Association

A PLACE OF COMMUNITY

3300 Fourth Ave, St. James City, FL 33956

(239) 283-0242 • info@sjccapi.org

www.sjccapi.org



**WE WELCOME
Newcomers Everyday!**

We offer art classes, exercise classes, crafting, line dancing, yoga, ping pong, bridge, euchre, MahJong and shuffleboard. We also have a photography club and book club.

Consider yourself invited!

