

## The Constitutional Officers of Pinellas County:

# A Brief History



### **Current Officers** (as pictured on cover, left to right)

**Bernie McCabe**  
State Attorney

**James Coats**  
Sheriff

**Ken Burke**  
Clerk of the Circuit Court

**Diane Nelson**  
Tax Collector

**Jim Smith**  
Property Appraiser

**Deborah Clark**  
Supervisor of Elections

**Robert Dillinger**  
Public Defender



Second Edition 2006



# **The Constitutional Officers of Pinellas County:**

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Clerk of the Circuit Court

Property Appraiser

Public Defender

Sheriff

State Attorney

Supervisor of Elections

Tax Collector

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# Foreward

“History is biography,” said the great Scottish essayist and historian Thomas Carlyle.

What better way, then, to look at the history of Pinellas County than through the profiles of the men and women who served as its constitutional officers from the county’s inception to the present day.

In 1912, Pinellas County wrestled with a different array of challenges and opportunities than it does today. The newly formed county consisted mainly of emerging communities and vast undeveloped areas. A substantial majority of the land was either unused or in cultivation. As Pinellas County struggled to establish an identity for itself, the issue of where to put the county seat became of paramount concern. Other items put before the first constitutional officers were the issues of serving a burgeoning population, the need for additional school facilities and the establishment of an intracounty roadway system.

Today, Pinellas County stands as the most densely populated county in Florida. Economic development heads our list of concerns, as does preserving the environment, promoting tourism, maintaining the infrastructure and providing superior emergency services to our citizenry. Step by step, through all the various terms of office, our constitutional officers have given their input to help solve the variety of problems encountered along the way and to shape our county into what is today a glistening vacationland and an ideal home for more than 900,000 permanent residents.

As we glance through the pages of this book and note the vitality with which our elected leaders have discharged their public duties, we would hope to gain an understanding of the depth of commitment that exists today on the part of our elected representatives. The people who today hold these offices stand on a rich tradition of quality service.

This retrospective is published as a tribute to past office holders, an acknowledgment of those who serve today and an inspiration to all who will come to fill these shoes in the future.

# 2006 Elected Constitutional Officers



Ken Burke

**Ken Burke**  
Clerk of the Circuit Court



Deborah Clark

**Deborah Clark**  
Supervisor of Elections



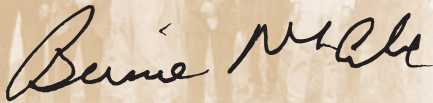
Jim Coats

**James Coats**  
Pinellas County Sheriff



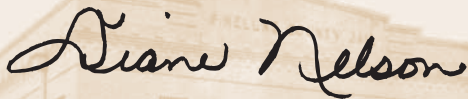
Bob Dillinger

**Robert Dillinger**  
Public Defender



Bernie McCabe

**Bernie McCabe**  
State Attorney



Diane Nelson

**Diane Nelson**  
Tax Collector



Jim Smith

**Jim Smith**  
Property Appraiser



## **Second Edition Acknowledgments**

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### **Pinellas County Department Representatives**

Pat Brady, Supervisor of Elections Office  
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PINELLAS COUNTY COURT HOUSE

*From Then  
Until Now*



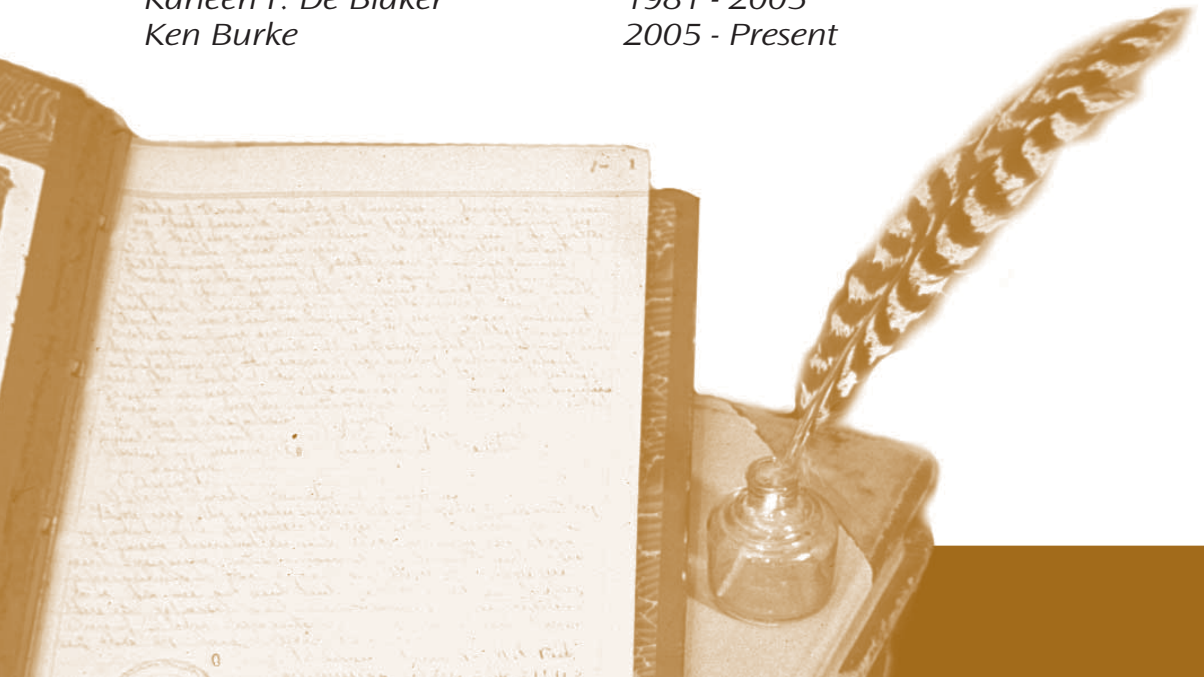
*J*

*here shall be in each county a Clerk of the Circuit Court who shall be selected pursuant to the provisions of Article VIII Section 1...*

*...the Clerk of the Circuit Court shall be ex-officio Clerk of the Board of County Commissioners, Auditor, Recorder, and Custodian of all County Funds.*

## **Clerk of the Circuit Court Tenure**

<i>C.W. Wiecking</i>	<i>1912 - 1917</i>
<i>John N. Brown</i>	<i>1917 - 1925</i>
<i>Karl B. O'Quinn</i>	<i>1925 - 1936</i>
<i>Myrtle B. O'Quinn</i>	<i>1936</i>
<i>A.G. McQuagge</i>	<i>1937</i>
<i>Laura J. McQuagge</i>	<i>1937</i>
<i>Ray E. Green</i>	<i>1938 - 1949</i>
<i>William Crawford</i>	<i>1949 - 1952</i>
<i>Morrison Pearce</i>	<i>1952 - 1953</i>
<i>Avery W. Gilkerson</i>	<i>1953 - 1963</i>
<i>Esther L. Gilkerson</i>	<i>1963</i>
<i>Clyde J. Keys</i>	<i>1963 - 1964</i>
<i>Emory L. Brown</i>	<i>1964</i>
<i>Harold "Pete" Mullendore</i>	<i>1964 - 1981</i>
<i>Karleen F. De Blaker</i>	<i>1981 - 2005</i>
<i>Ken Burke</i>	<i>2005 - Present</i>



# Introduction

On May 23, 1911, while people in Clearwater were in the midst of a festive victory celebration for the new county, Florida Governor Albert Gilchrist signed an important piece of legislation.

The bill to which the governor affixed his signature was an act providing for the creation of Florida's 48th county to include all the territory of Hillsborough County that had commonly been referred to as "West Hillsborough."

Pinellas County would be born as a result of that legislation.

On November 14, 1911, a referendum made the bill official. The residents of "West Hillsborough" voted for independence by a tally of 1,379 to 505. On December 15, as provided for in the bill, Governor Gilchrist made the following appointments:

For Clerk of the Circuit Court, he appointed C.W. Wiecking of St. Petersburg. This office was to keep the records and minutes of all court business and record deeds, mortgages, plats and maps of lands, judgments and similar legal documents. The Clerk would keep the financial records of the county and serve as county auditor, monitoring the expenditures of all county officials who handled public funds.

For Sheriff, the governor appointed Marvel Whitehurst of Ozone. This office was to execute the orders of the court and detect and arrest violators of the law. He would maintain the safekeeping and care of prisoners awaiting trial or sentenced to jail and see that quiet and order prevailed throughout his jurisdiction.

For Tax Assessor (Property Appraiser), the governor appointed Thomas J. Northrup of St. Petersburg. This office was to track all taxable property within the county, both real and personal. These listings would then be delivered to the Tax Collector for collection and to the Clerk of the Circuit Court to maintain as public record.

For Tax Collector, he appointed Eli B. McMullen of Largo. This office was to collect taxes as determined by the millage formula calculated by the Tax Assessor. The Tax Collector also would collect the occupational licenses tax and other miscellaneous taxes.

For County Treasurer, he appointed A. C. Turner of Clearwater. The County Treasurer was to be custodian of the county school funds and the fine and forfeiture fund of the county. It was his duty to give receipts in duplicate to all officers paying money into the county treasury, as well as to the Clerk of the Circuit Court for the inspection of the Board of County Commissioners.



For Superintendent (Supervisor of Elections), the governor appointed Albert S. Meares of Anona (now part of Largo). This office was charged with providing for the registration of all legally qualified voters in the county and for the returns of all elections, together with the poll lists and oaths of the inspectors and clerks, all ballot boxes, ballot stubs, memoranda and miscellaneous papers.

As Pinellas County would remain in the Sixth Judicial Circuit along with Hillsborough and Pasco counties, Herbert Phillips remained active as State Attorney in Pinellas. It was not until 1923 that the Sixth Judicial Circuit was reformed to comprise Pinellas and Pasco counties only, as it remains today. The State Attorney's Office was charged with prosecuting or defending all suits, applications or motions, civil or criminal, on the state's behalf. Other duties of the State Attorney's office were to summon all witnesses required on behalf of the state, to attend grand jury hearings for the purpose of examining witnesses in the jury's presence or for giving them advice upon any legal matter before them, to prepare bills of indictment and to assist the attorney general of the state in the preparation and presentation of all appeals from the circuit court before the state supreme court.

The Pinellas County Public Defender's Office was created by the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners in 1961. This office represents indigents who cannot afford a lawyer and defends them in cases that could lead to imprisonment. Indigent juveniles alleged to be delinquents are also defended by this office. Fees are determined by Florida Statute, and the court determines dates payable.

On January 1, 1912, these first constitutional officers prepared to go to work as the new government of Pinellas County made ready to convene.

Politically, there have been changes through the decades. Technology has streamlined the work. Growth has created new offices and combined the duties of others. But always, our constitutional officers have abided by their pledge to serve the people of Pinellas County and uphold the responsibilities of each individual office.

A major change did occur in 1980, with a vote by Pinellas County citizens to approve a Home Rule Charter. The charter's purpose was to give the county legislative body (The Board of County Commissioners) the right to govern the county to a greater extent locally rather than having to seek approval first from the Florida Legislature before certain decisions could be made. Adoption of that charter also set up the framework for other changes in the future.

In the 1996 general election, one of those potential changes occurred when a citizens' petition initiative passed attempting to place term limits of eight years on county commissioners and county constitutional officers. A local citizen attempted to stop the scheduled referendum but lost in court. After the referendum passed, W. Fred Petty, Tax Collector, engaged counsel with his own funds in an attempt to overturn the referendum. The other four county constitutional officers and the County Commission joined him in this endeavor. The group lost their appeal in the ensuing years in the local circuit court and then at the 2nd District Court of Appeals. At that point, three of the current constitutional officers withdrew from the appeal as did the County Commission. The Clerk and Sheriff, with the personal support of W. Fred Petty and assistance provided by the county legal department, carried on the appeal to the Supreme Court of Florida.

On August 29, 2001, the Supreme Court heard the Pinellas County appeal (Case No. SC00-1908) along with a similar appeal filed by the Duval County Clerk of the Circuit Court (Case No. SC00-1745). The Supreme Court held on May 23, 2002, that the 1996 citizens' petition amendment to the Pinellas County Charter was invalid because it attempted to unconstitutionally impose an additional disqualification from election to office. The case was remanded back to the lower courts for further proceedings not inconsistent with the Supreme Court decision. Requests for rehearing and clarification were denied. The lower courts subsequently ruled as instructed by the Supreme Court, and the citizens' initiative for term limits was overturned.

# Clerk of the Circuit Court

CLERK'S LIQUOR  
SEIZURE RECORD

1

PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA

Handwritten document with a circular seal at the bottom left.



1 DOCKET

*The development of Pinellas County is reflected in the profiles of the many men and women who served as Pinellas County's constitutional officers. Each one has left his or her legacy, and collectively they have brought us forward to where we are today. Some names made headlines. Others served quietly and without fanfare. But each left an indelible imprint in what today forms our county's unique historic heritage. Their stories are contained in the pages of this book. We invite you to turn the pages, and acquaint yourself with this fascinating history.*



*Pictured above, from left to right: County Commissioner Soloman S. Coachman, Mr. Caruthers, County Commissioner Levin D. Vinson, unidentified, Tax Assessor John N. Brown, Tax Collector Eli McMullen, County Commissioner Frank A. Wood, unidentified, Commission Attorney George Rowland, County Commissioner Oliver T. Railsback, Sheriff Marvel Whitehurst, Clerk of Court C.W. Wiecking, Mr. McClung, County Surveyor George Merrill, County School Superintendent Dixie M. Hollins.*

# Overview

The Clerk's authority and responsibilities are derived from the Florida Constitution, the Florida Statutes, Rules of Court and County Ordinance. The Clerk serves not only as Clerk of the Circuit Court, but as Clerk of the County Court, Recorder of Deeds, Clerk and Accountant for the Board of County Commissioners, custodian of all county funds and County Auditor.

The first provisional governor of Florida, Andrew Jackson, established the Clerk of the Court as a judicial office in the newly created counties of Escambia and St. Johns. Governor Jackson needed a dependable official to maintain a file of land records and related legal documents. All of the prominent citizens of that day needed clarification of land titles and access to records in order to do business in the new territory. Thus, the office of the Clerk soon grew into one of prominence and prestige.

Florida came into statehood in 1845, and the state's constitution, drafted in 1838, provided for a Clerk of the Circuit Court. A revised constitution, written in 1885, solidified the Clerk's position as an elected official. This is considered to be one of the most important aspects of the Clerk's role as a public trustee because he or she serves at the will of the people.

Through the years, the Clerk of the Circuit Court acquired a variety of duties and responsibilities. Today, the Florida Statutes assign over 926 tasks to the Clerk. Among them, the Clerk of the Circuit Court maintains custody of court records and all related pleadings that have been filed. This position secures evidence entered in court; collects and disburses all court fines, assessments and court-ordered child support; and summons prospective jurors. Outside the courtroom, the Clerk maintains the official records of Pinellas County including the official records of the Board of County Commissioners.

As custodian of all county funds, the Clerk receives and records all county revenue and has the responsibility of investing county funds. The Clerk serves as trustee in handling collection and disbursements of funding for numerous agencies, and the Clerk is the chief financial officer of the county. As county auditor, the Clerk performs a "pre-audit" to establish legality of planned expenditures and is personally liable if the office knowingly approves an illegal expenditure. A primary responsibility of the office is to ensure that county funds are expended only for public purposes and for the benefit of the public as a whole. Because the Clerk has the authority to audit all county expenditures, this role is one of the fundamental checks against too much power being centralized in any one county office. In Pinellas County, by interlocal agreement with other county officials, the Clerk has charge of county printing services and mail services. Until the mid 1960s, the Clerk also acted as a county administrator for the Board of County Commissioners.



### **C.W. Wiecking 1912 - 1917**

In December of 1911, as Pinellas County was about to be declared a sovereign county, the voters went to the polls to decide who their public officials would be. The referendum was essentially a preference poll as Governor Albert W. Gilchrist would actually appoint the winners to their respective offices. C.W. Wiecking ran unopposed for the Clerk of the Circuit Court seat. He attained the unique distinction of garnering the most votes of any of the other candidates for office in the first Pinellas County election.

In 1912, Wiecking was elected to a full term in the Clerk's office. While in office, Wiecking invested in the John's Pass Realty Company that laid out one of the first major golf courses in the area as well as adjacent lots for homes facing the golf course. The venture was a success, and the company thrived financially.



### **John N. Brown 1917 - 1925**

John Brown was elected to the Clerk's office in the fall of 1916. He served until January of 1925. He founded the Ninth Street Bank & Trust Company and built the Suwannee Hotel. Brown served as president of the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce. He held a seat on the St. Petersburg City Council from 1911-1912 and served as Pinellas County's Tax Assessor from 1912 to 1916. Brown also served on the City Library Board while the library building was being built.

John Brown was born in Florida in 1876, in Webster, Sumter County. He graduated from Georgia Business College in 1897. Throughout his political career and after, Brown was one of the leading hotel owners in the area and state. He served as president of the Florida Hotel Association in 1934.



### **Karl B. O'Quinn 1925 - 1936**

Karl O'Quinn was born in Kissimmee, Florida in 1893. At age sixteen, he was forced to support his mother and two brothers and did so by taking a job at the *Tampa Tribune* in St. Petersburg. O'Quinn later went to work as an assistant to John N. Brown when Brown was the county's Tax Assessor. He also served for three years as county finance and state bank examiner under Comptroller Ernest Amos and was the managing secretary for the West Coast Title Company.

O'Quinn was elected to the office of Clerk of the Circuit Court in 1924 and served until April of 1936. On December 7, 1934, O'Quinn submitted his resignation to Florida Governor Dave Scholtz effective January 1, 1935. Governor Sholtz named A.G.

McQuagge of the Clerk's office as replacement, but after protest from State Senator James F. Sikes, the appointment was withdrawn. The governor then appointed Frank J. Booth, one of O'Quinn's long-time political rivals, as his replacement. When O'Quinn heard this news, he withdrew his resignation, intending to finish out his term. A political eruption ensued, and the Florida Supreme Court was asked to render an opinion as to whether or not O'Quinn's resignation could be legally withdrawn. The court eventually ruled in O'Quinn's favor, but Karl B. O'Quinn died in office on April 12, 1936, without finishing his term.

### **Myrtle B. O'Quinn 1936** (not pictured)

After the death of Karl O'Quinn, Circuit Judges John Bird, T. Frank Hobson and John L. Viney appointed O'Quinn's wife, Myrtle B. O'Quinn, to serve as ad interim Clerk of the Circuit Court. Circuit court judges are authorized by the Florida Statutes to appoint an ad interim Clerk of the Circuit Court until the governor fills the position with a regular appointment. This allows the business of the court to proceed, which it would not be able to do otherwise. A large group of supporters endorsed Mrs. O'Quinn for the Clerk's position. Governor Dave Scholz subsequently appointed Mrs. O'Quinn to serve out her husband's term.



### **A.G. McQuagge 1937**

Archie McQuagge was one of the nominees for the Clerk's position when Karl O'Quinn tendered his resignation in 1935.

McQuagge was born in Washington County in the Florida panhandle on September 6, 1884. After attending public school, he studied business at a commercial college in Nashville, Tennessee. Returning home, McQuagge entered the mercantile business and later became vice president and general manager of the Dunn-Coleman Hardware Company. Being popular in Washington County, he was prevailed upon to run for the Clerk of the Circuit Court in that county and served two terms.

In January of 1925, McQuagge came to Clearwater and took the post of Assistant Chief Clerk of the Circuit Court of Pinellas County. Over the next few years, he studied law on his own and was admitted to the bar in 1928. In 1936, McQuagge campaigned for and was successfully elected to the post of Clerk of the Circuit Court which had eluded him a year earlier. He served less than one year in office, however, and died in December of 1937.



### **Laura J. McQuagge 1937**

Archie McQuagge's wife Laura was appointed as the second ad interim Clerk of the Circuit Court of Pinellas County upon the death of her husband. She served in the office for three weeks until Governor Fred P. Cone appointed Ray Green to fill out the rest of her husband's term. Mrs. McQuagge went on to serve as president of the Upper Pinellas Women's Democratic Club and president of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in Clearwater.





### **Ray E. Green 1938 - 1949**

Ray Green was born in Manatee County and moved to Pinellas with his family when he was one year old. He was a graduate of Clearwater High School and Max Morris School of Pharmacy in Macon, Georgia. Ray Green worked as a pharmacist for 21 years. He eventually sold his drugstore to Jack Eckerd of the Eckerd Corporation.

Green was elected to the office of mayor of Clearwater in 1935. He was then appointed to the Clerk's post by Governor Fred P. Cone to fill the vacancy created by the death of Archie McQuagge. He served as Clerk of the Circuit Court from 1938 until 1949. He then went to Tallahassee as assistant state comptroller. Green was appointed to the position of state comptroller in 1955 and served in that capacity until his retirement in 1965. One year earlier, Green attained national recognition as recipient of the Robins Bowl of Hygeia Plaque. This prestigious pharmacy award is given to only one individual in each state for his or her contribution to the fields of community service and health.

### **William Crawford 1949 - 1952** (not pictured)

William Crawford was born in Henderson, Kentucky, in 1892. He attended school in his home state and began a career in banking with the Henderson County Savings Bank. He moved to St. Petersburg in 1918 and held various positions within the banking industry including vice president of the Ninth Street Bank.

Crawford left his banking career and entered the Clerk's office as Deputy Clerk. He held that position for twelve years. In 1948, he campaigned for the Clerk's position and was elected. Shortly after taking office, however, Crawford's health took a turn for the worse. His chief deputy, Morrison Pearce, served as acting Clerk until failing health finally caused William Crawford to resign in 1952.



### **Morrison Pearce 1952 - 1953**

Morrison Pearce was appointed by the Governor in 1952 to fill William Crawford's unexpired term.

Pearce was born January 1, 1908, in Hope Mills, North Carolina. He moved to St. Petersburg with his family in 1911, where his father, J. D. Pearce, opened a drugstore. The elder Pearce was elected mayor of St. Petersburg in 1930, and he appointed his son as secretary. Morrison Pearce stayed in the secretary's office beyond his father's term as mayor and eventually took a position with the Clerk's office as the manager of the St. Petersburg branch office. In 1949, he became Chief Deputy Clerk, becoming Clerk of the Circuit Court after William Crawford's resignation.

Morrison Pearce unsuccessfully ran for election in the fall of 1952.



### **Avery W. Gilkerson 1953 - 1963**

Avery Gilkerson was born in Toronto, Ontario, on June 5, 1899. His family moved to Minnesota when he was five. He graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School after serving in World War I. In 1924, he moved to Massachusetts where he practiced law and entered politics. He served in the Massachusetts State Legislature for eight years before moving to Pinellas County in 1949. After serving as the mayor of Gulfport, he was elected Clerk of the Circuit Court in 1952 and was reelected in 1956 and 1960. He was the first Republican to hold that position since Reconstruction.

Avery Gilkerson was known for often refusing to pay bills that county officials could not back up with legal authority. He took his role as “watchdog” of all county funds seriously and is credited with making the Clerk of the Circuit Court one of the most powerful political positions in the county. A plaque in his memory on the wall of the courthouse has this quote from his employees: “Affectionately known to us all as ‘Mr. G,’ a man to whom public service was not a slogan but a way of life exemplified by his deeds.” Gilkerson died in office in 1963 at the age of 64.



### **Esther L. Gilkerson 1963**

Once again, the wife of a Clerk who died in office was appointed ad interim Clerk of the Circuit Court. After Mrs. Gilkerson stepped into her late husband's shoes, employees of the Clerk's office circulated petitions supporting her permanent appointment and sent them on to then-Governor Farris Bryant. Republicans and Democrats alike also called on Governor Bryant to appoint Esther Gilkerson to fill out the term of her late husband, but Bryant instead chose Clyde J. Keys, a member of his own political party. When Clyde Keys took over, Mrs. Gilkerson remained with the Clerk's office in a subordinate capacity.



### **Clyde J. Keys 1963 - 1964**

Clyde J. Keys was born in Dillsboro, North Carolina, in 1897. His father did extensive work throughout Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia as a builder and contractor. At the age of fourteen, Keys went to work for his father and served an apprenticeship until he had secured a thorough background and could go into the construction business himself. In Pinellas County, Keys supervised the construction of the Ponce de Leon Hotel, Mound Park Hospital (now Bayfront Medical Center) and the Municipal Power Plant. In 1954, Keys served as a Pinellas County commissioner filling the unexpired term of James Shoecraft. A long-time friend of Governor Farris Bryant and a leader in the Democratic Party in Pinellas County, Keys was a natural choice to

fill out the rest of Avery Gilkerson's term of office. Malcom Ogden, who was an administrative assistant to the governor and Key's son-in-law, called Keys on the morning of his appointment to the Clerk's office in 1963 to congratulate him. Keys responded with, "They have signed my death sentence." Still, Keys accepted the appointment because of his sense of honor and the obligation he felt to serve the people of Pinellas County. Ironically, he died in office just a few months later.

### **Emory L. Brown 1964** (not pictured)

Muriel Keys, Clyde Keys' wife, declined an ad interim appointment to become the Clerk of the Circuit Court. The various department heads of the Clerk's office recommended Emory Brown to the court for the position. Brown was born in Plant City and had lived in Florida all his life. The court did appoint Brown as ad interim Clerk, but Brown was disinterested in a full appointment to the Clerk's position. He served only until Harold Mullendore was appointed by Governor Farris Bryant. Later, Brown opened a law practice in Clearwater.



## **Harold “Pete” Mullendore 1964 - 1981**

Pete Mullendore had already received Clyde Keys' backing as the Democratic candidate for Clerk of the Circuit Court when Keys began experiencing health problems during his term of office. Governor Farris Bryant's appointment, however, was considered to be an important boost to Mullendore's campaign. After being appointed to the Clerk's position, Mullendore won his election bid in 1964 and was reelected three more times. Mullendore, who was born in Blount County, Tennessee, was a mortgage broker-insurance agent and a real estate broker and appraiser before becoming Clerk of the Circuit Court.

Mullendore served as president of the Association of Court Clerks in Florida. From 1976-1977, he served as president of the National Association of County Recorders and Clerks (NACRC). One of his proudest accomplishments while in office was the introduction of a civil service system for employees of the Clerk's office that later evolved into a unified personnel system for county government. During Mullendore's tenure, the Florida Constitution was amended, providing for local courts to be abolished and a state court system to be established. Due to that change, office services were expanded with the Clerk assuming responsibility for juvenile, probate and traffic court records. Mullendore introduced automation for the official records and the accounting records for the office, participated in the establishment of the Criminal Justice Information System and expanded branch office operations.

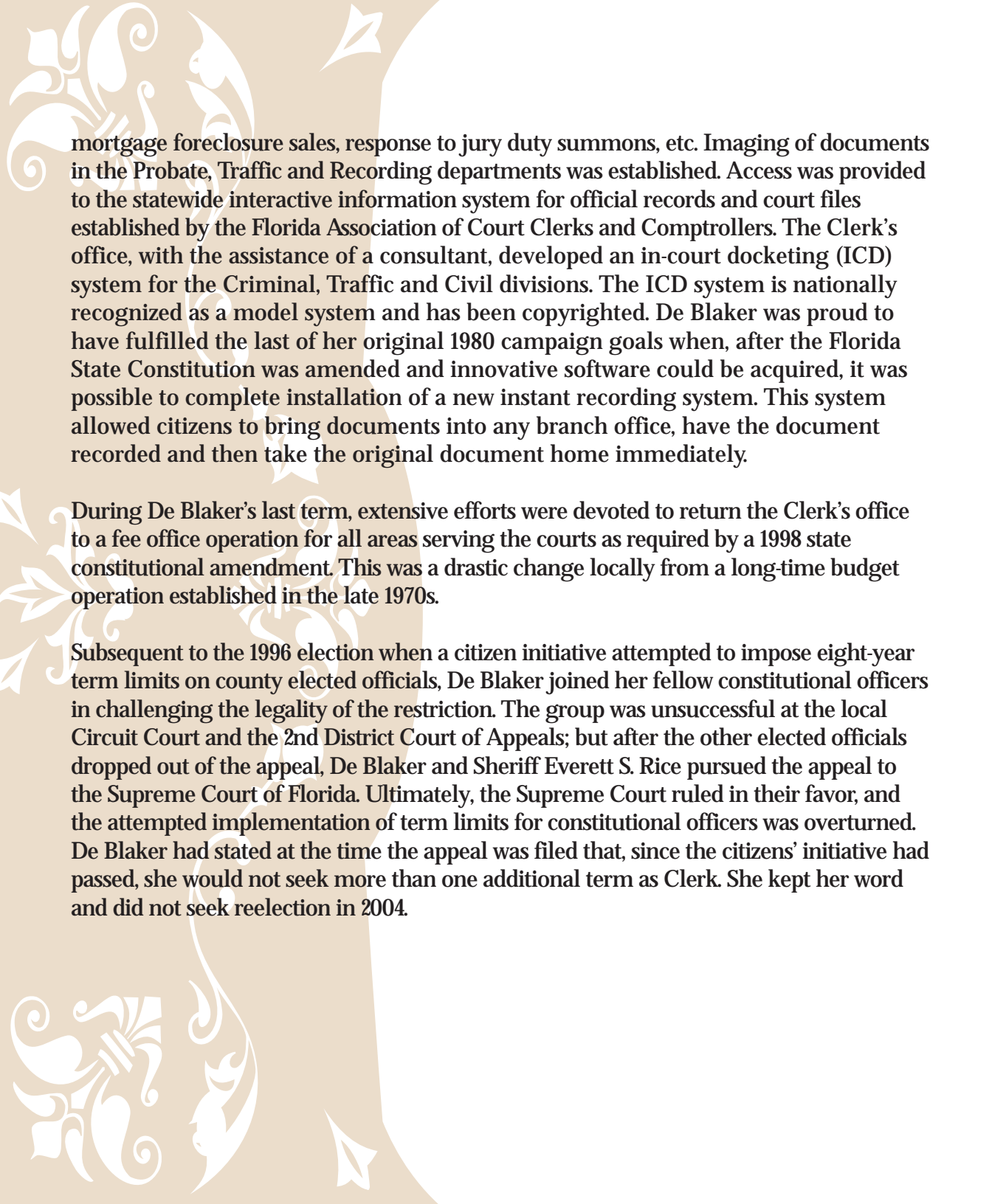


## **Karleen F. De Blaker** **1981 - 2005**

Karleen F. De Blaker was born in Blackwell, Oklahoma, and earned her Bachelor of Science degree, with majors in office administration and economics, at Oklahoma State University. Upon graduation, she worked for the assistant general sales manager of Continental Oil Company (Conoco) in the Marketing Department. De Blaker and her husband moved to Clearwater in 1961, where she immediately became active in numerous countywide civic groups. In 1974, she was the first woman elected to the Clearwater City Commission where she served three terms. In 1980, De Blaker, a Republican, became the first woman elected Clerk of the Circuit Court in Pinellas County.

She was reelected to that position five times for a total of 24 years of service to Pinellas County. In 1994, The Florida Association of Court Clerks and Comptrollers elected De Blaker as president.

De Blaker's financial initiatives resulted in millions of dollars of additional income for Pinellas County through wise investment of county funds. Yearly, beginning in 1981, the Clerk's Finance Division received Certificates of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada. De Blaker always placed a strong emphasis on the pre-audit of county expenditures (in the role of "watchdog" of county funds), and she established the Internal Audit Division of the Clerk's office. The division audits all departments under the county administrator, departments under the Clerk and separate dependent agencies of Pinellas County. During her terms in office, De Blaker greatly improved customer service and emphasized professionalism and a strict adherence to the Florida Ethics Law. The technology of the Clerk's office was given a boost with innovations such as electronic bar coding of files; electronic transfer of funds; voice activated computer response; electronic payment of fines, fees, etc. by credit card; online access to the index of county official records and the dockets of court files; and interactive access to the Clerk's website for information on numerous office services, tax deed and



mortgage foreclosure sales, response to jury duty summons, etc. Imaging of documents in the Probate, Traffic and Recording departments was established. Access was provided to the statewide interactive information system for official records and court files established by the Florida Association of Court Clerks and Comptrollers. The Clerk's office, with the assistance of a consultant, developed an in-court docketing (ICD) system for the Criminal, Traffic and Civil divisions. The ICD system is nationally recognized as a model system and has been copyrighted. De Blaker was proud to have fulfilled the last of her original 1980 campaign goals when, after the Florida State Constitution was amended and innovative software could be acquired, it was possible to complete installation of a new instant recording system. This system allowed citizens to bring documents into any branch office, have the document recorded and then take the original document home immediately.

During De Blaker's last term, extensive efforts were devoted to return the Clerk's office to a fee office operation for all areas serving the courts as required by a 1998 state constitutional amendment. This was a drastic change locally from a long-time budget operation established in the late 1970s.

Subsequent to the 1996 election when a citizen initiative attempted to impose eight-year term limits on county elected officials, De Blaker joined her fellow constitutional officers in challenging the legality of the restriction. The group was unsuccessful at the local Circuit Court and the 2nd District Court of Appeals; but after the other elected officials dropped out of the appeal, De Blaker and Sheriff Everett S. Rice pursued the appeal to the Supreme Court of Florida. Ultimately, the Supreme Court ruled in their favor, and the attempted implementation of term limits for constitutional officers was overturned. De Blaker had stated at the time the appeal was filed that, since the citizens' initiative had passed, she would not seek more than one additional term as Clerk. She kept her word and did not seek reelection in 2004.



## **Ken Burke 2005 – Present**

Ken Burke took office as Clerk of the Circuit Court for Pinellas County on January 4, 2005. Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Burke moved to Pinellas County at an early age where he attended public schools in the Seminole area. Upon graduation from Seminole High School, he went on to obtain an associate degree from St. Petersburg Junior College and a Bachelor of Science degree, with a major in accounting, from the University of South Florida. Burke is a Certified Public Accountant.

In 1983, Burke joined the law firm of DeLoach and Hofstra as their Legal Administrator and Vice President of the firm's Seminole Title Company. He served in that capacity for 22 years before being elected Clerk.

Burke became involved in politics early in life by assisting in a presidential campaign. He continued his public service by being an extremely active member of the community, serving in numerous civic and charitable organizations at both the local and national level. He has made significant contributions in the area of education having served as chairman of the St. Petersburg College Board of Trustees and currently as the chairman of the National Association of Community College Trustees where he is recognized as one who is “placing wings on people’s dreams.”

Burke brings that same care and compassion to the Clerk’s Office. Since assuming his position as Clerk of Court, Burke’s mission and focus for the office has been exceptional customer service. His goals include expediting the counter services in all of the offices that serve the public and the improvement of online services to provide a more user-friendly approach. Another high-priority was to provide easier access to the public records. This goal was accomplished shortly upon assuming office with the placement of Official Records images online for public access.

A major change in the funding structure of the office was taking place when Burke took office. The change resulted from a state constitutional amendment, approved in 1998, to shift funding of the court system from the counties to the state. Shortly upon assuming office, Burke was selected by his fellow Clerks to represent his district on the “Corporation of Clerks” that was created by the Florida legislature to assist with implementation of the mandated statewide court funding.





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*here shall be elected by the electors of each county, for terms of four years, a sheriff, a tax collector, a property appraiser...*

## **Property Appraiser Tenure**

<i>Thomas J. Northrup</i>	1912 - 1913
<i>John N. Brown</i>	1913 - 1917
<i>Albert T. Blocker</i>	1917 - 1925
<i>Charles A. Wilcox</i>	1925 - 1929
	1933 - 1949
<i>Herschel H. Sterling</i>	1929 - 1933
	1949 - 1961
<i>Mac S. Haines</i>	1961 - 1976
<i>Ronald J. Schultz</i>	1976 - 1989
<i>Jim Smith</i>	1989 - Present



# Overview

The Property Appraiser has the legal responsibility to determine the value of real and tangible personal property in Pinellas County through the actions of the marketplace and to appraise property accordingly so as to provide taxing authorities with accurate and uniform property values for tax purposes.

A property's market value is determined as the estimated sale price, less the cost of the sale. Three methods of determining market value are used: the market approach (tracking actual sales of similar properties in similar neighborhoods), the cost approach (calculating the cost of replacement construction) and the income approach (tracking the earning potential of income-producing property). Through the study of this information, the Property Appraiser can place a fair market value on every piece of property within Pinellas County.

The state of Florida taxed only land until 1905. That year, the state also began imposing a \$2 license fee for cars. In 1912, as Pinellas County was established, the county tax roll listed 14,000 taxpayers and 12,131 parcels of land valued at \$4,854,288. By contrast, today, the county Property Appraiser lists more than 415,000 pieces of real property within Pinellas County, valued at over \$88,000,000,000.

The first constitutional officers for fledgling Pinellas County, including the Property Appraiser (then called Tax Assessor), were appointed by the governor. The first elected Tax Assessor took office in 1913.

The Homestead Exemption Act, providing tax relief for those property owners whose homes were their residences, was established in 1934. The new law required property owners to file for homestead exemption each year. For years, the homestead exemption was set at the first \$5,000 of a property's appraised value. In 1980, as part of a state constitutional amendment, the homestead exemption standard was raised to \$25,000.

In 1974, as part of a state constitutional amendment, voters were asked to decide whether or not to change the name of "County Tax Assessor" to that of "Property Appraiser." Proponents argued that the Tax Assessor did not levy taxes. Rather, it was the job of the County Commission and school board to determine millage rates. The Tax Assessor merely determined the value of the property to be taxed. The voters agreed, and the office of county Tax Assessor became known as Property Appraiser.

Today, every piece of property throughout Pinellas County is reappraised each year based on the previous year's sales figures. All parcels are visually inspected every three years to note any changes in the property's physical condition.



**Thomas J. Northrup**  
**1912 - 1913**

Before Pinellas was established as Florida's 48th county, Governor Albert Gilchrist appointed six Pinellas County constitutional officers effective January 1, 1912. The county's first Property Appraiser, then called Tax Assessor, was a former mayor of St. Petersburg, Thomas J. Northrup.

During his year in office, Northrup approved Pinellas County's first tax roll. The county's 12,131 parcels of land were valued at \$4,854,288. He stepped down from his post in 1913.



**John N. Brown 1913 - 1917**

John Brown served as a member of the St. Petersburg City Council from 1911 - 1912. He later served as Clerk of the Circuit Court from 1917 - 1925. But in 1913, he became Pinellas County's first elected Tax Assessor. While in office, he instituted a new system of bookkeeping to keep work up-to-date at all times. His tenure lasted two two-year terms.



## **Albert T. Blocker**

**1917 - 1925**

Albert Blocker, another former mayor of St. Petersburg, became the county's first Tax Assessor to serve a four-year term (previously, a term in office was only two years). He was elected to two terms as Tax Assessor. During his career, he founded Blocker Transfer and Storage, which is still in business in St. Petersburg.



## **Charles A. Wilcox**

**1925 - 1929/1933 - 1949**

Before serving as Tax Assessor, Charles Wilcox held an appointment as Pinellas County's Supervisor of Elections. The four previous Tax Assessors had St. Petersburg roots; Wilcox came from Largo. His election may be representative of a population shift northward at the time. Wilcox introduced several changes in tax assessment that have endured even today. The foremost among these changes was sending notices to taxpayers inviting them to file for homestead exemption. Today, this homestead exemption can still be used by property owners as a means of reducing their overall taxes.

Throughout his career as Tax Assessor, Wilcox would run toe-to-toe with his Republican opponent Herschel Sterling. Wilcox and Sterling would alternate terms in office from 1925 through 1961.



**Herschel H. Sterling**  
**1929 - 1933/1949 - 1961**

As the county's fifth Tax Assessor, Herschel Sterling rode the Republican wave of Herbert Hoover's landslide presidential victory of 1928 to be the first Republican to attain the office of Tax Assessor. Land values decreased 30% during Sterling's early term of office largely due to the stock market crash of 1929.

Sterling and Wilcox faced one another in elections five times during the course of their careers in the Tax Assessor's office. This back-and-forth battle certainly showed that two-party politics had established itself in Pinellas County. Sterling declined to challenge Wilcox during the 1944 election. As the nation was embroiled in World War II, he claimed it was not in the public's best interest to change the political balance of power of the office at that time.



**Mac S. Haines 1961 - 1976**

It was during Mac Haines' 16-year tenure with the Tax Assessor's Office that its official title was changed to Property Appraiser in 1974. The computer era was ushered in during Haines' term in office as well. The technological shift brought the record-keeping process from addressograph machines and labor-intensive paper files to a new electronic world. However the speed of those early computers was nothing like that of modern equipment. Office workers could actually get up from their desks, walk to a card file and pull out the property cards in question in the time it took for those early computers to retrieve the appropriate data. In early 1976, Mac Haines announced he

would retire at the end of his term in January, 1977. The reason for the unexpected timing, which he kept private except to a few, became known to the public when he succumbed after a long battle with illness and died in office on November 4, 1976. His death occurred two days after the election of his successor, Ronald J. Schultz.



### **Ronald J. Schultz 1976 - 1989**

Ronald Schultz began his first term of office early because he was appointed by Florida Governor Ruben Askew to fulfill the remaining obligations of Mac Haines' term of office.

While teaching at the University of South Florida and pursuing his Ph.D. in 1970, Schultz developed a sales/ratio method of determining property appraisals. Buoyed by public support for his methodology, Schultz was successful in his bid for the Property Appraiser's Office in 1976.

As Pinellas County Property Appraiser, Schultz continued to use computers to streamline the flow of information within that office. In addition to maintaining a computer mapping and property record system, he devised a program that allowed the county to reappraise property every year.

Significant state laws affecting property taxation were passed by the Florida Legislature while Schultz was in office, including the Truth in Millage legislation. This legislation set a definite distinction between the Property Appraiser's office and the taxing authorities. For the first time, tax liabilities were broken down between millage rates versus assessed value, so citizens could clearly see which factors were responsible for a change in the amount of their taxes.

Ron Schultz later served as Property Appraiser in Citrus County.



## **Jim Smith 1989 - Present**

Jim Smith entered politics in 1978 when he won a house seat in the Florida Legislature.

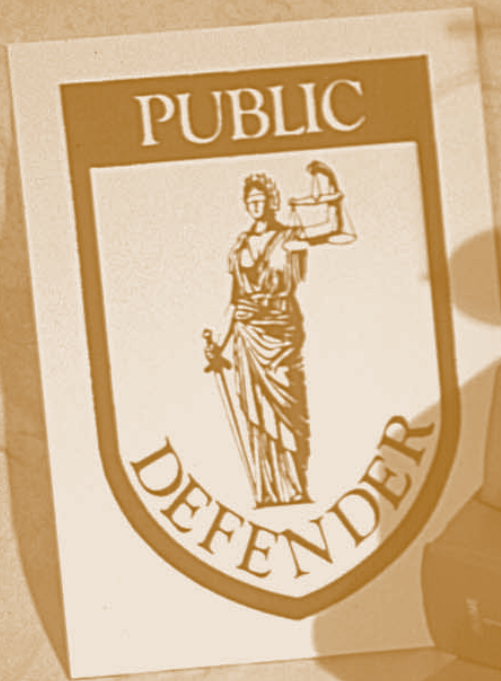
During his term in the legislature, the Truth in Millage Act was passed. This act allows for a Notice of Proposed Property Taxes, or Truth in Millage (TRIM) Notice, to be sent to taxpayers. The notice lists the governmental entities responsible for property taxes levied and the amount of tax liability owed to each taxing entity. It also compares the previous year's assessed value and property taxes with the current year's assessed value and proposed property taxes. Budget hearings are posted so taxpayers may attend.

While serving as a legislator, Smith recognized a need for government to be operated more like a business and vowed to do so if given the opportunity to head a governmental office or department.

That opportunity came when Jim Smith was elected Property Appraiser for Pinellas County in November 1988. After taking office in January 1989, Smith, a prior owner of an electronics firm, immediately set about utilizing his successful business practices. Cost efficiency, professionalism and friendly, business-like customer service were stressed.

Among other accomplishments, Smith implemented automatic homestead exemption renewal and year-round filing for new applications, and he established the office Internet site ([www.pcpao.org](http://www.pcpao.org)) that provides a powerful database search feature to the public free of charge. Smith also broke new ground in the appraisal field with the introduction and implementation of handheld computers to facilitate the collection of appraisal information. He also created the first homestead exemption fraud unit, which counties across the country have sought to emulate.





# Public Defender



*In each judicial circuit a public defender shall be elected for a term of four years. He shall perform duties prescribed by general law. A public defender shall be an elector of the state and reside in the territorial jurisdiction of the circuit. He shall be and have been a member of the Bar of Florida for the preceding five years. Public defenders shall appoint such assistant public defenders as may be authorized by law.*

## **Public Defender Tenure**

*Robert Jagger  
Robert Dillinger*

*1961 - 1997  
1997 - Present*



# Overview

The Pinellas County Public Defender's Office was originally created by the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners and officially opened its doors on October 1, 1961.

While the sixth amendment to the U.S. Constitution ensures the right to a speedy trial, nothing in the constitution specifically provides for a defendant's right to be represented by an attorney. However, the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment does guarantee that the state shall not deprive any person of life, liberty or property without due process of law. In 1932, in *Powell vs. Alabama*, it was argued that standing trial without an appointed attorney violated a citizen's right to due process. The Supreme Court agreed, deciding that "the courts of all of our states are required to appoint counsel to represent indigent persons accused of capital cases."

A later case, *Gideon vs. Wainwright* in 1963, prompted the high court to further affirm a defendant's right to counsel, not only in capital cases, but in all criminal cases. The court believed the necessity for legal assistance, not the nature of the sanction, should be the controlling consideration.

Subsequent to this decision, the Florida Legislature created a mandatory Public Defender system throughout the state that includes the Sixth Judicial Circuit comprising both Pasco and Pinellas counties. Public Defenders are elected for a term of four years.

Prior to the creation of the Public Defender's Office, circuit court judges appointed attorneys to represent the indigent on a catch-as-catch-can basis. It was an informal procedure whereby judges would decide whether defendants were capable of representing themselves. If not, judges would appoint an attorney from those who happened to be available in the courthouse that day. This procedure caused a bit of disgruntlement among local attorneys and prompted the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners to create the Public Defender's Office two years prior to the state's legislative action.

In its first year of operation, the Public Defender's Office represented 324 defendants in 470 felony cases or more than 60% of all felony cases within the county.

Today, the Public Defender's Office handles more than 82,000 cases a year, which represent the great majority of all cases within the Sixth Judicial Circuit.



## **Robert Jagger 1961 - 1997**

The Public Defender's Office was created when Robert Jagger was appointed by the Board of County Commissioners as Public Defender for Pinellas County on October 1, 1961. From 1961 through 1963, the Public Defender, one assistant, one investigator and one secretary handled only felony defendants in Pinellas County. The Florida Legislature created the statewide system in 1963, and Chief Judge John U. Byrd strongly recommended Jagger for appointment. On July 1, 1963, Jagger was appointed Public Defender of the Sixth Judicial Circuit for Pasco and Pinellas counties. He was the only Republican Public Defender in the state of Florida appointed by Governor Ferris Bryant, a Democrat. In 1964 and 1965, juvenile and misdemeanor cases, respectively, were added by law, and the office and staff increased accordingly as the caseload increased.

One of the greater accomplishments of the office under Jagger was the creation and establishment of the first Guardian Ad Litem program in Florida. The two lawyers who worked on this program went on to Tallahassee and established the statewide program based upon the model in the Pinellas Public Defender's Office.

Another accomplishment was the establishment of the first Public Defender Clinic in Florida. This was done in conjunction with Stetson University College of Law. As a result, the Florida Supreme Court established rules allowing students, with a supervising lawyer, to practice law in the courts of this state. Other state and national law schools soon adopted similar Public Defender clinics and adopted the Florida student practice rule.

As Public Defender, Jagger was also chairman of the National Committee on Public Defender Standards and Ethics as well as chairman of the National Defender Committee. In 1969, the National Legal Aid and Defender Association named Jagger the recipient of the Reginald Heber Smith Award, the highest



national award for a Public Defender. During this same period, Jagger was also president of the Florida Public Defender Association.

In 1996, Jagger was awarded the Florida Bar's highest honor, the Selig Goldin Award, for the contributions that he made as Public Defender to the Florida criminal justice system.

### **Robert Dillinger 1997 - Present**

Bob Dillinger graduated from Columbia University in 1973 and from Florida's Stetson University College of Law in 1976. Upon earning his law degree and passing his bar examination, Dillinger joined the Public Defender's Office as an Assistant Public Defender in 1976. In 1982, he left the Public Defender's Office and entered private

practice, handling both criminal defense and civil jury work. A select few of those cases were high profile and earned him recognition in the public eye. His diligence and dedication to the law merited him the prestigious Nelson Poynter Award as an outstanding lawyer in the community. He won the Pro Bono Award in 1990 and received recognition as a member of Who's Who in 1993. In 1996, he defeated Robert Jagger for the position of Public Defender for the Sixth Judicial Circuit.

As Public Defender, Dillinger remains committed to the rights of the poor and is an advocate for treatment for the mentally disabled. Since his installation in office, Dillinger has increased staff within existing budget restraints and has placed great emphasis on assisting the mentally ill, the addicted and the homeless in living productive lives free from the criminal justice system. In 2004, the office received almost a million dollars in federal grant money to assist in diverting the mentally ill from the jail. No other office in the country received such an award. The office has also received grant funding for a full-time homeless jail diversion program.

The office website can be found at [www.wearethehope.org](http://www.wearethehope.org).

# Sheriff



*J*

*here shall be elected by the electors of each county, for terms of four years, a sheriff..*

## **Sheriff's Office Tenure**

<i>Marvel Whitehurst</i>	<i>1912 - 1920</i>
<i>Lorenzo E. Sloat</i>	<i>1920 - 1921</i>
<i>William S. Lindsey</i>	<i>1921 - 1925</i>
<i>Roy Booth</i>	<i>1925 - 1929</i>
	<i>1930 - 1933</i>
<i>Gladstone R. Beattie</i>	<i>1929 - 1930</i>
<i>Ernest G. Cunningham</i>	<i>1933 - 1941</i>
<i>Todd Tucker</i>	<i>1941 - 1953</i>
<i>Sid Saunders</i>	<i>1953 - 1958</i>
<i>Donald S. Genung</i>	<i>1958 - 1975</i>
<i>William T. "Bill" Roberts</i>	<i>1975 - 1981</i>
<i>Gerard A. "Gerry" Coleman</i>	<i>1981 - 1989</i>
<i>Everett S. Rice</i>	<i>1989 - 2004</i>
<i>James F. Coats</i>	<i>2004 - Present</i>



# Overview

Back in 1912, the early Pinellas County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) reflected the rough and rural nature of the county at that time. Bootlegging, moonshining and gambling were daily occurrences, and the Sheriff's Office was kept busy running after a host of colorful criminals. During the era of Prohibition, 1919 through 1933, the Sheriff's Office pursued liquor law violations of every kind. The arrest of a team of confidence men made headlines early in PCSO history. While the arrest made news, so did the escape, as the prisoners sawed through the iron bars of the Pinellas County Jail with tools smuggled to them from the outside.

During the 20-year period of 1930 - 1950, the Sheriff's Office was much different than the law enforcement institution we know today. Sheriff's deputies rode in their own cars, wore civilian clothes and carried their own weapons. The county was divided into several districts, each of which had an elected constable and a Justice of the Peace to supervise legal matters. Various municipal police departments enforced the laws as did the old County Patrol. The Sheriff's Office ran the county jail and enforced the protocol of the courts. Sometimes the office would round up jurors when the selector pool was depleted.

Financing was accomplished through a fee system in those early days. For every arrest made, warrant served, journey traveled and prisoner transported, the Sheriff earned a fee. This fee was a preassigned amount that was entered on the books for accounting purposes. Eventually, the fee system was eliminated and replaced by a departmental budget supported by county taxes.

It wasn't until 1959 and the tenure of Sheriff Don Genung, that the Sheriff's Office began to take on a modern identity. The Sheriff's Office absorbed the County Patrol in 1960. A year later, the Sheriff's Office bought a fleet of 1961 Plymouth Fury automobiles to serve as patrol cars. Sheriff's deputies were put into uniform and issued standard weapons. Deputies received special training from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. In 1965, the Sheriff's Office instituted the Pinellas County Sheriff's Recruit Academy that gave Sheriff's Office recruits 320 hours of training over an eight-week period. By 1972, the training had increased to 480 hours. Sheriff's Office personnel were given the benefits of civil service along with health benefits and a retirement plan.

Improvements in technology and law enforcement strategy continued to evolve during the following decades. Currently the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office consists of more than 3,000 members in five major service bureaus:



Patrol Operations, Detention and Corrections, Investigative Operations, Support Services and the Inspections Bureau. Sheriff's deputies have countywide jurisdiction but are on patrol in the unincorporated areas and in the cities under contract with the Sheriff's Office for primary law enforcement services.

Law enforcement services such as the K-9 Unit, Flight Section and Marine Unit are available countywide. The Sheriff's Child Protection Investigation Division (CPID), another countywide program, meets the needs of abused and neglected children. The Sheriff's Office also took the lead in tracking sexual predators and offenders by dedicating a team of deputies to monitor the registration and activities of these individuals countywide.

The Youth Services Section has grown to include School Resource Officers in middle schools and high schools and programs dealing with youthful offenders. Deputy Sheriffs teach the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program (DARE) in county elementary schools.

The Sheriff's Office has forged strong community partnerships by offering citizens numerous opportunities to learn more about law enforcement and personal safety. Citizens from around the county can participate in the Sheriff's Citizen's Policing Institute, the Sheriff's Advisory Board, Neighborhood Watch and Volunteers In Partnership (VIPs).

The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office is one of the few law enforcement agencies in the nation to achieve the highest marks in three areas of professional accreditation: law enforcement, corrections and inmate health care.

The agency has pioneered the use of facial recognition technology in law enforcement and corrections. The Sheriff's Office continues to be innovative in the automation of records, forensic science and the security of property and evidence.

*Leading The Way For A Safer Pinellas* is the vision and will continue to be the direction of the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office.



## **Marvel Whitehurst**

**1912 - 1920**

When Pinellas County came into being as the state's 48th county in 1912, the governor had the power to appoint all the constitutional officers. For the office of Sheriff, Governor Albert Gilchrist asked the Democratic Executive Committee to hold a party election. Marvel Whitehurst emerged as the popular Democratic choice and was appointed Pinellas County's first Sheriff.

Whitehurst won the county's first regular election in 1912 and reelection in 1916. However, scandal marked his tenure in office. He was accused of turning a blind eye to certain criminal charges leveled against his deputy, W. L. Strickland, and was accused of not acting swiftly enough to stem the activities of a local confidence operation.

Whitehurst was removed from office by the governor in 1920, yet valiantly struggled to win back public confidence and the popular vote. He lost his bids for office, both in 1920 and 1924.

Whitehurst died in 1930. He received a full military funeral due to his service in the Spanish-American War and was buried in Curlew Cemetery in Palm Harbor, Florida.

## **Lorenzo E. Sloat 1920 - 1921** (not pictured)

Lorenzo Sloat was appointed as interim Sheriff to fill the vacancy left when Marvel Whitehurst was removed from office. He announced that he would not be a candidate in the 1920 election, perhaps because of the magnitude of the race going on between Marvel Whitehurst and Democratic frontrunner William S. Lindsey. Lindsey won the election and stepped into office in early January of 1921.



### **William S. Lindsey 1921 - 1925**

For eight years prior to becoming Pinellas County Sheriff, William Lindsey worked for the St. Petersburg Police Department. He served as chief for the last six months of his career there.

Lindsey served only a single term as Sheriff. The election of 1924 was a maelstrom of political activity. The Democratic primary had six candidates, among them Marvel Whitehurst, vying for their party's support. Lindsey received only 70 votes in that contest. Roy Booth won the 1924 Democratic primary, then went on to win the election as the county's fourth Sheriff.

### **Roy Booth 1925 - 1929/1930 - 1933**

From the political brawling that occurred during the 1924 election, Roy Booth emerged victorious to attain the office of Pinellas County Sheriff. He spent much of his time in office running after bootleggers in this Prohibition period. One report recounted that the Sheriff's Office had made 30 arrests in 30 days, including arresting one man for selling whiskey that was "alleged to have driven three well-known men crazy."

Booth lost the 1928 election to Republican challenger Gladstone Beattie. Almost immediately, Booth filed suit, alleging certain irregularities in the voting procedures and demanded that the ballots be recounted. Seventeen months and two trips to the Florida Supreme Court later, Booth won approval for his request. A recount declared him the victor, and he was restored to the Sheriff's Office in May of 1930.

In his years as Sheriff, Booth established the first County Traffic Patrol, consisting of two motorcycle patrolmen whose duty was to check reckless driving. He opened the first Sheriff's branch office in St. Petersburg as well.

Booth lost reelection in 1932. He died in his hometown of Safety Harbor in 1959.





**Gladstone R. Beattie 1929 - 1930**  
Gladstone Beattie had been in Pinellas County only four years when he ran for the position of Sheriff. He was the first Republican to be elected to that office. However, he was removed from office in February of 1930 by Democratic Governor Doyle E. Carlton for malfeasance and misfeasance. The governor charged that Beattie failed to make arrests, allowed illegal gambling activities to flourish and accepted “protection” money from those involved in illegal operations. In the meantime, Roy Booth was successful in his bid to recount the ballots in the 1928 election and was restored to office shortly after Beattie’s dismissal. Beattie continued to be active in local politics, however, running again for Sheriff in 1932. He lost that election to Ernest G. Cunningham.



**Ernest G. Cunningham 1933 - 1941**  
The Sheriff’s Office had fewer than ten employees when Ernest Cunningham began his term in office. Cunningham served as St. Petersburg City Commissioner before vying for the office of Sheriff. His family was successful in business. One brother, Vernon, founded the Ninth Street Bank and Trust Company. Before he was elected to the office, Cunningham served as interim Sheriff during the brief period of Gladstone Beattie’s removal and Roy Booth’s reinstatement. In these four months, he managed to lose a substantial portion of the Sheriff’s funds on deposit in his brother’s Ninth Street Bank and Trust when that financial institution closed. (Depositor’s insurance did not exist at that time.) Despite this judgmental error, Cunningham won the 1932 primary and defeated Gladstone Beattie in the general election. He was reelected in 1936 and retired at the end of that second term. Afterwards, he spent his time raising cattle and became the first president of the Pinellas County Cattlemen’s Association.



### **Todd Tucker 1941 - 1953**

Todd Tucker came into the office of Sheriff with years of law enforcement experience under his belt, having served as Deputy Sheriff and as a plainclothes policeman with the St. Petersburg Police Department. One of the hallmarks of Tucker's career was the procurement of in-car radio communications for the Sheriff's patrol fleet. Tucker also had an opinion about the fee system that had financed the Sheriff's Office to date. "I have always been opposed to the fee system," Tucker once declared, "because I never thought it was right for an officer to have to depend on putting people in jail to collect his salary."

Another highlight of Tucker's career was his zealous fight against gambling. Not only did he work to eliminate adult gambling from the county, but he also confiscated gumball machines which offered prizes on the premise that the machines lured pennies from children.



### **Sid Saunders 1953 - 1958**

Sid Saunders started his law enforcement career as a police officer for the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. That position brought him to St. Petersburg, where he joined the Sheriff's Office. In 1934, Sheriff Ernest Cunningham deputized Saunders and assigned him to the St. Petersburg district. He served as district constable from 1944 to 1952, then won the election of 1952 to become Pinellas County Sheriff.

Saunders improved electronic communications within the Sheriff's Office and with other Pinellas County law enforcement agencies. He was praised in the media for maintaining Pinellas County's clean reputation, while, as one writer of the period noted, "hordes of underworld characters" flooded other parts of the state.



Unbeknownst to his public, Saunders had a serious heart condition that would claim his life while in office. Saunders died on February 19, 1958, from bronchial pneumonia complicated by his rheumatic heart disease.

### **Donald S. Genung 1958 - 1975**

After serving in the United States Air Force and attaining the rank of captain, Don Genung began his law enforcement career with the Clearwater Police Department in 1946. During that time, he served as patrolman, juvenile officer, detective, sergeant, captain of detectives and assistant chief. In 1953, he joined the Sheriff's Office as chief criminal investigator. He was appointed interim Sheriff upon Sid Saunders' death in 1958, then went on to win the 1958 election and subsequent re-elections from 1960 through 1972.

During this time in office, Genung was the driving force behind modernization of the Sheriff's Office. He instituted extensive training for Sheriff's Office personnel, standardized equipment and uniforms, the K-9 unit and the flight section. Communications and information retrieval took quantum leaps forward during the Genung administration with the implementation of the agency's first Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system that utilized mobile display terminals in deputies' vehicles for improved communications.

Because of his concern for children, Genung began the practice of segregation of juvenile offenders from the adult population of the jail and instituted a Youth Study Center so juveniles could continue their education while in custody.

In the early 1960s, Genung was appointed by President John F. Kennedy to the President's Counsel on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime. Although Kennedy urged him to run for Congress, Genung declined, stating that his background and experience were best suited for being a good sheriff.

Genung retired from the Sheriff's Office on April 1, 1975. He subsequently became Director of Development for the Florida Sheriff's Youth Fund, Inc. that sponsored the Florida Sheriff's Boys Ranch and Girls Villa.

Don Genung died in Pinellas County in September of 2001 after a long bout with cancer. He was 84.



**William T. "Bill" Roberts**  
**1975 - 1981**

Upon special request from Sheriff Don Genung, Governor Rubin Askew appointed Bill Roberts to fill the vacancy left by Genung's retirement. Roberts served the remainder of that term and later won the 1976 election.

Roberts had been a police officer for the city of Largo, then went to work for Pinellas County Sheriff Sid Saunders in 1953. Roberts functioned as deputy-in-charge of the Sheriff's Clearwater Office, then chief deputy of the upper Pinellas area. He later was promoted to chief deputy and held that position for 17 years.

Roberts did not participate in the 1980 election. After leaving the Sheriff's Office, he pursued interests in the real estate profession.

Roberts remained in Pinellas County through his retirement. He was 77 years old when he died in December of 2001.



**Gerard A. "Gerry" Coleman**  
**1981 - 1989**

Gerry Coleman was the first Republican since Gladstone Beattie to win the Sheriff's race in Pinellas County.

Coleman grew up in New York City, where his father worked for 37 years with the New York City Police Department. His parents retired to Pinellas County, and Coleman started his law enforcement career with the old County Patrol. The following year, Coleman was appointed as a Pinellas County Sheriff's Deputy under Sheriff Don Genung.

During Coleman's administration, the Sheriff's Office established its first victim's advocate program. Coleman also introduced a policy manual for deputy conduct and an internal affairs unit to investigate allegations of misconduct from within the force. One



major accomplishment for the Sheriff's Office, spearheaded by Coleman, was national accreditation. The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office received its first accreditation in March of 1988 from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies.

In his 1988 reelection bid, Coleman lost the Republican primary to former Sheriff's Office captain and local attorney Everett S. Rice.

### **Everett S. Rice 1989 - 2004**

Everett Rice's entire law enforcement career was with the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office. He completed police academy training in 1967 and joined the office under Sheriff Don Genung. Rice quickly moved up the ranks attaining the rank of captain. In 1980, Rice became director of investigations for the agency.

While working in the Sheriff's Office, Rice had been advancing his academic career, with degrees from St. Petersburg Junior College and Stetson University College of Law. In 1985, Rice resigned his position with the Sheriff's Office to practice law. After three years with Rice & Kwall, P.A., Rice entered the 1988 Republican bid for Sheriff, won the primary by a hefty two-to-one margin and went on to easily win the 1988 election against Democratic contender Leroy Kelly, Jr.

During his time in office, Rice initiated advancements in both agency automation and forensics. The number of municipalities contracting with the Sheriff's Office for law enforcement services increased. Additionally, Rice reinstated civil service for members of the office and expanded the agency pay scale, allowing members to build careers in their areas of preference and expertise.

Following his reelection in 1996, Rice joined his fellow constitutional officers in opposition to a referendum question which imposed term limits of eight years on county elected officials. The vote was initiated by a grassroots "Eight Is Enough" campaign.

Rice said that he embraced referendums as the voice of the people, but in this case he said the question before the voters was incorrectly drawn by "Eight Is Enough" proponents. He contended that a local referendum could not affect the term for an office created, not by a local authority, but by the state constitution. Early in the debate,



Rice promised not to seek reelection in 2004 to avoid the appearance of personal interest in the issue.

Despite local legal setbacks and when others dropped out, Rice and the Clerk of the Circuit Court persevered and pursued an appeal on the issue to the Florida Supreme Court. In May 2002, the court upheld the Sheriff's and the Clerk's position in a 4-3 vote. As promised, Rice did not seek reelection as Sheriff in 2004.

In 1997, Rice was elected president of the Florida Sheriff's Association (FSA). Under Rice's leadership, the FSA lobbied and won creation of the Department of Juvenile Justice which assumed jurisdiction of juvenile criminal matters from the old Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (now the Department of Children and Families). Other legislative changes advocated by the FSA resulted in rules requiring felons to complete at least 85% of their sentences for crimes committed.

Rice saw the benefits of technology for law enforcement and introduced automation, including facial recognition technology, into the daily operations of the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office. Many of the programs initiated at the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office are considered model applications in the law enforcement profession today.

Rice left the office of Sheriff in October 2004 to pursue a candidacy for Florida State Representative. He achieved that office in November 2004, as he ran unopposed in that election. Rice was succeeded as Sheriff by his chief deputy, James "Jim" F. Coats.



## **James F. Coats 2004 - Present**

James “Jim” Coats began his long and productive career with the Pinellas County Sheriff’s Office in 1971 as a deputy sheriff. Originally from New York, Coats served four years in the Air Force before turning his attention to law enforcement.

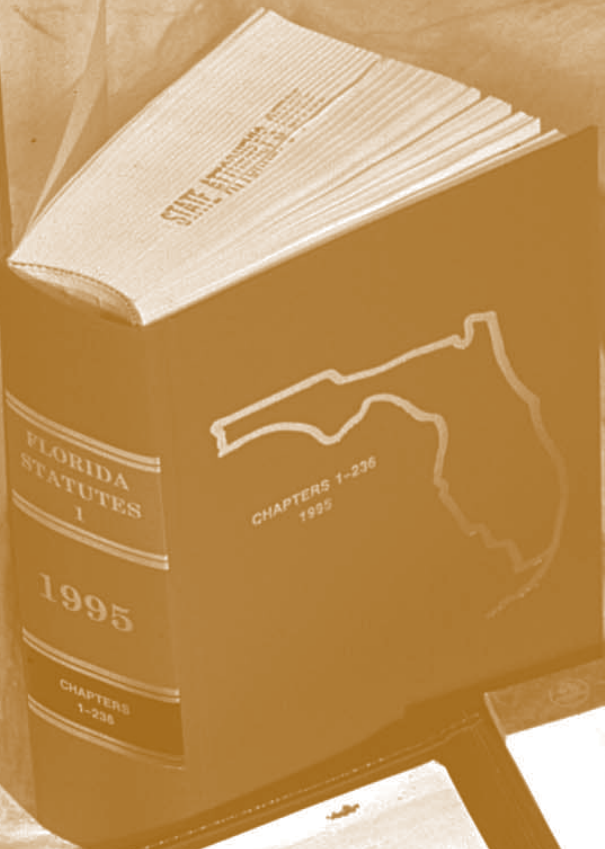
During the course of his career, Coats worked to attain all ranks from patrol deputy to major in command of the Investigative Operations Bureau. Governor Lawton Chiles asked him to serve as interim Sheriff in Santa Rosa County in 1992 and Gulf County in 1994-95 while those sheriffs were under investigation.

In 1995, Jim Coats was appointed to chief deputy by Sheriff Everett Rice. As second-in-command, he assisted the Sheriff in managing one of the largest and most progressive law enforcement and corrections agencies in the United States.

Chief Deputy Coats announced his intentions to run for the Office of Sheriff as a Republican in 2002, upon the retirement of Everett Rice in 2004. However, in October of 2004, Rice resigned as Sheriff to run for an open seat in the Florida House of Representatives. Governor Jeb Bush appointed Coats as interim Sheriff until after the election; Coats won the election decisively.

Coats has launched numerous initiatives focusing on performance-based management of agency services and programs. He has emphasized community partnerships as an important resource in building a safer community. Coats is personally dedicated to the programs that serve the youth of Pinellas County: the Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranch, the Boys & Girls Club and the Sheriff’s Police Athletic League (PAL). The integration of leading-edge technology into agency operations is also a priority of Sheriff Jim Coats.

# State Attorney



*Answer to State*

The office of the state Attorney, with judicial circuit is consolidated pursuant to article V, section 17 of the Constitution of the state of Florida. The state attorney is charged with being the chief prosecuting officer of all trial courts in his respective circuit and performs all other duties prescribed by general law.

Chapter 21 of Florida Statutes and the Florida Rules of Criminal Procedure further elaborate upon the duties of the State Attorney.

The State Attorney, with the aid of appointed assistants and staff, appears in the circuit and County Courts within his judicial circuit and prosecutes on behalf of the State in a particular case.

The office of the State Attorney, with judicial circuit, is located in Pinellas and Pasco Counties. The main office is located in Clearwater.



1999 COUNTY OWNED PROPERTY

A-2 "Tracts named Park", Chesapeake Point (14-21)

Lot 4, Block 22, Sunset Hills (7-28)

Req. at NE cor. of Lot 3, Block 14, run N 173° 51' W 210', S 77° 14' E 250' to P.O.B., less deed 218894 & 241214 (G 800) S 1/2 Sec. 15, T 27 N, R 15 W 2/3, less deed to heading & adjacent, 8/13/63, Official Map of Tarpon Springs

A-2 Req. at NE cor. of Lot 3, Block 14, run N 137° 51' W 60', S 137° 51' W 60' to P.O.B., Official Map of Tarpon Springs

A-2 Req. 200' E of NE cor. of Lot 3, Block 14, run N 137° 51' W 60', S 137° 51' W 60' to P.O.B., Official Map of Tarpon Springs

A-2 Req. 250' E of NE cor. of Lot 3, Block 14, run S 137° 51' W 50', S 137° 51' W 60' to P.O.B., Official Map of Tarpon Springs (G 800)

A-2 Lot 3, Block 22, less E 680' 100', Official Map of Tarpon Springs, G 800-801

A-2 200' W of NE cor. of Lot 4, Block 14, run S 137° 51' W 60', S 137° 51' W 60' to P.O.B., Official Map of Tarpon Springs (G 800-801)

A-2 200' W of NE cor. of Lot 4, Block 14, run S 137° 51' W 50', S 137° 51' W 60' to P.O.B., Official Map of Tarpon Springs (G 800)

*In each judicial circuit a state attorney shall be elected for a term of four years. Except as otherwise provided in this constitution, he shall be the prosecuting officer of all trial courts in that circuit and shall perform other duties prescribed by general law; provided, however, when authorized by general law, the violations of all municipal ordinances may be prosecuted by municipal prosecutors. A state attorney shall be an elector of the state and reside in the territorial jurisdiction of the circuit. He shall be and have been a member of the bar of Florida for the preceding five years. He shall devote full time to his duties, and he shall not engage in the private practice of law. State attorneys shall appoint such assistant state attorneys as may be authorized by law.*

## State Attorney Tenure

<i>Herbert S. Phillips</i>	1912 - 1913
<i>George Pettus Raney, Jr.</i>	1913 - 1914
<i>Horace C. Gordon</i>	1914 - 1915
<i>Melvin Arthur McMullen</i>	1915 - 1921
<i>Emmett Pasco Wilson</i>	1921 - 1931
<i>Chester B. McMullen, Sr.</i>	1931 - 1950
<i>Archie Clement</i>	1950 - 1952
<i>Clair A. Davis</i>	1953 - 1969
<i>James T. Russell</i>	1969 - 1992
<i>Bernie McCabe</i>	1993 - Present



# Overview

The office of the State Attorney for the Sixth Judicial Circuit dates back to a time when Pinellas County existed as a part of Hillsborough County. In 1915, Pinellas and Hillsborough separated judicially, as Hillsborough County became the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit. Pinellas was then coupled with Manatee County as the Sixth Judicial Circuit.

By 1921, the Sixth Judicial Circuit comprised Pinellas, Manatee, Sarasota and Pasco counties. Eventually, Manatee and Sarasota broke off to form the Twelfth Judicial Circuit. Pinellas and Pasco counties constituted the Sixth Judicial Circuit. This arrangement continues today.

In the early days of the State Attorney's history, those who held the position did so as a part-time endeavor. Many of the early State Attorneys maintained private law firms while functioning in their office. In 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court case of *Gideon vs. Wainwright*, which declared that all indigent defendants had the right to state-appointed counsel, resulted in 415 Sixth Judicial Circuit cases being returned for retrial. This added a tremendous burden on the office of State Attorney, which was then forced to expand its staff. In 1970, it became a requirement that State Attorneys have no outside employment.

As the population of Pinellas County and the Sixth Judicial Circuit continued to increase, so did the State Attorney's workload. As marijuana possession and sales increased dramatically in the late 1960s, the State Attorney's office reacted with stringent prosecution of all those caught with the substance.

In 1972, the revision of Florida Constitution Article 5 provided for a streamlining of the judicial system statewide. The confusing multitiered court system, in effect for almost 100 years, finally came to an end with the dissolution of municipal courts, justices of the peace, county solicitors and prosecuting attorneys. The State Attorney's Office came into focus as the sole prosecuting agency for all crimes against all governing institutions. The same year, the State Attorney's staff was expanded considerably to handle the additional intake of charges resulting from the reformation of the court system.

Today, the office of the State Attorney has 465 state-funded positions which encompass assistant state attorneys, investigators and various support personnel in both Pasco and Pinellas counties. Offices are located in Clearwater, New Port Richey and Dade City. More than 120,000 new cases are brought to the State Attorney's Office annually.



## **Herbert S. Phillips**

**1912 - 1913**

Herbert Phillips represented the area known as West Hillsborough when Pinellas was still a part of Hillsborough County. After Pinellas attained its independence in 1912, Phillips served as representative to this area within the Sixth Judicial Circuit through July 31, 1913.



## **George Pettus Raney, Jr.**

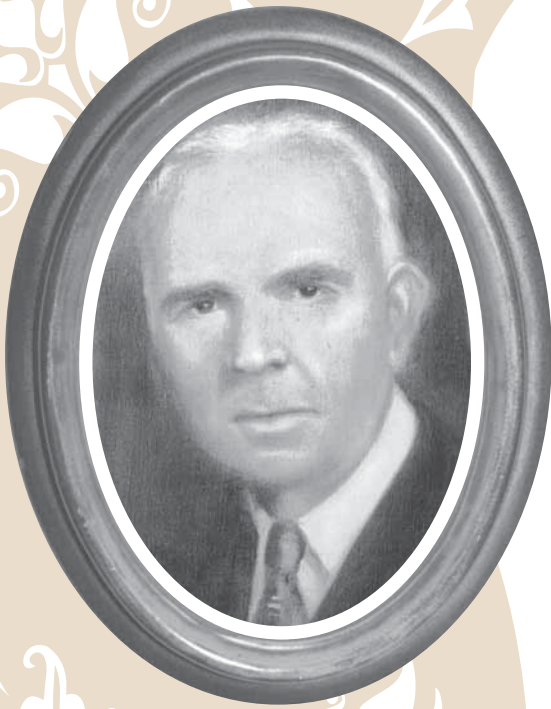
**1913 - 1914**

George Raney became State Attorney on September 18, 1913, and was the first State Attorney to preside over the newly formed Pinellas County. He served for little more than one year, however, and resigned on September 1, 1914.

## **Horace C. Gordon** (not pictured)

**1914 - 1915**

Horace Gordon replaced George Raney as State Attorney in 1914. He, too, would serve a short period of time. He left office on June 8, 1915.



## **Melvin Arthur McMullen** **1915 - 1921**

Pinellas and Hillsborough counties were judicially joined as the Sixth Judicial Circuit until 1915 when Hillsborough became part of the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit and Pinellas coupled with Manatee County as the Sixth Judicial Circuit. Melvin McMullen, a member of one of Pinellas County's original pioneer families, became State Attorney for the new circuit on June 18, 1915. McMullen had served as Pinellas County prosecuting attorney prior to his commission and thus brought a great deal of courtroom experience with him to his new office. During McMullen's tenure as State Attorney, he prosecuted only capital crimes, identified in that era as murder and rape.

McMullen served as State Attorney until 1921, when he left to accept a position as a circuit court judge. He served in that capacity until 1926, when he left the bench to resume private practice in Clearwater. He died in Clearwater on May 10, 1955, at the age of 69.



## **Emmett Pasco Wilson** **1921 - 1931**

During Emmett Wilson's term in office, the Sixth Judicial Circuit was expanded to include Pinellas, Manatee, Sarasota and Pasco counties. Eventually Manatee and Sarasota counties broke off to form the Twelfth Judicial Circuit. That left Pinellas and Pasco counties as the Sixth Judicial Circuit. The same configuration exists today.

Wilson served quietly in office for ten years. Afterwards, the role of State Attorney was taken over by another McMullen.



**Chester B. McMullen, Sr.**  
**1931 - 1950**

Like his brother Melvin before him, Chester McMullen gained courtroom experience as a Pinellas County prosecuting attorney prior to his landslide election victory for the office of State Attorney. At the age of 28, McMullen holds the distinction of being the youngest State Attorney ever to take office within the Sixth Judicial Circuit. McMullen created the office of assistant state attorney (of which there are now 121). McMullen also was granted a request for a secretary to assist the State Attorney and for that secretary's salary to be paid by state funds.

In January 1950, a group of political activists encouraged McMullen to run for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. McMullen resigned as State Attorney after winning the election, and he became the first Pinellas County native to serve in the U.S. Congress.



**Archie Clement 1950 - 1952**

Archie Clement continued the tradition of defending the interest of the state. As was the practice of the day, he and two assistant state attorneys maintained private law firms in addition to their duties in the State Attorney's Office. During Clement's tenure, the juvenile justice system began. Most cases were handled by a group of specialists in juvenile law. Clement resigned the State Attorney's Office in 1952.





### **Clair A. Davis 1953 - 1969**

A number of innovative practices were brought to the State Attorney's office by Clair Davis. He introduced a bill in the legislature calling for a method of collecting delinquent child support from fathers. The Uniform Reciprocal Enforcement of Support Act, implemented in 1954, collected \$6,952 in delinquent child support payments that first year. Over the next ten years, nearly \$2,000,000 would be collected.

During Davis' tenure, two landmark judicial developments would propel the office of State Attorney into an increasingly higher profile in our local justice system. In 1963, the landmark *Gideon vs. Wainwright* case granted the right to an attorney to all indigent criminal defendants, regardless of the offense. Davis was faced with hundreds of retrials for past

offenses and steeled himself for an increased workload as more prosecutions were now expected to go to trial. He disbanded his private law practice and concentrated on the State Attorney's position full time.

In the 1968 election, Davis, who was 69 years old at the time, was challenged by Alan Williams, a 35-year-old displaced county prosecutor. Davis won the election but died from a heart attack while in office in 1969.



## **James T. Russell 1969 - 1992**

James Russell was an assistant state attorney under Clair Davis and became acting State Attorney immediately following Davis' death. In March of 1969, Florida Governor Claude Kirk officially appointed Russell as Davis' replacement.

Russell had previously served as a judge for several municipalities and as attorney for the city of Gulfport. In addition, Russell served as a state legislator from 1958 to 1964.

The task of reorganizing the State Attorney's Office after the 1972 constitutional revision, streamlining the judicial system statewide, fell to Russell. Many additional attorneys and investigators were hired to handle the ever-increasing caseloads due to the elimination of the municipal courts.

The concept of a statewide prosecutor had not been introduced yet, and at the behest of the Governor, Russell occasionally traveled to Orlando and Miami to prosecute politically sensitive cases that involved some of those cities' elected officials.

In 1983, Russell and Florida Attorney General Jim Smith joined forces to combat organized crime in Pinellas County as several New York crime families tried to take over the garbage industry. Six members of the Joseph Bonanno family were convicted and sent to prison.

Russell also established a Bad Check Diversion Program to expedite monetary recovery for worthless checks. The program would eventually generate thousands of dollars in restitution for Pinellas County businesses.

Russell ran unopposed for reelection from 1970 through 1988. As his 65th birthday and the 1992 election neared, Russell announced plans to retire effective December 31, 1992. Russell recommended his chief assistant, Bernie McCabe, to succeed him in office.

James Russell died on January 2, 2006.



## **Bernie McCabe 1993 - Present**

In 1992, for the first time in 24 years, there was a battle for the State Attorney's Office. Bernie McCabe won the Republican Primary, then ran unopposed for the office of the State Attorney. His elected term began on January 6, 1993. He actually began work on January 1, as Governor Lawton Chiles appointed him to fill the four days left open by James Russell's December 31st retirement.

Like his predecessor, McCabe soon earned a reputation as a diligent prosecutor with a concern for his community. His office implemented a Misdemeanor Domestic Violence Division in 1992. Working solely with domestic violence issues, the division consists of four specially-trained assistant state attorneys and one specific judge. Two victim counselors from the Center Against Spouse Abuse and The Haven (area domestic violence clinics) are

assigned to work within the State Attorney's Office. In addition, the State Attorney's Office operates a division that deals solely with cases that involve abuse of the elderly.

As Pinellas County continued to grow, the caseloads increased. By 1992, the Juvenile Division, which had been one circuit division since its inception, became two full-time divisions with two judges hearing court daily. During the 1996-1997 school year, the Juvenile Division realized the correlation between truancy and juvenile delinquency and implemented a pilot program working with parents to combat school truancy. The State Attorney's Office has the option of criminally prosecuting parents if their children's absenteeism rises to the level of educational neglect. In 2000, the Unified Family Court was established consisting of four divisions for dependency and delinquency aspects involving one family. The State Attorney's Office also serves as legal counsel for Child Welfare Legal Services.

McCabe ran unopposed during the 1996, 2000 and 2004 elections. He is an active member of state, local and national bar associations as well as the Florida Prosecuting Attorneys Association, the First Step Corporation (past president), the Pinellas County Substance Abuse Advisory Board (chairman) and the National District Attorneys Association, among others.

# Supervisor of Elections



Handwritten notes on a clipboard, including a list of names and addresses, and a 'WOTE' logo.

Handwritten notes on a clipboard, including a list of names and addresses, and a 'WOTE' logo.

Handwritten notes on a clipboard, including a list of names and addresses, and a 'WOTE' logo.

RECORD OF ELECTIONS  
NO. 1  
PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA

BALLOT  
BOX  
PRECINCT

PINELLAS COUNTY  
PRECINCT NO. 5

CONTINUE  
REVIEW  
COMPLETE  
YOUR BALLOT IS NOW CAST

Next

*J*

here shall be elected by the electors of each county, for terms of four years, a sheriff, a tax collector, a property appraiser, a supervisor of elections...

## Supervisor of Elections Tenure

<i>Albert Stevens Meares</i>	1912 - 1913
<i>Arthur Campbell Turner</i>	1914 - 1916
<i>Charles A. Wilcox</i>	1916 - 1924
<i>Harry Hammock</i>	1924
<i>John W. Davis</i>	1924 - 1937
<i>William Campbell "Billy" Reid</i>	1937 - 1949
<i>Warren A. Wright</i>	1949 - 1951
<i>Richard M. Collins</i>	1951 - 1953
<i>Wilda J. Cook</i>	1953 - 1973
<i>Jeanne Khoyi Nelson</i>	1973 - 1977
<i>Charles J. Kaniss</i>	1977 - 1989
<i>Dorothy Walker Ruggles</i>	1989 - 2000
<i>Deborah Clark</i>	2000 - Present



# Overview

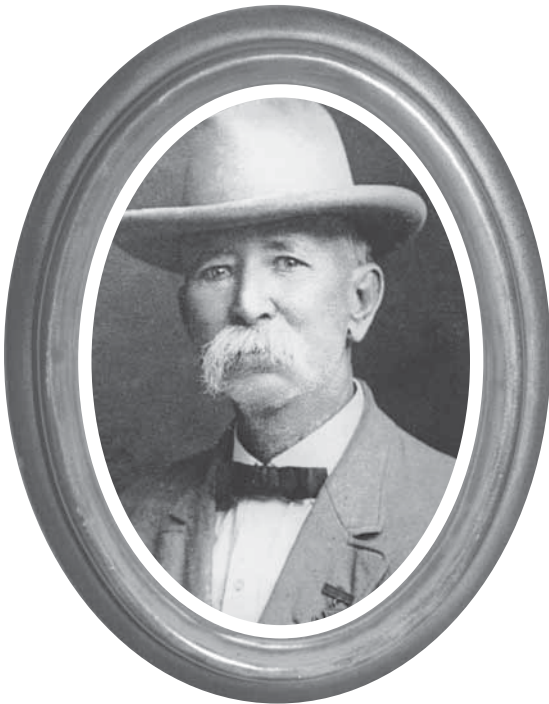
In 1912, at the birth of Pinellas County as the state's newest county, there was no mention of a Supervisor of Elections in the state constitution. Rather, the County Treasurer executed the responsibility of registering county voters and overseeing elections.

Other titles used by the office over the years included Voting Registrar, Registration Officer and Superintendent of Registration. The office was officially changed to Supervisor of Elections in 1937.

In the county's early days, poll taxes, literacy tests and white primaries were the norm, just as they were in other areas of the region. These measures effectively managed to keep all non-whites and non-males away from the voting booths. As federal laws such as the Voting Rights Act and Civil Rights Act went into effect, along with constitutional amendments allowing women's suffrage and equal protection, the county's policies toward precinct policing changed with the social climate. Pinellas County embraced the new voting parameters wholeheartedly. Pinellas County has always been progressive in ensuring fair and accurate election results for all citizens and all candidates.

**Albert Stevens Meares 1912 - 1913** (not pictured)

Albert Meares, a citrus grower in Anona (now part of Largo), set up the Pinellas County Office of Registration. The job was considered primarily a part-time undertaking. Though he lent both moral and monetary support to help establish the office, his duties at the courthouse took a back seat to work on his citrus farm. Indeed, he didn't even make it to the ribbon-cutting ceremony of the county's first courthouse. The fledgling county government paid Meares very little for his contribution. In December 1913, Meares resigned his position as the county's Voting Registrar.



**Arthur Campbell Turner  
1914 - 1916**

Arthur Turner had served as a Hillsborough County Commissioner for two terms before becoming Pinellas County's first treasurer. He retained his treasurer title as he took on the extra duties of Registration Officer after Albert Meares' departure. Turner was known as an active leader in county affairs as well as a shrewd businessman. After purchasing the *West Hillsborough Times* newspaper in the 1880s and setting up a Cleveland Street storefront in Clearwater, he sold the newspaper to some St. Petersburg interests in 1892. That paper would later evolve into the *St. Petersburg Times*.

Turner presided over a number of state and local elections during his tenure as Registration Officer. He resigned from his office in 1916 to pursue other endeavors.



## **Charles A. Wilcox**

**1916 - 1924**

Charles Wilcox was appointed to the position of Registration Officer on an interim basis in the summer of 1916 by Governor Park Trammel. That position became permanent two years later in 1918.

Wilcox entered his office concurrent with an explosive boom in population across Pinellas County and consequently a sharp rise in registered voters. From 1910 through 1920, the population of Pinellas County more than tripled.

In addition to registering all these new residents, Wilcox was responsible in part for collecting the one dollar poll tax from every eligible voter.

The first election of a Superintendent of Registration in Pinellas County took place in 1921. Wilcox won that contest and served for three more years before resigning to run for the office of Tax Assessor.



## **Harry Hammock 1924**

Citrus grower Harry Hammock was appointed to complete the unfinished term of Charles Wilcox. He chose to take his political career no further and thus holds the record for the shortest term in this office, less than four months.





### **John W. Davis 1924 - 1937**

Perhaps one of the most dynamic and exciting characters to hold the office of Superintendent of Registration was John Davis, an amputee who lost both his legs to diabetes at an early age. Despite his physical challenges, Davis fulfilled the duties of his office with vigor and energy. His family worked tirelessly on his election campaigns, with “I need you - you need me!” as his campaign slogan. His campaign platform failed to persuade voters in 1936, and he lost that hotly contested race.

### **William Campbell “Billy” Reid 1937 - 1949**

In 1937, the office of the Superintendent of Registration became known as the Supervisor of Elections. A boost in salary, from \$2,400 to \$3,000 per year, attracted a number of candidates to the position.

Billy Reid arrived in Pinellas County in search of a warmer climate in 1910, after having struggled with polio during much of his life.

Reid made the mechanization of the voting process his highest priority while in office and introduced the first voting machines to Pinellas County. He was also active in revising outdated registration policies and in purging the voter polls of deceased or otherwise ineligible individuals. Reid was the last Democrat to date to be elected to the position of Supervisor of Elections. He lost the bid for the 1948 election and died one year later at the age of 66.





### **Warren A. Wright 1949 - 1951**

Warren Wright was a traveling salesman before he took up residence in St. Petersburg in 1933. He immersed himself in civic affairs and was elected as Supervisor of Elections on his very first run for political office.

Wright continued to maintain the purging of the voting registration lists begun by Billy Reid with the county commission's Single Registration Act. He was forced by illness to resign his office only two years into his first term and died three days after his seventy-first birthday in 1951.

### **Richard M. Collins 1951 - 1953**

Governor Fuller Warren appointed Largo Mayor Richard Collins to fill the unexpired term of office left vacant by Warren Wright. An active leader all of his life (he served as city commissioner before attaining the office of mayor), Collins dove into the Supervisor of Elections position with vigor.

His most noted contribution to the office was his purchase of new ballot boxes to coincide with the new voting machines ordered by Warren Wright. He was the first Supervisor of Elections to staff the precinct polls with volunteers, going against the long-standing position of having the political parties provide the poll workers.

Toward the end of his term, Collins resigned his position to seek the office of Tax Assessor. He lost the bid for Tax Assessor but went on to a successful career in the private sector. He was appointed Largo postmaster in the 1960s. Collins served in that capacity until his retirement in 1987. He died on July 16, 1997.





### **Wilda J. Cook 1953 - 1973**

Wilda Cook was the first woman to hold the position of Supervisor of Elections in Pinellas County. She served for 20 years, holding the record for the longest time in office.

After graduating from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Cook moved to Pinellas County with her aging mother. She promptly began working with the U.S. Veterans Administration, headquartered at the time in the Don CeSar Hotel on St. Petersburg Beach (now St. Pete Beach). An automobile accident put her out of work for five years, during which time she worked on projects for the Women's Republican Club. Friends urged her to run for the Supervisor of Elections position that was open since the resignation of Richard Collins. She won the election in 1952.

The number of registered voters in Pinellas County skyrocketed more than 300% during Cook's administration. Cook increased her staff from six full-time workers to twenty-three. Cook's paramount goals as Supervisor of Elections were to simplify the process of registration, inform new residents of the Florida registration laws and eliminate waiting lines. Reformatations in the state constitution during her tenure expanded her authority to include registration and oversight of elections.

Cook suffered a stroke in 1969 and chose not to run for reelection in 1972. She remained active in the Republican Party until her death in 1978.



### **Jeanne Khoyi Nelson 1973 - 1977**

Jeanne Nelson first entered politics in a bid for a position in the state legislature in 1970. She lost that contest but emerged from a pack of eight contenders to win the Supervisor of Elections position in 1972.

Nelson is credited with expanding the county's registration efforts into all city hall buildings, libraries and several shopping centers. During her term in office, microcomputers were introduced to automate the voter registration process. Poll worker training advanced greatly with the introduction of personal instruction books and films. "I Voted" stickers were first handed out to voters at the polls during this time.

In 1976, rather than running for another term as Supervisor of Elections, she chose to take on Clerk of the Circuit Court incumbent Harold "Pete" Mullendore. She lost that election and subsequently left politics to open a small business and work in real estate.

### **Charles J. Kaniss 1977 - 1989**

Charles Kaniss moved to St. Petersburg as a small child with his family from Henryetta, Oklahoma. He attended St. Petersburg High School and St. Petersburg Junior College. He later earned a philosophy degree from the University of Wisconsin.

After a brief stint seeing frontline action in the U.S. Army and rising to the rank of captain, he helped his father and brother manage the Kaniss Jewelry Store in St. Petersburg. He served on the St. Petersburg City Council and stepped forward to serve as director of sanitation during the 1968 garbage strike. In 1974, Kaniss became St. Petersburg's assistant director of Public Works.

In 1976, Kaniss was elected Supervisor of Elections. He was reelected to this office without opposition in 1980 and 1984. As Supervisor of Elections, Kaniss was popular



and effective. He enjoyed great success with the Outreach Voter Registration Program. Kaniss' most innovative improvement to the voting process was the implementation of the punch card voting system that replaced the cumbersome voter lever machines. He continued improvements by computerizing the many daily activities of the Supervisor of Elections Office.

After three terms in office, Charles Kaniss chose not to run during the 1988 election. Charles Kaniss passed away in April 2006.



### **Dorothy Walker Ruggles 1989 - 2000**

Charles Kaniss' retirement in 1988 cleared the way for another open election, but only one candidate, Kaniss' Deputy Administrator Dorothy "Dot" Ruggles, ran for the office.

Ruggles moved to Pinellas County in 1969. She graduated from Eckerd College in 1983. For several years, she worked in the real estate field before entering politics through her work with the Pinellas County Young Republicans. She met Charles Kaniss during the 1976 Gerald Ford/Robert Dole presidential campaign and was hired by Kaniss to head the Outreach Voter Registration Program. After a brief leave of absence in 1981 to work for Florida Congressman C. W. "Bill" Young in Washington D.C., Ruggles returned to the Supervisor of Elections Office where she became deputy administrator in 1982. Ruggles

was responsible for three separate voter registration offices throughout Pinellas County. She was also able to take voter registration to new heights by implementing the Oracle relational database and incorporating state-of-the-art, online digitized signatures. She brought the elections office into compliance with the National Voter Registration Act of 1993.

In 1997, Ruggles observed and assisted in national elections in Albania, Bosnia and the Republic of Serbia. In 1998, she was selected to meet with village administrators in Beijing, China, regarding elections and governmental procedures.

Loved and respected by her family, staff and the public, Dorothy Ruggles died in office in May 2000. A memorial sculpture was created by Property Appraiser Jim Smith and placed in the Pinellas County Courthouse courtyard.



## **Deborah Clark 2000 – Present**

When Governor Jeb Bush appointed Deborah Clark to fill the unexpired term of Dorothy Ruggles, he did not select a newcomer to elections administration. Clark began her career in the Pinellas Elections Office in 1978 as Charles Kaniss' assistant and served as deputy administrator to Kaniss and Ruggles from 1982 – 2000.

In November 2000, she was elected Supervisor of Elections for what would become one of the most challenging periods in Florida elections history after national scrutiny focused on the state during the extremely close 2000 presidential election. With election reforms soon under way, Clark began by replacing the punch card voting system with touch screen voting machines. These machines were used for the first time countywide in the September 2002 Primary Election.

In 2003, the Pinellas County Supervisor of Elections Office received the Award of Excellence from the Public Relations Society of America for its Voter Education Program introducing the public to the touch screen voting machines and other key election reforms. Clark's vision for expanding voter education also led to the development of a nationally recognized *Vote in Honor of a Vet* program that registers high school seniors and inspires them to vote as a way of honoring the service of veterans.

Other major technological advancements and innovations during her time in office include a new voter registration system, election history and statistics on the Internet, online candidate financial reporting, election night results with precinct mapping on the Internet and a website for Spanish-speaking citizens. Clark ran unopposed for reelection to the office in 2004.

Clark's goal is to educate and register every eligible voter in Pinellas County and to provide the most reliable, accurate and secure elections possible. She recently received her official designation as a Certified Elections and Registration Administrator from The Election Center. Clark is one of only 320 elections officials nationwide to achieve this status.



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here shall be elected by the electors of each county, for terms of four years,  
a sheriff, a tax collector...

## Tax Collector Tenure

<i>Eli Bartow "Uncle Eli" McMullen</i>	1912 - 1929
<i>DeWitt Cornelius Wilkerson</i>	1929 - 1937
<i>Jay B. Starkey</i>	1937 - 1949
<i>J. Walter Lanier</i>	1949
<i>Joseph W. Fleece</i>	1949 - 1951
<i>Lester W. Lambert</i>	1951 - 1961
<i>O. Sanford Jasper</i>	1961 - 1993
<i>W. Fred Petty</i>	1993 - 2001
<i>Diane G. Nelson</i>	2001 - Present





# Overview

A common misconception is that the office of the Tax Collector decides how much to collect in taxes. In fact, taxation of property within the county is a two-step process. First, the Property Appraiser puts a value on property parcels within Pinellas County, then the taxing authorities determine the millage. The tax money collected by the Tax Collector goes to the taxing authorities, while the Tax Collector's Office charges processing fees to maintain its office. Any excess fees are distributed back to the county.

The primary duty of the Tax Collector is to collect, account for and distribute current and delinquent real property ad valorem taxes and tangible personal taxes within the confines of Pinellas County for county government, municipalities, the school board, fire districts and all other special local and regional taxing districts. The Florida Statutes authorize county Tax Collectors to collect delinquent taxes by the sale of tax certificates and later processing of tax deed applications for the sale of the real property.

In addition, the office of the Tax Collector issues state motor vehicle tags, processes motor vehicle titles and collects sales tax on the transfer of motor vehicle titles as a statutory agent of the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

The Tax Collector's Office is also in charge of registering and processing title applications for vessels, selling hunting and fishing licenses, and collecting tourist development taxes.



### **Eli Bartow "Uncle Eli" McMullen 1912 - 1929**

Son of Largo pioneer Daniel McMullen, Eli McMullen came to Pinellas County with his family when he was only three years old. He worked with the Farmers' Alliance Exchange store in Largo from 1889 to 1903, when he opened a mercantile business in Largo. He then ventured into real estate and operated in Largo most of his life. He was appointed Tax Collector for Pinellas County in 1912.

In 1923, McMullen's wife died. To honor her memory, the Pinellas County Courthouse was closed for a day. The Tax Collector's Office was closed for two days.

### **DeWitt Cornelius Wilkerson 1929 - 1937**

Prior to being elected as Pinellas County Tax Collector, DeWitt Wilkerson had been Tax Collector for the city of St. Petersburg for seven years. Wilkerson's background included working for the Central Savings Bank of Detroit, operating a sawmill and general store, and maintaining an association with a St. Petersburg investment firm. Wilkerson worked for the city of St. Petersburg's Department of Municipal Railways from 1918 to 1925. He was elected to the St. Petersburg City Commission in 1927 and served several years in the dual capacity of city tax collector and member of the Finance Department.

Wilkerson was a devoted Republican and is credited with being a leading figure in organizing the Republican Party in Pinellas County. He remained an active party member throughout his life.





### **Jay B. Starkey 1937 - 1949**

Jay Starkey is remembered as an honest man with ability. He maintained the assertion that not a penny of taxpayers' funds went toward his business expenses. He even financed his own convention and travel expenses.

Even at age 11, Jay Starkey was an enterprising businessman/rancher. He owned his own cow and sold warm milk for ten cents a quart. After he graduated from St. Petersburg High School in 1914, he kept four cows in a pasture near present-day Tyrone Square Mall. Starkey served in the U.S. Army during World War I and later worked for the U.S. Postal Service.

Starkey got involved in local politics when he was asked to make a speech for county Tax Collector candidate Bert McMullen in 1932. In 1936, Starkey decided to run for the office himself and won. Starkey's heart was always at home in the Florida outdoors, however, and he decided to return to ranching full-time in 1948. Throughout his career, Starkey amassed significant land holdings. In 1975, he donated 250 acres of his 16,000-acre Anclote River Ranch to the Southwest Florida Water Management District. He also sold 1,759 acres to the District at below market value to be used as a well field site and for preservation purposes. The land is now designated as the Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park.



### **J. Walter Lanier 1949**

J. Walter Lanier had served as deputy Tax Collector for 12 years under Jay B. Starkey. He was elected to the office in the 1948 election. Tragically, on November 12, 1949, Lanier suffered a fatal heart attack while working in his yard at home.

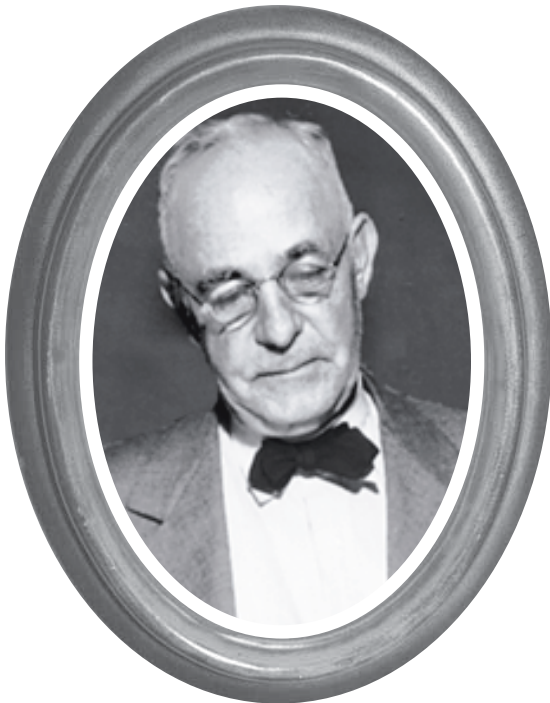


### **Joseph W. Fleece 1949 - 1951**

Following the untimely death of J. Walter Lanier, Governor Fuller Warren appointed Joseph Fleece to the office of Pinellas County Tax Collector on November 23, 1949.

Fleece grew up in Memphis, Tennessee. He moved to Pinellas County in 1924 and took a position as sales manager with Roberts Bize Motor Company. Seven years later, Fleece and his partner Ed Rieck of Pittsburgh founded Rieck and Fleece, Inc., a lumber and building supplies firm.

In 1950, Fleece asked the voters to allow him to continue to serve out Lanier's unexpired term of office. He was defeated, losing the Democratic primary election to Lester W. Lambert by nearly 7,000 votes.



### **Lester W. Lambert 1951 - 1961**

Lester Lambert was the popular choice to fill the remainder of J. Walter Lanier's unexpired term. Lambert had worked in the Tax Collector's Office for eight years under D. C. Wilkerson and for another twelve years under Jay B. Starkey. He also worked with J. Walter Lanier until Lanier's untimely death.

Given his experience, Lambert's defeat of Joseph Fleece in the 1950 election was no surprise. Lambert served as Pinellas County Tax Collector for the next ten years.



## **O. Sanford Jasper**

**1961 - 1993**

Born in Chicago of Norwegian parents, Olav Sanford Jasper worked in banking in Chicago as he took classes at the American Institute of Banking. Afterwards, he pursued his formal education at Northwestern University, where he studied accounting, and at John Marshall Law School, where he studied real estate law.

Jasper moved to St. Petersburg in 1943. At age 54, he decided to get married. The wedding date was September 26, 1960. However, the happy couple postponed their honeymoon, as Jasper was right in the middle of his first election bid for public office. Kitty Jasper subsequently became Jasper's campaign manager and ran his election campaigns for the next 32 years.

Perhaps because of his wife's illness, Jasper did not intend to seek re-election in 1992. Deputy Tax Collector W. Fred Petty and four other candidates tossed their hats into the ring. In a dramatic change of heart, Jasper marched into the Supervisor of Elections Office just five minutes before the filing deadline to put his name on the ballot. Of the six candidates running in the first Republican primary, Jasper and Petty finished with Jasper leading. In the runoff primary, however, Jasper lost to Petty by 9,000 votes.

Ironically, Jasper's wife died on January 1, 1993, just as his career as Pinellas County Tax Collector came to an end.

Jasper always felt it was an honor to serve the public and always served with dignity and honesty.

After Jasper's death, the Pinellas Board of County Commissioners ordered a commemorative plaque near the Tax Collector's entrance of the South County Service Center, which reads: Dedicated to O. Sanford Jasper, Tax Collector, in recognition of over 32 years of dedicated and outstanding service to the people of Pinellas County - January 1999.



## **W. Fred Petty 1993 - 2001**

W. Fred Petty took office as Tax Collector in 1993 after defeating long-time incumbent, O. Sanford Jasper. In June 1995, W. Fred Petty brought the 200 employees of the Tax Collector's Office into the Pinellas County Unified Personnel System. The system offered more security for the employees and allowed them to address complaints with a formal grievance procedure.

In 1996, a Pinellas citizens' initiative passed to impose eight-year term limits on county elected officials. Petty engaged legal counsel with his own funds in an attempt to overturn the referendum. He was joined by the four other constitutional officers and county commissioners at the start. By

the time the Florida Supreme Court heard the case in 2001, only the Clerk and the Sheriff had carried on the appeal with Petty. The withdrawn county commissioners gave assistance by permitting staff counsel from the county legal department to continue to argue the case. On May 23, 2002, the Florida Supreme Court ruled in favor of the constitutional officers' appeal and declared the term limits invalid.

Also in 1996, W. Fred Petty won reelection decisively over two challengers. In July of 1998, he was elected President of Florida Tax Collectors, Inc. In 1999, Petty reversed his pledge not to seek reelection to a third term in a pattern that resembled the change of mind of his predecessor, O. Sanford Jasper. The reason Petty gave for his change of mind was the change in his personal circumstances due to the failing health of his wife, who succumbed after a long illness. On September 5, 2000, Petty was outpolled by his challenger, Diane Nelson who, like him, was a top official in the Tax Collector's Office before running for office.



## **Diane G. Nelson 2001 – Present**

Diane Gonzalez Nelson was born in Clarksburg, West Virginia, one of five children to parents, Leo and Minnie Gonzalez, who taught her the importance of family values. When she was 10, the Gonzalez family moved to Tarpon Springs, Florida, where she attended Tarpon Springs Elementary School and graduated from Tarpon Springs High School.

In 1969, Nelson began her career with the Pinellas County Tax Collector's Office as a part-time clerk in a local tag office. A number of progressively more responsible promotions came her way. By 1994, she reported directly to the Tax Collector as director of all tag/title operations countywide, overseeing all five branch offices. In the spring of 2000, with 30-plus years of experience, Nelson announced she would seek the top job of Tax Collector and retired to comply with the county's resign-to-run rule.

Nelson campaigned on better customer service. She planned to replace a much-criticized automated phone answering system and promised to "answer phones with real people." She also emphasized improved budgeting and pledged to make better use of technology. Nelson challenged the incumbent, W. Fred Petty, and made history with her election on September 5, 2000, by becoming the county's first career-service employee and first woman to become Tax Collector.

In her first term, Nelson built an e-Service Center to answer phones with real people and received statewide awards for her achievements in technology services and budgeting. Nelson took on the duties of driver license issuance when the state government began to shut down its locations. She embraced modern business practices, instituted strategic planning methods to chart the future course of the office and began a long-term project to develop a business solution for true one-stop, one-payment service that can adapt to emerging customer technologies.

Nelson has chaired and still serves on the county Information Technology Board and the Board of Directors of the Pinellas Federal Credit Union. Keeping a busy schedule in civic activities, she is the founder of an arts scholarship fund for students at St. Petersburg College.

In 2004, Nelson was reelected Tax Collector without opposition.

# Index and Bibliography





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*any individuals worked to make this book possible...*



*Pinellas County Board of Trade  
Pinellas Park, Florida  
January 4, 1915*



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## Officers From the 1999 First Edition Cover

(as pictured left to right on the back cover)

**Bernie McCabe**

State Attorney

**Everett S. Rice**

Sheriff

**Karleen F. De Blaker**

Clerk of the Circuit Court

**W. Fred Petty**

Tax Collector

**Jim Smith**

Property Appraiser

**Dorothy W. Ruggles**

Supervisor of Elections

**Robert Dillinger**

Public Defender

The first edition of this informational booklet was suggested to fellow officers by Supervisor of Elections Dorothy Walker Ruggles as a way to emphasize the importance of duties performed by these separately elected county officials for the citizens of Pinellas County.

*A Brief History*

The Constitutional Officers of Pinellas County:

