

Summerfield Boat Works from 1940 to 1960

By Richard Jordan



*Summerfield Boat Works,
1950s. Courtesy of Mort
Allread.*



*Summerfield Boat Works,
2010. Courtesy of Richard
Jordan.*

“I had forgotten how to get in here. How pitiful,” I thought to myself as I drove through Shady Banks. I was on my way to meeting a client. I saw the old school and weaved around. Now I remembered. As I took the final hard left toward my destination, I about gasped. On the right lay the ruins of Summerfield’s—overgrown with weeds and sparsely covered in rubble. It is funny how quickly things deteriorate in South Florida under the scorching sun, terminal termites, and vicious vines. My client had run aground at the entrance of the back side canal behind Summerfield’s. I drove to the end of the dead end road, parked and got out. It was a sultry, silly hot day. What struck me most of all was the quietness. I remembered the bustling boatyard business. It was eerie and saddening. Inside every house a million eyes peered out at me. I squeezed through the loosely locked gate and trespassed toward my client’s hard-aground sloop.

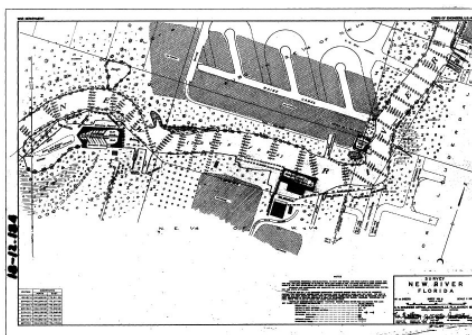
Sometime after this experience, I had the funny idea to write an article about the status of old Summerfield Boat Works. The property is located south of Davie Boulevard on the south fork of the New River as she curves westward toward I-95. The property runs along the northwest bend across from Lauderdale Marine Center and Riverbend. These days, as I said above, the property is all but a vacant lot with a bashed-in sea wall, a dilapidated testament to the glorious splendor of her hay days. It has been about five years since my family’s business was booted out of the office building. The bitterness of the experience still lingers. I hold the odd distinction of being principal of the last Summerfield brokerage.

I found that the property was in foreclosure and for sale for \$7.5 million (since sold for \$1.25 million in back taxes), that the seawall was in ruins from careless barges, and that our office building still stood unchanged except



Summerfield Boat Works, 2010. Courtesy of Richard Jordan.

for the name outside, Pier 17. I found out too much. My research lead me to write a slick modern article for the local paper, *Waterfront News*. In the process, I learned so much about the history, the culture and the people that I felt obligated to tell their story. So after I wrote the story I carried on my research. What follows is the result – a history of the yard from the founder’s purchase in 1941 until his untimely death in 1960.



Summerfield Survey ca. March 1939. Courtesy of the US Engineer Office.

George Hartman and Henry Summerfield were friends in Toledo, Ohio, in the 1930s. They had great plans of sailing a boat to Central or South America and bringing back mahogany lumber. Those plans

did not work out, but did lead to Hank and George settling in Fort Lauderdale.¹ In about 1939, Hank sailed from Toledo through the Barge Canal, down the Atlantic east coast, and into Fort Lauderdale in a Class R 40-foot wooden sloop.^{2,3} Looking for safe harbor, he ended up berthing at the yard that would later bear his name.⁴ George went to work building the *Prospector* for Jack Collison at Cypress Bend, an area on the New River in Shady Banks on the east side of Southwest 15 Avenue.⁵ Hank owned a business called Cypress Landing Woodcrafters in 1940.⁶ There is a stretch of road where the middle is separated by a median with trees. Cypress Bend is the land along the river there.⁷

Hank and his first wife, Jessie, whom he had married in Toledo, purchased the C. R. Breckenridge Boat Yard on July 8, 1941.⁸ The land was situated south of Cypress Bend at the westward turn of the river where his sloop was slipped. Hank traded his 40-foot “R” sloop plus cash to Breckenridge to consummate the deal for the property.^{9,10} C. R.

Breckenridge had been operating his tiny boat yard called the Lauderdale Yacht Basin since 1933.^{11, 12} The purchase included Block A of the amended plat Yellowstone Park and the eastern-most 100-foot-by-212-foot of the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of the section-township-range 16-50-42, also known as lot 17 of Mrs. E. P. Marshall’s subdivision.¹³ The property was crescent-shaped bounded by the New River on the eastern and southern sides and included two rickety wet storage sheds over a basin dredged into the east bank,¹⁴ and a workshop.¹⁵ Hank converted the workshop into a house by adding a living room and bedroom.¹⁶ It was a humble beginning.¹⁷

Formal U.S. involvement in World War II commenced with the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. George took his family to California to design and build air-sea rescue boats for the Navy.¹⁸ Hank expanded the yard by purchasing the western-most adjacent lot from Cinco Investment Co. on January 6, 1942. He and

Jessie now owned the east-most eighth of the aforementioned Mrs. Marshall's subdivision along with the Yellowstone Park lot.¹⁹ During World War II, Summerfield's was used as a service area for navy patrols and a storage area for confiscated boats.²⁰ The Navy painted the confiscated boats white and slipped them along the north side canal. The idea was to preserve and return the boats to their original owners after the war. They used some of the fast ones as patrols. But none of the boats were maintained. Thus when the war ended, the worms had eaten the

confiscated boats and no one really got their boat back.²¹ The canal became a rough haven for broken down boats and salty live-aboards.

George returned with his family to their home in Shady Banks around 1943. He asked Hank to help him build what would become the famous sailboat *Starlight* on the banks of the New River west of the Summerfield's lot. They were setting up the backbone when they had a falling out. George stayed and hired another fellow to help build the boat. Hank left and concentrated on developing his boatyard.²² On

February 10, 1944, Hank and Jessie purchased the rest of the available western land from CJ West et ux. In total, Summerfield Boat Works included the western three-fourths of the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of 16-50-42²³ along with the original crescent-shaped Block A of the amended plat Yellowstone Park. With this final acquisition, the current Summerfield's yard was in place. The rest of the transactions noted are mortgages, transient properties, miscellaneous claims or parking lots.

With the yard in place and WWII still going on, Hank signed on as a navigator with Pan American Airways for a tour of duty and left a foreman in charge.²⁴ When Hank's tour of duty was over, he came back to his boat yard to find that the foreman he hired had run away with his wife Jessie.²⁴ Hank and Jessie divorced, and on March 22, 1945, most of

WEST - SUMMERFIELD TRANSFER

Purchase Price. \$3775.00
 Revenue Stamps on Note. 1.70
 Total due. \$3776.70

Credits:

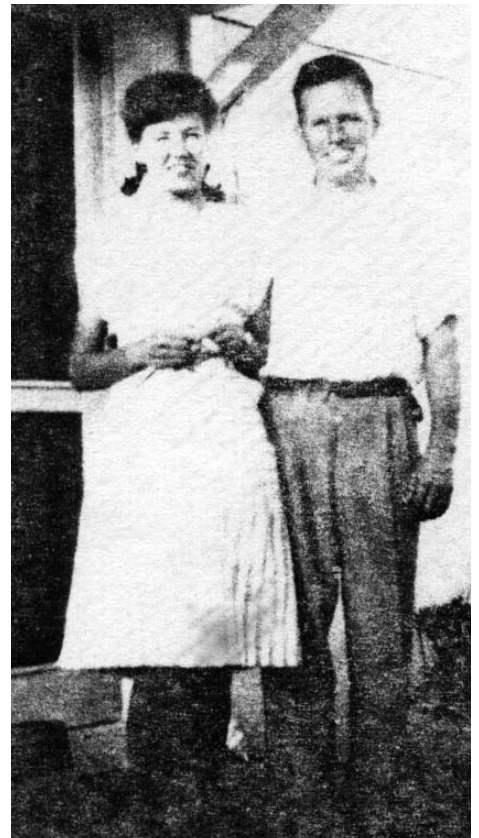
Cash Paid. \$ 300.00 ✓
 Mortgage. 1775.00
 Revenue Stamps on Deed - State. 3.80
 Federal. 4.40
 County Taxes for 1943. 10.50
 Pro Rated 1944 Taxes. 1.16
 Total credits. 2094.86
 Balance due. \$1681.84 ✓

1100.00 300.00
 1681.84

 \$ 1981.84
 1100.00

 \$ 881.84 Cert to Sullivan
 51.50 chg to Anita

 \$ 933.34 Cert to Sullivan



Hank and Pauline Summerfield.
 Courtesy of Mort Allread.

Summerfield Transfer ca. 1944. Courtesy Mort Allread.

the property transferred from dual ownership to Henry Summerfield. The deed did not include the western-most fourth of the land in 16-50-42²⁵ and Jessie would return for her share when Hank died.²⁶

Hank went back to Toledo, Ohio, became reacquainted with his high school classmate, Pauline.²⁷ By 1948, Hank was married to Pauline, and together they would go on to have two daughters.²⁸ This ushered in an era of stability and growth for Summerfield Boat Works. Hank installed a railway to haul boats. In 1948, Hank purchased six government buildings in Boca Raton, Florida, to setup wet storage sheds along the south bank of the boat yard. He bought the buildings for one dollar each on the condition that he had to clean out everything down to the concrete flooring. Luckily, another prospect arrived who wanted the wiring, urinals and fixtures that populated the buildings. Mort Allread, who would later become foreman of the yard, arrived on a sport fishing

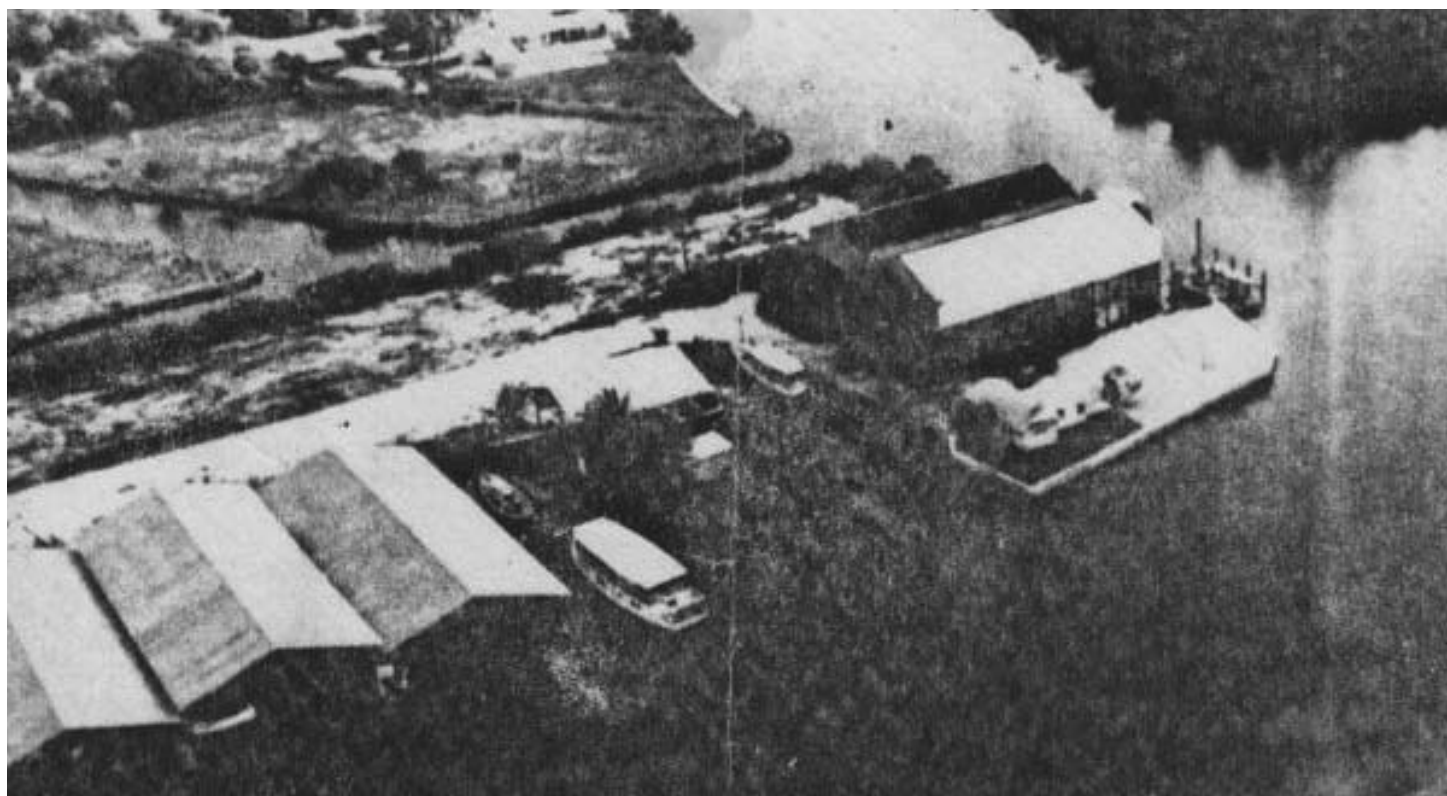
boat in early 1950. At that point the pilings were in for the sheds and by 1952 Hank completed construction. The sheds gave the yard a good income from storage rentals and this area made it possible to service berthed yachts.²⁹

During the 1950s across the river from Summerfield's on the south side, there were boatyards, too. The western-most boatyard was near where I-95 is today. It was known as Pilkington's and was not very active, having been irreparably damaged in the hurricane of 1926. The more active yard was called Dooley's. The main shed of Dooley's was directly south of Summerfield's, where the east yard of Lauderdale Marine Center stands in 2010.³⁰ Dooley's was building 140-foot mine sweepers and exporting them to the Netherlands to clean up mines left over from World War II in the North Sea.³¹

In 1954,³² Hank finished construction of the little house that still stands

on the western-most 175 feet of the yard property.³³ Hank, Pauline, and their two children went to live in this combination home and office building.³⁴ Starting in November 3, 1954, Henry and Pauline paid off and re-mortgaged Summerfield Boat Works. They paid off mortgages due to the Broward National Bank of Fort Lauderdale.^{35, 36} They re-mortgaged to Irene Schmitt and Harlow Davock.^{37, 38} On October 18, 1956, they took a second mortgage from Howard Stiles.³⁹

In 1956, Hank designed and built a 60-ton elevator to haul boats up to 75 feet and over 9-foot draft with help from Powell Brothers Construction. Summerfield's specialized in servicing sailboats.⁴⁰ The platform was a massive frame of stainless steel I-beams planked with wood. A six-cylinder Chevy truck engine with three-speed manual transmission lowered the platform via eight and three-quarter-inch steel cables wound around a pair of drums. A strap brake prevented the



Summerfield Sheds ca. 1950-51. Courtesy of Mort Allread.



Summerfield's Looking West ca. 1955. Courtesy of Mort Allread.

vessel from dropping. This marine elevator was especially attractive for fragile wood boats.⁴¹

By the late 1950s, Hank and George Hartman had mended their relationship marred by disagreement about the construction of the *Starlight*. Friends once again, they went out flying together,

Hank in his Navion and George in his Cessna 182. Bob Hartman, George's son, remembers riding with Hank in his Navion.⁴² On January 8, 1959, Hank paid off both Irene Schmitt and Harlow Davock, leaving him with just the Stiles mortgage.^{43, 44}

On August 4, 1959, Hank began his involvement in the Bossert Isles properties. He purchased the eastern-most 115-foot later corrected to the eastern-most 117-foot.⁴⁵⁻⁴⁸ This

lot would become known as lot 28 of the Bossert Isles subdivision.⁴⁹ The lot stretched along the New River bordered by the live-aboard canal on the north side and the Summerfield property on the south. Summerfield Boat Works would retain ownership and use it for parking. Deeper involvement in the Bossert Isles subdivision continued as Hank became a second mortgagee to many lots of Bossert Houses Inc. on December 9, 1959.⁵⁰ On March 8, 1960, Hank acquired lots 35 and 29.⁵¹ Paired with lots 34 and 28, these four would provide all the parking for Summerfield's.

On March 8, 1960, along with handling business, Hank purchased a condominium near the beach at Sea Tower Apartments just north of Oakland Park Boulevard.⁵² His family packed and was ready to

move out of the little home along the western-most 175-feet of the Summerfield property. Then one day sometime before April 7, 1960, while talking at the yard to Bill Kyle, a yacht broker, Hank Summerfield had a heart attack and died.⁵³⁻⁵⁵ Hank was buried beside his father and mother at the Lauderdale Memorial Cemetery in block 10, row 14.⁵⁶ ■

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4. Ibid.
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8. Broward County Records, Taxes and Treasury Division, 115 S. Andrews Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, FL, Room 119, Book-Page 388-251.
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24. Allread, Mort, email with author, January 14, 2011.
25. Broward County Records, Room 119, Book-Page 477-283.
26. Lee, John, in-person interview with author, May 31, 2010.
27. Allread, Mort, email with author, January 14, 2011.
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