

## Florida Firsts

The Famous, Infamous, and Quirky of the Sunshine State

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### From the Introduction

Florida was the first place in the nation to be home to European settlers and the first to be given a permanent name. Through the centuries it has been home to many historic firsts...

But while Florida is the oldest state in history, it is the newest in development. For three centuries it remained largely a vast, uncharted wilderness. Heat, hurricanes, and deadly yellow fever epidemics all served to discourage newcomers.

It wasn't until the real estate boom of the 1920s that masses of people from other parts of the country began to look to Florida as a new Eden and started pouring into the state in record numbers, both as tourists and as permanent residents. The new influx was helped along by air conditioning, the invention of an Apalachicola physician. And when another physician, Dr. John Wall of Tampa, discovered the cause of yellow fever, it was the first step in eradicating an age-old menace.

You'll read about them here.

### ***HEALTH MAINTENANCE ORGANIZATION***

In 1888, Don Enrique Pendas, a Spanish tobacco worker in Ybor City, saw a need for health insurance in the newly established cigar industry. On June



18 of that year, he organized El Porvenir, the country's first health maintenance organization.

In return for small weekly dues, the Spanish, Italian and Cuban workers received medicine as well as hospitalization and medical services. The system worked well, and soon each nationality established its own group. El Porvenir was followed in 1891 by El Centro Espanol, in 1894 by L'Unione Italiana, and in 1902 by El Circulo Cubano and El Centro Asturiano.

There was no sense of competition among the groups, and they cooperated nicely. Tuberculosis and yellow fever were constant threats, and the organizations worked together to build clinics and two hospitals and to hire trained medical personnel. These early HMOs helped the proud group of immigrants remain independent. A marker near an early cigar factory in Ybor City states that the cigar workers "have never been a burden on society, and through the years have saved tax-payers millions of dollars."

Unfortunately, envious Tampa physicians were opposed to the idea of the cigar workers and their families getting the best medical care at very low cost. The county medical society barred the Ybor City physicians and nurses from practicing in the city's hospitals. Eventually the HMOs bowed to the more powerful group and were forced to disband.

## ***WOMAN TO BREAK SOUND BARRIER***

She was born around 1906 in the little Florida sawmill town of Muskogee and learned to read by figuring out the letters on the railroad boxcars that went by. She had no shoes until she was eight years old, and home was usually a "shack on stilts." It seemed unlikely that Jacqueline Cochran would one day be known as one of the world's most famous women fliers and test pilots and head of the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) in World War II. On May 18, 1953, while piloting an F-86 Sabre at 625.5 miles per hour, she became the first woman to break the sound barrier.

Cochran was introduced to flying in 1932 by millionaire Floyd Odlum, who later became her husband. She soloed three days after her first lesson and earned her pilot's license in three weeks. One of her early feats led to mandatory pressurized cabins and oxygen masks: she flew a biplane to 33,000 feet without heat, pressure, or an oxygen mask and almost met her death, which could easily have come by freezing or by fainting from lack of oxygen and crashing. In 1971, she became the first woman to be enshrined in the National Aviation Hall of Fame in Dayton, Ohio. She died in 1980.