

CHAPTER 13

Daytona Beach

In 1804 the Spanish crown gave Samuel Williams 3,000 acres on the Halifax River. But Seminole Indians and runaway slaves lived there too. By 1835 the clash of cultures lit the land in flames. When peace returned the sugar plantation at New Smyrna had been burned and Seminole villages destroyed. There was no art, only the natural beauty of the area, and the wide, flat, open beaches.

In 1870 Mathias Day Jr., an Ohio businessman, took a boat trip down the east coast of Florida to a spot just south of the burned sugar mill. Here was a perfect site for a town. For \$8,000 Day bought two thousand acres of the Williams grant. Unfortunately, he couldn't make his development pay and eventually lost his investment. The first settlers honored him by naming the area Daytona, "Day's little town." Slowly Daytona began to grow, and the neighboring towns of Daytona Beach and Seabreeze were settled.

In New York City pioneering photographer Alfred Stieglitz spent the years from 1890 to 1917 trying to convince the world that photography could be an important form of artistic expression. He managed the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secessionists on Fifth Avenue. It was a period of change, with Stieglitz and his friend Edward Steichen, helping to bring modernism to America; promoting photography as art. It was men like Stieglitz who were the first artists in Daytona.



**William Henry Jackson, Tomoko River Near Ormond Beach.
Mounted albumen print, 16 by 20 inches.**

When William Henry Jackson, famous for his photographs of the American West, visited Florida in 1887, he came to Daytona. He returned in 1889, 1900, and 1903, photographing the area for the Detroit Photographic Company. Jackson's *Sunrise on the Ocklawaha*, *In the Ormond Hammock*, and *Florida, Tomoka River* were three of more than eighty images used on postcards and by northern railroads to illustrate life in Florida.¹

Photographer Edward G. Harris and his wife, Thusnelda, arrived in Daytona in 1883; staying until 1906, when they moved to Colorado. The Harrises returned in 1919 and remained in Daytona for the rest of their lives. Harris's photography in Daytona artfully portrayed the early residents of the city. Thusnelda Harris enjoyed painting and left many pictures of the area when she died in 1932.²



**Edward G. Harris, his wife Thusnelda, and daughter Cecilia.
Cabinet card 4 by 6 ½ inches.**



Thusnelda Harris, watercolor, 4 ¼ by 7 ¼ inches

J. Ralph Wilcox came to Daytona from Elmira, New York, in 1905, and purchased land for a home in the Goodall area. In the winter season, Wilcox, a skilled artist, leased space in the Clark Building on Beach Street and opened an art store. He anchored a houseboat, the *Manatee*, at a dock opposite the Clark Building, used it as a studio, and lived on it with Mrs. Wilcox. Wilcox spent years exploring the backwaters of Florida and painting fine watercolors of the Florida wilderness. Assisted by his photographer friends Charles H. Willson and W. C. Greene, he sold hand-painted photographs that are highly sought after today.³

Henry Kaiser opened a photography studio in Daytona in 1902, selling it in 1908, to Richard Habersham LeSesne. LeSesne became the official photographer for the new car races out on the beach. He operated his studio for more than forty years: becoming well known for his hand-painted pictorial views of Florida.

In a sense the first “art” in Daytona was the automobile. In the winter of 1903 two pioneering giants of the new born automobile industry brought cars of their own design to the beach to vie with each other for new speed records. Alexander Winton brought his “Bullett.” Ransom E. Olds, who later became a winter resident, brought one of his first Oldsmobiles. They stayed at the Ormond Beach Hotel and “tracked the sand speedway from one end to the other with the wheels of their chugging, stinking vehicles.”⁴



Ralph Wilcox. Oil on canvas mounted on board, 21 by 48 inches.

More traditional art came to Daytona in 1922, during the Florida land boom,

when Don J. Emery arrived in the city. Emery grew up in Vermont and studied art at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, then worked as art director for a New York publishing company. During World War I he served in France as a private in the 27th Infantry Division and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.⁵



Ralph Wilcox. Oil on canvas mounted on board, 24 by 48 inches.

Emery came to Daytona Beach as a member of the advertising staff of the *Daytona Daily News* and the *Daytona Beach Journal*. He listed in the local directory as an advertising counselor. During the boom years of the early 1920's art played an important role in promoting Florida real estate. Some of Emery's first work appeared in the *Journal* in 1926, as *A Series of Portraits Illustrative of Florida's Most Unique Project: Daytona Highlands, Florida's Suburb of Hills and Lakes*.⁶ Emery worked for local businesses, the Daytona Beach Chamber of Commerce, and illustrated tourist brochures for the City of Daytona Beach. Two years after his arrival Don J. Emery's son, Don Woodruff Emery was born.

In 1926 Daytona, Daytona Beach, and Seabreeze were united under the name, Daytona Beach. Emery opened the first school of art in the merged town at 128 Broadway. His Daytona Beach Art School was affiliated with the Ringling School of Art in Sarasota. A year later a group of young amateur artists, students of Don J. Emery, began meeting for sketching trips or "picnics" around Daytona Beach. Members of the group included Isabelle Van Dyke, Mrs. E. L. King, Catherine Eastman, Clarke H. Garnsey, and his sister, Sibyl. Over the next few years the sketching group began to grow.⁷

Emery was friendly with John A. Rogers, a local architect who came to Daytona from Chicago in 1916. Rogers, an etcher and painter, was the son of one of the founders of the Art Institute of Chicago. He designed and built the Peninsula Club building and many homes in Daytona. Emery and Rogers talked about the increasing number of Halifax area artists and the need to exhibit their work. Anxious to find exhibition space they spoke to Orlando businessman N. P. Yowell.



Don J. Emery. Oil on board, 28 by 32 inches.

Yowell-Drew Company was a large department store chain in Central Florida, with a Daytona branch on the corner of Magnolia and Beach Streets. For one week beginning February 9, 1932, Yowell-Drew would sponsor the first art salon in the city.⁸

The term “vernissage,” or varnishing, for the opening night of an exhibition comes from French artists’ habit of putting finishing brushstrokes on their paintings at the last minute, even on their way to an exhibit, so the paint was not dry when the pictures were hung. On February 8, 1932, the artists of Daytona Beach held an impromptu varnishing day of their own. One of the exhibiting artists was E. G. Harris’s wife, Thusnelda. The *Daytona Beach News-Journal* described the scene:

Bringing their paintings with them the artists came early; stayed late. There was eager discussion of the exhibits as one by one they were deposited on the third floor of the store. By noon it became evident that space would be at a premium. . . . Still un-hung this morning the pictures made a colorful corner, where they stood. Landscape and portrait and still life, pencil sketch, watercolor and etching were there from brush and pencil of the local art colony. There were Florida scenes with color blazing through the mediums of oil, watercolor and pastel . . .⁹

The next day the *Evening News* noted the exhibit:

All roads led today . . . to the first annual art salon, where artists of the city held a joint exhibit at the invitation of Yowell-Drew company. Scores had taken advantage, by early afternoon, of the invitation of the artists and their host, to visit the third floor show room, where more than 100 paintings, etchings, drawings, and other work of local artists had been put on display.

Transformed magically overnight . . . from a chaotic group of work into an orderly array, the pictures were being examined today by artists and friends. And as a result of the interest shown by local craftsmen, John A. Rogers, architect and painter, has called a meeting for tomorrow afternoon . . . at Boy Scout headquarters opposite the Yacht club on Beach Street, when working artists, both professional and amateur, will organize into an art association. They will make preparations to go into the Florida Federation of Arts.¹⁰

Among the interesting pictures hung were a Florida hammock scene by Don Emery; a group of pastels by Miss D. R. Morton of New Smyrna; several portraits in oil by Helen Van Valzah; *Way Down Deep in Florida* by A. P. Gardiner; *Cypress Swamp*, by Beth Eastman; etchings by John A. Rogers; and several dune scenes done in brilliant sun by Ralph L. McKelvey.¹¹

Ralph McKelvey moved to Daytona Beach in 1931. McKelvey was representing Lloyd's of London on Wall Street when the Great Depression forced him to leave both the insurance industry and New York. "After wasting thirty years in business," he would spend the rest of his life in art and have a major influence on art development in Florida.¹²

The Daytona Beach Art League (DBAL) was chartered on May 28, 1932, with John Rogers as its first president.

When the Orlando Art Association and the Rollins College Studio Art Club put on a sidewalk art fair in 1933, Daytona artists liked the idea, and plans were made for the first Artists' Mart to be held in Daytona Beach. Artists from DeLand and New Smyrna were invited to bring paintings. Posters were prepared by students at Don Emery's art school and put up about town to point the way to the art mart at Castle Burgoyne. The idea was to give artists an opportunity to present their work to the buying public and at the same time offer an entertaining exhibit.¹³ With the country now deep in the Depression, the local paper reported:

Daytona Beach Art League and other local artists were resting today upon their laurels and recognition achieved in their first art mart. . . . Enthusiastic over the exhibition, with the record of four paintings practically sold, members announced last night they would follow Orlando's example and sponsor an art mart every two weeks starting next season.¹⁴

Enthusiasm over the possible sale of four paintings underscores the economic uncertainty of the times. The *News-Journal* also noted that fifty-nine cents was realized from an April Fool parody of modern art.

The DBAL joined the Florida Federation of Art and began hosting the Federation's annual juried exhibitions. The league used whatever facilities were available for exhibition space, including, hotels, the Palmetto Club, the YWCA, the City Recreation Hall, and Don Emery's art gallery on Broadway.

During the Depression the WPA and the Florida Art Project (FAP) put Florida artists back to work. Don Emery was the Daytona Beach area director for the Project; his studio on Broadway became the WPA art center. Emery taught local art classes and even classes for convicts at the Raiford state prison. He gave talks to local civic organizations, illustrating his speech with his own paintings and urging his listeners to get outside and paint.¹⁵

The DBAL opened its 1937 annual at the WPA center. Twenty-three members exhibited, with the best receiving a ten-dollar prize.¹⁶ Richard H. LeSesne showed his photographs. In 1939 the annual was held at the YWCA. First prize went to Karen Joy Miller, a Daytona resident who taught art in an Orlando public school.¹⁷

In 1940 the FAP and the DBAL found a new home, the Daytona Beach Art Center,

at 130 Broadway, next to Emery's school and gallery.¹⁸ The Art Center presented the work of Chester Tingler, Miami artist and muralist, who was working for the FAP.¹⁹

James Calvert Smith was an active member of the DBAL. Born in Micanopy, Florida, and a successful New York artist for more than thirty years, Smith gave an illustrated lecture on the Gay Nineties in Florida. He first came to Seabreeze back in 1893. From 1903 to 1909 he was a political cartoonist for the *Florida Times-Union* in Jacksonville. In New York, Smith did illustrations for the *Saturday Evening Post* and, as a staff artist with *Life* magazine, worked with Charles Dana Gibson and Norman Rockwell. He was vice president of New York's Florida Society and a member of the famous Salmagundi Club.²⁰

Another new member of the league was Ulrich Fisher. A German-born artist who left the country before the Nazis rose to power and now living in Daytona, Fisher exhibited landscapes and marine studies.²¹

Fred Dana Marsh, a world-famous artist known for his industrial subjects, was wintering at Ormond Beach and was a judge at DBAL exhibits. A sculptor, muralist, and active member of the league, Marsh designed the statue *Chief Tomokie* at the Tomoka State Park, at Ormond Beach.²²

In 1941, state FAP supervisors dedicated the New Smyrna Beach Cultural Center. Max Bernd-Cohen, then head of the art department at Florida Southern College, gave the principal address, with more than 1,200 people in attendance.²³

After Pearl Harbor Art League members urged Don Emery to close art activities for the duration of the war, but Emery persisted and the art shows continued. In March the art league mounted its ninth annual with Fred Dana Marsh, Charles E. Shaw of Mt. Dora, and Joy Postle of Orlando as judges. Sixty paintings were presented. In the professional class Don Emery took first prize in oil landscape with *Valley Farmhouse*, and Ulrich Fisher second with a marine. Awards to amateur artists included first in landscape oil to Alice McKinney for *River Side* and second to Marie Davis for *Tropical Nights*.²⁴



Fred Dana Marsh, *Chief Tomokie*, Tomokie State Park, Ormond Beach

The next year more than fifty paintings were received for the annual exhibit. Sara Potts of Ormond Beach won first, second, and third prizes, while Ulrich Fisher won first and second for his marines.²⁵ The 1943 exhibit saw a portrait by Isabelle Van Dyke named best picture in show. In 1944 Clarke H. Garnsey, a charter member of the league and now a sergeant in the army, won a prize for *Old 329*, a watercolor of an old locomotive beside a train shed.²⁶

The DBAL sponsored a Soldier's Art Recreation Center and worked with the Service Men's Locker Club at the YMCA. Many of the league's paintings were hung at the U.S. Naval Station.²⁷ War brought a New Yorker, Henry Saltzman, to Daytona Beach as a G.I. art instructor at the Welch Convalescent Hospital. Saltzman decided to stay, and in September 1946 opened the Henry S. Saltzman School of Art at 324 South Beach Street. The following January he presented an exhibit of forty-one paintings done by his students.²⁸

The Art League had outgrown Don J. Emery's studio, and finding a site where the next exhibition could be held was not easy. Mrs. William Morgan, a member of the league, offered to sell a building site on South Palmetto Avenue, facing Beach Street, for half price. It took all their funds, but the land was purchased. Francis Walton, a local architect and member of the board of directors, volunteered to prepare plans for a building.

Malcolm Fraser, a nationally prominent artist with a winter home in Orlando, offered fifty-three of his paintings to the DBAL, on condition that funds for a suitable gallery could be raised before June 1, 1946. The collection eventually went to the city of Ormond as the Ormond War Memorial Gallery, opened in December 1946 as a memorial to those who served in World Wars I and II.²⁹

The Art League with the land for a building but no money, started a fund drive. The *News-Journal* described the event:

The Daytona Beach Art League will launch a drive tomorrow to collect \$20,000 for the first unit of its proposed new \$40,000 Art Center to be erected at 423 South Palmetto. Mrs. Charne Hightower Jones, Building Committee chairman, last night announced opening of the drive and showed architect Francis Walton's sketches of the Center. Walton has conceived a graceful one story structure with a central foyer separating two main wings. The building is to be located on the south side of the lot facing north and overlooking a garden. . . . The west wing of the building, the main gallery, and the foyer comprise the first unit.³⁰

Under the presidency of Don J. Emery, the league's annual exhibit opened in March 1947, at the Methodist Church with 127 paintings. Judges included Nunzio Vayana of Ogunquit, Maine, and Hugh McKean of Rollins College.³¹

On April 4, 1948 the nearly completed building on Palmetto Avenue was opened for the first exhibit of the DBAL in their new home. Victoria Hutson Huntley, visiting artist at Rollins College, and a recently elected member of the National Academy, was on the jury.³²

Don J. Emery had a one-man show at the new Palmetto Avenue Art Center. There were many Florida paintings: *Surf at Sunrise*, *Shrimpers Port Orange*, *Old Sugar Mill Port Orange*, *Dunes Ormond Beach*, *Fountain of Youth Park*, *Hazy Day in Florida*, *Dunes near Daytona Beach*, and *Franciscan Mission Ruins*.³³ An exhibit of paintings by University of Florida students included several works by Don J.'s son, Don Woodruff Emery.³⁴

At the 1950 annual Mathilda Baskin won first place, Margaret Eaton second and James Calvert Smith third. New Smyrna Beach artist Hester Merwin Ayers exhibited.³⁵ Mrs. Ayers, who worked under her maiden name, Hester Merwin, liked to travel. She had studied in Italy and New York and spent two years with Albin Polasek at the Art Institute of Chicago. Merwin painted many portraits of Volusia County residents, but it was her paintings of the Indians of Taos and Santa Fe in New Mexico, of the natives of India and the Far East, that were widely exhibited in the United States.³⁶

Don W. Emery's education was delayed by service in the U. S. Army during World War II. In 1951 he graduated from the University of Florida; one of four, in a class of 800, to receive the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree.³⁷

When Don W. was born, his father had an idea for murals to decorate the large wall panels in the Florida Bank and Trust Company on Beach Street. Twenty-six years later that idea would become reality. The Emerys, father and son, received a commission to begin the work. Small oil designs were made for the murals and submitted to bank officials. Once approved, the designs were gridded off and transferred to the large panels. The Emerys erected an elaborate system of scaffolding over the desks and tellers' windows and began work. After just a month the first mural was completed. Don W. remembered a humorous incident from that period.

He and his father continued working after the bank closed. The bank doors . . . locked for the day, his tired father accidentally sat on his palette, a large one loaded with oil paints . . . on a nearby stool. Don J. reached for some turpentine to swab the paint off his jeans, soaking his pants and underwear in the process. It wasn't long before the heating effect of turpentine on tender skin began to be felt. "I'm on fire!" the artist yelled to his laughing son, who advised him to drop his pants in order to get to the source of the trouble. He did and barely managed to get his clothing back in order before the click of a key turning in the front door lock was heard. It was a bank trust officer and his wife, who never knew how they had nearly come face to face with catastrophe.³⁹

One painting was a map of Florida marked with the twenty-two cities that the Bank had branches in. The other murals were titled *Lighthouse at Ponce de Leon Inlet*, *Blue Springs*, *Ocean Dunes on the Atlantic*, *Bulow Plantation Ruins*, and *Sailboats on the River*.

Three Daytona Beach artists, Ivanell Diaz, Louise Shepard, and Minerva Goldsmith, had paintings chosen for the 1951 Florida Federation of Art statewide circuit.⁴⁰ Diaz, a self-taught artist, came to Daytona from Havana, Cuba. Louise Shepard, a student of Henry Saltzman, was a frequent prizewinner in Daytona exhibits. Minerva Goldsmith had moved to Florida in 1925 and in 1946 began her art education at the Norton School of Art in West Palm Beach. She had a one-woman show at the Ormond War Memorial Gallery and in 1955 was honored with inclusion in the Ringling Museum's Fifty Florida Painters exhibit.⁴¹

The twentieth annual exhibit of the Daytona Beach Art League opened in 1952 with 186 paintings by sixty-five artists. Among the exhibitors were president

James Calvert Smith, both Emerys, and Elizabeth Oliver, a graduate of the Art Institute of Chicago; Marion Howard, who studied with William Merritt Chase; Allen Strickland and Grace Borland, both of whom had studied and exhibited in Paris; and Dolly M. Treat. Treat, who came to Daytona Beach in 1944, won honorable mention in the February league exhibit and had a one-woman show of twenty-nine paintings at the Ormond Memorial Galleries.⁴²



Don W. Emery. Oil on board, 19 ¾ by 31 ½ inches.

The DBAL held a joint exhibit of the works of Elizabeth Oliver, Nell Thompson, Margaret A. Scott, and Ivanell Diaz in 1952.⁴³ Oliver exhibited portraits of local residents. Nell Thompson, a member of the Art League since 1933, had studied at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C. Her work included local scenes, flower studies, and landscapes. Scott, an amateur painter, studied ceramics at the Art Institute of Chicago. In December the league presented a one-man exhibit of watercolor paintings of old Daytona Beach, by James Calvert Smith.⁴⁴

At the Art Leagues 1953 exhibit, May Buhrer won the popular prize with a portrait of Mari Aldon, Gary Cooper's leading lady in the film *Distant Drums*, set in the Second Seminole War of 1840, and shot on location in the Everglades. Buhrer, who lived on Atlantic Avenue, had been doing portrait work in Daytona for years.⁴⁵

The 1956 annual prizewinners included Don J. Emery, Everett C. Brown, Lillian Gittner, Adele Wylie, and Grace Borland.⁴⁶ In 1959, at the twenty-seventh annual, Louise Shepard, Nell Thompson, Edward Tamm, Regina Phillips, and Everett S. Brown won prizes.⁴⁷ Brown was president of the Art League.



Everett Currier Brown. Oil on board, 10 by 14 inches.

Everett Brown worked as a commercial artist in New York City for thirty-five years before moving to Daytona Beach in 1937. He became one of the best known artists in the Halifax area. Brown lived on the beach for years, later moving to Big Tree Road. The *Daytona Beach Evening News* noted his work:

The smoke was overpowering, the heat terrific and along came two laborers. They looked like devils out of Dante's Inferno. That's how Everett Brown came to immortalize the Daytona Beach City Dump in oils.... Not content with a literal representation of his subject; he says his aim in painting is to intensify reality. 'By adding, taking away, rearranging, or if necessary, all three, the artist can achieve a reality which will heighten the effect of his work' From art school he went into commercial work, doing advertising layouts. 'After all, you have to eat. Some of the finest artists I've known designed candy boxes to get money to live on.' His work now runs mostly to still lifes and scenes. Of the 72 paintings in his show, only one is a figure study. 'They don't go much for nudes down here...' He prefers to

work directly on location, painting what he sees.... He objects to the term, modern art. 'Art's art, anytime or place and it's always modern.'⁴⁸

Don J. Emery died at his home on September 7, 1956 at the age of sixty-seven. His Distinguished Service Cross awarded for extraordinary heroism in action during World War I reads, "Displaying an absolute disregard of danger, Emery . . . in caring for the wounded under shell and rifle fire, and continuous cheerfulness under trying conditions, his courageous example was inspiring to his comrades."⁴⁹ In a career that spanned thirty-four years, it was Emery's courage and determination that helped keep art alive in Daytona Beach during the Depression and World War II.

The Daytona Beach Museum of Arts and Sciences (DBMAS) was founded in 1955. The Cici and Hyatt Brown Museum of Florida Art, erected on the campus of the DBMAS opened in the winter of 2015, a great Florida museum, and the first dedicated solely to the celebration of The Artists of Old Florida!



**Don W. Emery, *Sebring, 1960*. Watercolor, 8 by 12 by inches.
Scott Schesinger Collection.**



Across the face of tropic isle
Of coral, palm and cooling breeze,
Its spans extending miles and miles
Above the iridescent seas,
A highway runs and runs and runs
As though it seems quite loath to end.
While rising suns and setting suns
And silver moons their brilliance lend.
Here God like skill of brain and hand

Have conquered nature in her might
And link'd the water, keys and land
Into a chain of pure delight,
Where sea sick addict feels quite free
To ride the waves 'neath sun or star-
He blithely rolls away to sea
And never leaves his motor car.

— Cassidy, *The Rubberneck in Florida*.