



# CANAL GATOR TALES

January 2022



## Celebrating 10 Years!!

We are excited that 2022 is the 10-year anniversary of the Panama Canal Museum Collection (PCMC) at UF. Although it doesn't seem possible that a decade has passed so quickly, it was in 2012 that the Panama Canal Museum closed its doors and transferred its incredible collection of treasures to UF. We are celebrating this anniversary throughout 2022 at events including the Spring Luncheon in Gainesville and the Panama Canal Society's Annual Reunion in Orlando.

Of course, the history of the collection stretches back to 1998 with the founding of the Panama Canal Museum. All of the good work we have been able to achieve at UF over the past ten years is an extension of the great work accomplished by the Panama Canal Museum in its fourteen years of existence. The collection that was transferred to UF included over 12,000 objects consisting of millions of pages and items, so it cannot be overstated that the Museum did a remarkable job developing a premiere historical collection. Likewise, the Museum successfully established educational and outreach activities, built relationships with other institutions and museums, and developed an outstanding network of supporters.

There have been more than a few milestones and significant achievements in the past decade. First and foremost, UF received a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services in 2012-2015 to manage the merger and to celebrate the 2014 Centennial of the Canal's opening. This prestigious grant ensured a fairly smooth transition as the collection went from community museum to large research university. The Centennial celebration activities included a conference held in conjunction with the UF Center for Latin American Studies, a special concert, numerous exhibits in Gainesville and other cities, and a gala dinner featuring an actor portraying Teddy Roosevelt. The grant project also included considerable digitization of photos and publications, particularly focusing on school yearbooks, reports, and newspapers like the *Panama American*.

After the grant ended in 2015, management of the PCMC was transferred to the Department of Special & Area Studies Collections in the Smathers Libraries and efforts focused on organizing the collection, ongoing digitization, and acquisition of new materials. The next major milestone was the 2017 opening of the Albert H. Nahmad Panama Canal Gallery located in the Smathers Library Building on the UF campus. Dedicated to members of the Balboa High School Class of 1958, the Gallery features annual exhibits on the history of the Canal with an emphasis on the personal stories of people who worked on the Canal and lived in the Canal Zone. Exhibitions premiere annually in March or April at the joint Panama Canal Society and PCMC Friends Spring Luncheon.

In recent years, PCMC curators have prioritized the collecting of oral history interviews, which are invaluable because they capture stories, memories, and perspectives that are often not recorded in publications or other sources. We currently have over 140 interviews available in our digital collection, with dozens more in the queue for transcription and editing. At the same time, we also continue to collect all types of physical materials - everything from letters and photos to maps and artifacts. In fact, the quantity of our acquisitions has increased significantly in the past two years, even in the midst of the COVID pandemic.

**We are celebrating the PCMC's ten-year anniversary throughout 2022, beginning with the Spring Luncheon on March 26 on the UF campus.** Attendees will be able to view recent important donations including multiple paintings and drawings by artist Al Sprague and postcards collected and digitized by Brad Wilde (see below for more information about this donation). Attendees also will be able to learn more about the oral history project and interact with the new exhibition in the Gallery focusing on the history of medicine and health care. If you are interested in attending the luncheon, please refer to the registration form for PCS members available in the *Canal Record*.

The celebration of the anniversary will continue at the Panama Canal Society's Reunion in Orlando in July. The PCMC exhibit at the reunion will highlight important acquisitions and milestones from the decade, and UF personnel and the Friends of the PCMC will hold a brief ceremony to observe the anniversary.

We hope that you will join us in celebrating this anniversary throughout 2022. The PCMC is successful because of the broad community of people who are dedicated to preserving and sharing information about the American era of the Panama Canal. We thank you for your support over the past ten years, and we look forward to working with you for many years to come.



## **8-Week Challenge Update**

As we reported in the Fall, our 8-Week Challenge to raise funds for our Oral History program was a terrific success and we more than doubled our goal of raising \$8,000 in eight weeks between September and November. We had hoped to match the \$8,500 raised by the Silent Auction held by the Friends of the PCMC at the Panama Canal Society Reunion in July, and we were delighted to receive \$17,525 from our generous donors during the 8-week challenge period. On top of that, we also received an additional \$2,900 between November 12 and December 31, and we have one outstanding pledge of \$1,000 for the campaign. After combining these gifts with the funds raised by the Silent Auction, the total amount raised between September and December 2021 was \$29,925.

Thanks so much for your incredible support! These donations help us sustain our Oral History program so that we can continue to preserve and share stories of life in the Canal

Zone and Panama. We're well on our way to achieving our strategic goal to raise \$250,000 for the Oral History program by the end of 2022.

If you are interested in supporting our Oral History program, visit [pcmc.uflib.ufl.edu/oralhistory](http://pcmc.uflib.ufl.edu/oralhistory) for more information. We also encourage you to give a gift in honor or memory of a family member, friend, classmate, colleague, or group because all funds received for [memorial and honor gifts](#) will be used to support oral histories. For more information contact the Development Office at (352) 273-2505 or [lib-development@ad.ufl.edu](mailto:lib-development@ad.ufl.edu).



## Brad Wilde Postcard Collection

We are thrilled to announce that the PCMC has acquired more than 15,000 digitized postcards from the extensive collection of donor Brad Wilde. This incredible donation will have a significant impact on scholarship and teaching for years to come because of the sheer quantity of the postcards and the breadth and depth of their photographic documentation of the Canal Zone and Panama.

While we regularly collect donations of digital materials for the PCMC, it goes without saying that the extremely large number of digital images makes this an extraordinary donation. The digital collection includes thousands of cards produced by prolific publishers such as I.L. Maduro, Jr., Underwood & Underwood, C.L. Chester, Foto Flatau, Vibert & Dixon, and Albert Lindo, as well as dozens of other publishers large and small. In addition to postcards produced by publishers using lithograph- or offset-printing processes, the collection includes over 6,000 real photo postcards, which are photographic images printed on postcard stock. These real photo postcards are invaluable because many of the images were taken by amateur photographers and include unique images of people, families, places, and events not found in the postcards printed and sold by the publishers.

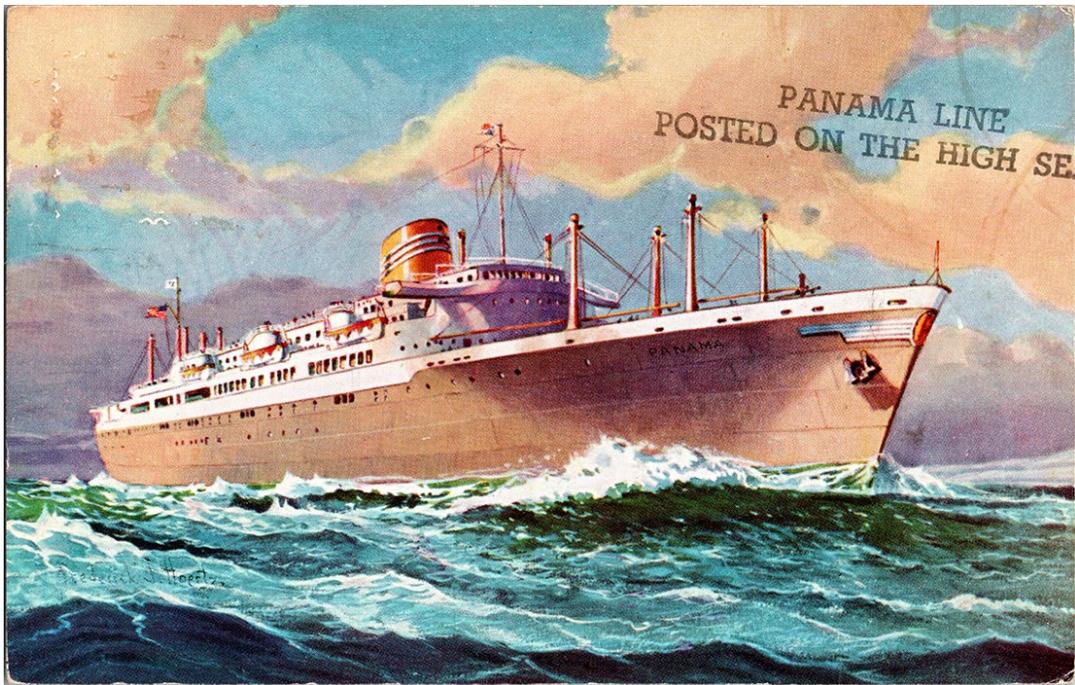
Several postcards were used and include correspondence written by a variety of people including Canal employees and their family members, American and foreign tourists, service men and women, and others. This is a treasure trove for researchers seeking firsthand perspectives (albeit brief ones) of the Canal and Panama. For example, many postcards from the 1904-1914 era of Canal construction include correspondence commenting on the progress of the construction, health and sanitation conditions, and impressions of the Canal Zone during its early years.

We have already spent a great deal of time organizing and describing the postcards so that they will be more easily discovered and used by researchers, and we plan to release the collection in multiple batches as work progresses. Because of copyright restrictions, not all of the digitized postcards will be published online. However, they still will be available to students, scholars, and other researchers, and of course they will be available for use in exhibits and in classes.

A selection of postcards relating to health care and medical history will be displayed using the MagicBox exhibit case as part of the 2022-2023 exhibition in the Panama Canal Gallery. The exhibition will open to the public at the Spring Luncheon on March 26 in the Smathers Library Building on the UF campus, and we hope you will join us to interact with these postcards and celebrate this wonderful donation.



Example of a real photo postcard with the handwritten caption  
"Submarine Dive, July 4th, 1914."



Example o Panama Line postcard circa 1953.

**SAVE THESE DATES**

February 26, 2022

Panama Canal Society Meeting and Space Coast Picnic at the Kelly Park East, Merritt Island, 11:00 am - 4:00 pm. Please bring to Mickey Walker Fitzgerald any items you would like to donate to the 2022 silent auction to support the PCMC.

**March 26, 2022**

Panama Canal Society/Friends of the PCMC Spring Luncheon and opening of the new exhibition on health care in the Nahmad Panama Canal Gallery, Smathers Library, Gainesville.

**July 6-10, 2022**

Exhibit, Auction and Cultural Seminar at the Panama Canal Society Reunion at the Shingle Creek Resort, Orlando, FL. It's never too early to start identifying items that you would like to donate to the auction! Please contact Mickey Walker Fitzgerald ([mickeyftz@aol.com](mailto:mickeyftz@aol.com)), Carole Miller ([czmiller345@gmail.com](mailto:czmiller345@gmail.com)), or Kathy Egolf ([Pankee@aol.com](mailto:Pankee@aol.com)) if you have items to donate or if you want to volunteer to help out.