

## ◆ Historical Points of Interest

### ◆ 1 Booker Creek

The earliest settlements in the EDGE were by the Tocobaga Indians along Booker Creek. Their tribes flourished from 1000-1500 A.D., occupying the entire peninsula and living in harmony with the waterways. In the 1500s, however, Spanish explorers brought them violence and disease, and by 1709, no Tocobaga remained. Artifacts from their rich and complex culture have been recovered and are on display in many local museums.

### ◆ 2 Railway

The 1880s brought the next phase of settlement when Russian émigré Peter Demens expanded his Orange Belt Railway from central Florida to Tampa Bay. The SE corner of the EDGE was the terminus, around which the first town center grew. From 30 residents in 1888, to 273 residents in the first census in 1890, most were clustered at that corner.

### ◆ 3 Cooper's Quarters

In the 1880s, freed slaves Louis Bell Jr. and the John & Anna Donaldson family comprised the entire African American community here. To build the railway, many more arrived. Leon Cooper, a white businessman, put up shacks south of the railroad – “Cooper’s Quarters” – for them. In 1914, the municipal gas plant was built there, the neighborhood becoming the Gas Plant District. As the town grew, Jim Crow laws influenced city planning and restricted blacks to certain areas, like the Quarters. Despite this, its residents united to make their community safe and vibrant. In 1986, the neighborhood was leveled to build the now-Tropicana baseball stadium.

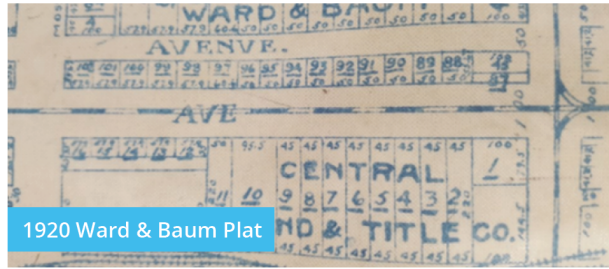


1180 Central, 1935

Historical reference citations available at: [edgedistrict.org/edge-history](http://edgedistrict.org/edge-history)



EDGE District, 1935



1920 Ward & Baum Plat

## Historical Points cont.

### ◆ 4 Baum Avenue

Jacob Baum arrived in 1876, buying large tracts of land in the SE corner of the EDGE for citrus groves. In 1888, another pioneer, E.R. Ward, opened the town’s first general store at that corner and partnered with Baum to buy 5 acres nearby – the “Ward & Baum Plat” – selling it in small 50-foot lots for \$20-\$60. The plat’s street, Baum Avenue, was the first west of 9th, long before Central. As a result of the duo’s enterprising, blue-collar efforts, the town grew fastest in the EDGE, giving them control over commerce, land management, and setting the tone for future city development.

### ◆ 5 900 Block

The commercial gateway to the EDGE was the Western Hotel built in 1918 at 9th & Central. Renamed the St. Petersburg Hotel in 1920, it was also home to a wide range of businesses, including groceries, insurance companies, lenders, doctors, clothing and shoe stores, a probation & parole office, and the Tampa Bay Grain Co. Three more hotels would be built in the EDGE: the Gregory (936 1st Ave. N.) built in 1924, the Wilmer (1110 Central) built in 1926, and the Almay (1027 Central) built in 1940. Notably, the Wilmer was the first Hilton acquisition in the area, built for Conrad’s brother August. It later became the Carlton Hotel.

### ◆ 6 Industry Along the Railway

As the railway expanded into the area in the late 1880s, the surrounding vast forests enticed George King to open a sawmill and others to set up lumberyards near the tracks. Livestock barns were also built nearby. These industries helped house and feed the booming town’s population in the 1900s, and turn St. Petersburg into a tourist destination. Pivotal buildings still remain, like 1246 Central, its rear angled to meet the railway and its 4th floor used as a chicken roost, and 1000B Central, whose elevated rear bay was the loading dock for a wholesale grocery warehouse.

### ◆ 7 Automotive

Many of the buildings in the EDGE resulted from the 1920s boom and have roots in the auto industry. Masonry vernacular was the most popular style, with large bays to showcase new cars, tires, repairs, vulcanizing, and paint shops. The Great Depression halted the industry, but the post-war surge revived it. Businesses like St. Petersburg Tire Service Co. (901-911 Central), Crump Used Motor Cars (1440 Central), Fred’s Auto Repair (1117 Central), Miller Tires (1133 Baum), and Dick Winning Auto Leasing (1144 Central) dotted the District.

### ◆ 8 Furniture

Post-Depression, plentiful lumber and vacant buildings in the EDGE gave furniture manufacturers a strong foothold, and they revived the economy. W.H. Lester Furniture, Mather Brothers Furniture (1246 Central), and Green Bench Furniture and Repair (942 Central) were among them. Today, 1246 Central houses Furnish Me Vintage, the country’s largest mid-century modern furniture store.

### ◆ 9 Art & Culture

Entertainment, art, and culture have long been facets of the EDGE. A grain house was converted to the Alcazar Theatre (914 Central) in the mid-1920s, and it continued to thrive as the Roxy, and then the Center until the 1970s. Other businesses like Miss Lennox Dance Studio added flair, and intricate architectural detailing also exuded artistry (e.g., 1126-28 Central, 1180 Central, 1445 Central). Today, the EDGE is filled with murals, live music venues, and art-focused businesses.

### ◆ 10 Public Services

Municipal Services have been a part of the EDGE since 1918, primarily on the northwest end where electrical distribution started. The city’s second power plant was built there in 1925, the city’s first fire station (25 15th St. N.), and the city’s original police station (1300 1st Ave. N.). Today, the new police complex is being constructed across the street.

### ◆ 11 Breweries & Eateries

The first brewery in the EDGE was Jacksonville Brewing Co. in 1933 at 959 Central. Distributing throughout the South, its flagship product, Jax Beer, was a German-style pilsner. Today, the EDGE is home to one of the premier brewers in the country, Green Bench Brewing Co. (1133 Baum), and nearly two dozen other purveyors of craft beer.

Now home to more than 15 eateries, the District’s first known one was the Ernest A. Smith Restaurant (1100 Central) in the 1930s. Marking an important era when St. Pete grew from frontier town to tourist and retirement destination, colorful local cafeterias became popular with friendly service and inexpensive meals. Among the most notable was the Belmark (1001 1st Ave. N.), whose owner Phil Kinsman, a former Metropolitan Opera singer, would sing to the customers.