

C. Perry Snell House
507 2nd Street South
HPC #94-09 - Designated December 1994



The Snell House is significant for its association with C. Perry Snell, one of St. Petersburg's greatest boosters and developers until his death in 1942. In addition, the house is a rare example of Dutch Colonial Revival architecture with Queen Anne influences. The style is based on the architectural style popularized by the Dutch colonization in the Hudson River area in the middle 1600's. The predominant elements of this style that are reflected in the C. Perry Snell House are the gambrel and steeply pitched gable roofs with overhang and the presence of classical columns. This eclectic mix was common when the building owner directed the architectural design by selecting personal architectural favorites or by selecting details from pattern books. The house was originally located at 106 Second Avenue NE where it eventually became the annex to the Colonial Hotel. It was relocated to the 500 block of 2nd Street South on the Bayboro Campus of the University of South Florida in 1993.

C. Perry Snell was born on June 5, 1869, in Bowling Green, Kentucky. The second son of Commodore Perry Snell and Isabella Shelton Snell, he attended Ogden College Preparatory School, the Cherry Brothers Institute, and later became a pharmacist. During his young adult years he helped a brother and sister get through school and worked in a variety of cities, including Louisville, Los Angeles and Chicago. He later moved to Columbia, Tennessee, where he met and married Lillian Allen, an heiress who bankrolled his land investments. Two weeks after arriving in St. Petersburg during their first trip in 1899, the Snells purchased the lot on which their first home was eventually built. A few weeks later, they bought the rest of the block, part of which later became a portion of the Soreno Hotel. In February 1904, after annual vacations to St. Petersburg, the Snells decided to permanently reside in the city their, and completed their home (located at present corner of Second Avenue NE and First Street) in November of the same year. The Snells eventually sold this property to Elizabeth M. Fogarty in 1910 and moved to a smaller home at 136 Second Avenue NE (now demolished).

The house acted as a base for Snell's early civic and real estate development endeavors. As a trustee of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, he loaned a substantial sum for the construction of a new house of worship. He served as a stockbroker in the National Bank of St. Petersburg. In May 1905, he became a partner in the Bay Shore Land Company, a body that purchased 80 acres of property north of the city. Snell later purchased 22 acres in 1906 near Mirror Lake, which combined with later additions in Northeast St. Petersburg, solidified Snell's role as the leading developer of this period. By December 1906, Snell, J. C. Hamlett and A. E. Hoxie purchased all of the holdings of the partnership known as St. Petersburg Land and Improvement Company and formed a partnership known as Snell and Hamlett. This acquisition included several hundred city lots, as well as several hundred acres surrounding the city. Snell and Hamlett had an agreement to develop the North Shore area in 1909-1910, and Snell saw the potential for residential neighborhoods north of the downtown area.

Snell and Hamlett oversaw the construction of housing in the area west of Mirror Lake and around Crescent Lake, and Snell allowed the city to acquire a 56 acre rectangular portion of land around Crescent Lake for use as a city park at a cost of \$35,000, much less than the property's value. After moving from his first St. Petersburg home, Snell developed much of the North Shore area. Along with Hamlett, Snell purchased several large tracts of land bordering Tampa Bay. On March 18, 1919, Snell bought out Hamlett's interest in the partnership, and less than two months later, began work on the Coffee Pot Golf Course.

Snell's active support of William L. Straub's vision of a public waterfront park also began during his years at this house. With Beach Drive serving as a shoreline roadway at the time, Snell's house sat only one block from Tampa Bay. The scenic view offered by this prime location certainly encouraged Snell to appreciate the importance of maintaining public access to the waterfront. In March 1905, he joined the St. Petersburg Board of Trades's Harbor Survey Committee. He appeared before the City Council in April 1906 to report on the group's progress in securing waterfront lots for public ownership.

Once he purchased Hamlett's share of this enterprise, Snell continued his affairs without any partners. After announcing the availability of lots on Snell Isle in October 1925, Snell accumulated sales in excess of \$7 million in this, his most elegant development. During this period he also constructed the Snell Building (later known as the Rutland Building and the Snell Arcade) on the corner of Fourth Street and Central Avenue, at a cost of \$750,000. The collapse of the land boom and Florida's early entry into the Great Depression devastated nearly every local developer, but Snell alone continued to fulfill his commitments to his clients, at great personal expense. A true patron of the arts and culture, Snell toured Europe in search of paintings and statues as the boom went bust. He returned from his \$1,000,000 shopping spree, and found himself morally committed to completing promised improvements on Snell Isle. In later years, Snell expressed an interest in Gulf Beach property along Pass-a-grille, which consequently was the last area he developed.

C. Perry Snell continued to serve as one of St. Petersburg's greatest boosters until his death in October 1942. While returning from a vacation to Mexico City with his third wife, Snell suffered a heart attack in Monterey, Mexico. He died on October 23, 1942, at Mercy Hospital in Laredo, Texas and his body was returned to Bowling Green, Kentucky for services and interment.