

PINE ISLAND . . . FLORIDA'S "REDISCOVERED" ISLAND

By Tedd Lincoln
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OF HISTORY AND LEGENDS

In the year 1513, famous Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon, finding no suitable anchorage for his 3-ship flotilla on the southeastern coast of Florida, proceeded to sail around the tip of the state and then north up the Gulf coast.

On May 23rd, he discovered the "islands that jutted out into the sea."

Finding an opening between Cayo Costa and Gasparilla Islands, he sailed into Charlotte Harbor, anchoring eventually in a protected sound off an 18 mile-long island covered with tropical foliage. The sound was Pine Island Sound and the tropical



island, of course, Pine Island. In a return trip to the area in 1521, de Leon was fatally wounded by an arrow in a fight with native Calusa Indians, dying a few days later in Hispaniola.

Whether the subject is the Calusa Indians and their mysterious ceremonial shell mounds, Ponce de

Leon and the Spanish explorers, or the notorious coastal pirates of a later century, such as Jose Gaspar (Gasparilla), the history and folk legends of Pine Island make for fascinating reading.

Largely forgotten during the first half of this century (electricity did not come to the island until 1941), Pine Island, with all its enchanting natural beauty, is continuing to be "rediscovered" by thousands of people looking for a place to live that still retains the authentic charm and natural splendor of "Old Florida."

Still comprised primarily of unspoiled natural terrain, featuring lush, tropical and subtropical foliage, stands of Lob-lolly pines, and hundreds of inlets, creeks, bays and sounds, all teaming with fish and wildlife...Pine Island today is one of the last areas on the Gulf coast that pretty much looks the same as it did a hundred years ago.

The island's current population of approximately 9,500 year-round residents is for the most part congregated in four basic communities:

MATLACHA: Pronounced Mat-la-shay, this sleepy fishing village still reflects the charm of days-gone-by, with bait shops, seafood signs, fishing

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