

# Starbuck Spring



Don and Jinny Barker (USF)

*This narrative is based on an interview with Don and Jinny Barker at their vacation home on Starbuck Spring on August 27, 2001. Starbuck Spring has been a part of their lives since the 1940s and has been the location for many family events over the years. During this interview, Don and Jinny shared their knowledge of the spring's history, as well as many interesting stories that took place over the years.*

## Personal History



The walkway leading into the spring (USF)

Don and Jinny Barker are both from New York State. In the early 1940s, Don came to Florida to be with a college friend, Starbuck Yale, who was suffering from leukemia. When Starbuck passed away, Don decided to stay in Florida and became a surrogate son to Starbuck's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Yale. During this same time, Jinny had also moved to Florida with her mother. Don and Jinny knew each other from New York State and began dating in Florida. Jinny says about their decision to stay in Florida once they were married: "We loved being here, so we just stayed."

In 1942, Don enlisted in the Civilian Pilot Training Program. As part of the training exercises, Don was sent to many universities around the country. During his stay at the University of Florida, he met a young man who had grown up on Lake Brantley. According to Jinny, "Don was always bragging that he knew more about Florida than Floridians." This man from Lake Brantley challenged Don's knowledge of Florida and took him to visit Sheppard Spring. This was the first time that Don saw the spring that would become an important part of his life. He shared this new knowledge about Sheppard Spring with his friend, Mr. Yale. At the time, Mr. Yale was dealing with paralysis and could only walk with crutches. Jinny says that Mr. Yale was "...thrilled to death because he figured out that with a walkway he would be able to get in the water. Swimming was so good for a paralyzed person." In early 1944, the Yales bought the spring and its surrounding property. According to Jinny, the previous owner was happy to sell because the land was not good for citrus. The Yales renamed the spring after their son, Starbuck.

From the beginning, Don and Jinny would visit the spring. In 1964, after the Yales passed away, the Barkers purchased Starbuck Spring. The spring has played a very important part in their lives. Don and Jinny raised three children in Orlando and when they were young, they would come to the spring "every weekend." The family has also celebrated many holidays there. One tradition that has been a part of the Barkers' life for the past 40 years is Thanksgiving at the spring. Starbuck Spring has also been the location for many picnics – for family, business, and sports teams. Don explains how important the spring has been in their lives:



*The spring in 2001 (USF)*

*“People with children just have the best time out here because that spring bubbles...It is just great for children. The older people and the younger people can be here and have a good time. Some can go in the water and some can watch the children. We’ve never had any problems. We’re very fortunate. Many people have come out over the years... We like to have them here.”*

Starbuck Spring continues to play a significant role in Don and Jinny’s lives. They now live in Winter Park and visit the spring almost every day of the week, although they never permanently moved to the spring. As Don likes to say, “If we lived out there, where would we go?” The Barkers’ family and friends still visit and their grandchildren love to come with their friends and their dogs. Jinny says about the gatherings:

*“You know the phone calls will go around or the e-mails will go around, and before you know it, we’re all going to meet at the spring on Sunday. You bring the baked beans and I’ll bring the bread.”*

## History/Information

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*Don Barker with a baby alligator in the 1950s (Barker)*

Starbuck Spring is located in the Little Wekiva Watershed and feeds into the Little Wekiva River. Nearby springs include Sanlando and Palm. According to a Florida Geological Survey, the spring is 70 feet in diameter and about four feet deep (Source: [http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/springs\\_of\\_fl/aaj7320/starbuck.html](http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/springs_of_fl/aaj7320/starbuck.html)). Jinny believes that the water level in the spring is currently higher than normal and has been high for the past year. The discharge rate has varied over the years. Jinny explains:

*“Well, the last they reported to us was 7.2 million. It has been as high as 14 million gallons a day, but that was way back. Since then, it has varied. The lowest I can remember was 6 million gallons. The average has been 8-9 million gallons a day.”*

Starbuck Spring has had a history of flooding since Hurricane Donna in 1960. According to Jinny, the rain that accompanied this hurricane flooded everything in Seminole and Orange Counties. To relieve some of this flooding, Seminole and Orange Counties teamed together to dredge the Little Wekiva River. Jinny says about the experience:

*“So they dredged on up past us and that resulted in a spoil bank being put on the east side of the Little Wekiva. We were just flooded out constantly after that. Don got with...other landowners and finally got Seminole County to dredge and put a spoil bank on our side. So there’s this big island that runs down there up past the property next-door to us.”*

Although a spoil bank was placed on the river near the spring, flooding continues to be a problem. Many years ago the Barkers placed cement bags around the perimeter of the spring to avoid additional erosion from the flooding. Most



The road to Starbuck Spring in 1968 (Barker)



The spring in the 1940s (Barker)

recently, they have been recovering from a flood in the summer of 2001. Jinny believes that some of the flooding has been caused by the growth of aquatic vegetation on the Little Wekiva. According to Jinny, the water hyacinths used to be sprayed by either the Army Corps of Engineers or the St. Johns Water Management District. This spraying has not occurred recently:

*“That bridge down there, Springs Landing, was too low and they couldn’t get up here to spray. So this whole area from here on up to Sanlando is just filled up. There’s no way they can spray it. It’s clogging up...our 7-8 million gallons a day does not go out very fast.”*

When Jinny and Don first came to Starbuck Spring, the surrounding area looked like “a wide kind of savanna.” Jinny goes on to describe the area:

*“Open marsh. The water used to just go through. The water would be anywhere from ankle-deep to knee-deep. It was mucky. I was scared to death of it because of snakes. But I soon found out that if I didn’t go with Don, I would have to sit here and wait for him. So I learned how to handle my end of the canoe. It was great going downstream. You just floated it. All you had to do was kind of steer it. You would see alligators, turtles and birds. It was just absolutely gorgeous. Then we had to work a little to get back up.”*

The surrounding area was also heavily wooded. Don manually cut back many of the trees near the spring. Today, many trees remain on the Barkers’ property. The types of trees near Starbuck Spring include bottlebrush, swamp maple, palm, hickory, plum, holly, scrub oak, and long needle pine.

Before the nearby residential development began in the 1970s, there were a number of different animals that visited the spring. Some of the animals that Jinny and Don used to see include alligators, turtles, deer, foxes, squirrels, and bear. According to Jinny, a Florida bobcat has also been recently spotted. A few of these animals were almost like family pets, including a fox and an alligator. Jinny tells a story about a pet alligator from Starbuck Spring:

*“Way, way back we used to have a small alligator. The Yales would feed the little gator. They called him Herman. They would call “Herman” and he would steam over and come up and they would feed him something. Well, Herman finally got too big. He had to be relocated.”*

Jinny notes that they no longer feed the alligators. As more people moved into the area, many of the larger animals disappeared. Jinny says about the deer that used to visit, “Well, of course before this was all built up, it would not be unusual to see a deer. There’s no place for them anymore.” However, some of the smaller animals continue to live in the area around the spring.

In the past, there also were many birds in the area. According to Jinny, the birds were rather noisy. She shares, “As Don used to say, it was difficult to hear recordings [of business meetings]...because the birds were so noisy.” Although the numbers of birds have decreased, the Barkers still continue to see a variety. Among the birds that frequent Starbuck Spring are the Belted Kingfisher, Grackle, Cardinal, Woodpecker, White Ibis, Green Heron, Sandhill Crane, Great Blue Heron, Great Horned Owl, and Barred Owl.

# Development

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Family and Friends enjoying the spring in the 1950s (Barker)

Although the exact use of Starbuck Spring before the beginning of the written historical record is unknown, as a source of fresh water near a navigable river, the spring was likely visited by Florida's early Native American population. Don has found many arrowheads in the area near the spring. The written record indicates that agriculture was important for the areas around Starbuck Spring beginning in the 1800s. According to a publication by the Masons in Apopka, "One Hundred Years of Masonry in Orange Lodge No. 36, F. & A.M.: 1856-1956" by T. J. Deringer, the early white settlers in the area also chose to live near the springs and rivers because of the fresh water. Deringer writes that these early settlers were very self-sufficient, raising vegetables and hunting the wild game, which were plentiful. The publication also states that the first Masonic Lodge in what was then Orange County, now Seminole County, was held at a sawmill at Sheppard Spring, now known as Starbuck Spring. This building no longer exists. However, on the edge of the Barkers' property there is the foundation of an old building. Jinny speculates that this could have been related to the mill or possibly a citrus grove.

Another historical use of the land in the area near Starbuck Spring was citrus cultivation. According to the publication "Early Days in Seminole County" by Arthur E. Francke, Jr., citrus cultivation in the area was brought to a standstill due to a freeze in the winter of 1894-1895. Jinny shares her knowledge about this freeze, "...everybody who had invested in citrus on this ridge evidently were wiped out. Even up until the 1940s they said, 'No. Don't try to grow citrus. It's a cold spot.'"

When the Barkers began to visit Starbuck Spring, the area was still undeveloped, residentially and commercially. Jinny describes what the area used to look like:

*"In the early days, there was some growth between here and Markham Road, but this was really a wide kind of savanna. The river itself went through it, meandered through it. We had a hurricane; it was in the late '40s. It evidently went right through here. There were no buildings here. It flattened everything..."*

In 1971, construction began for a nearby residential development called "The Springs." This development is 400 acres and includes both Sanlando Spring and Palm Spring. Within this development are a mixture of different types of homes and condominiums. According to the residential association, there are 880 living units in the development and more than 100 acres of land has been "preserved in its natural state" (Source: <http://www.thesprings.cc/>).

Don believes that Starbuck Spring remains "pretty well isolated" from the development, especially considering that the Barkers' property spans 50 acres. Jinny thinks that they have done a good job with the development because the houses are spread out and she appreciates the extra security that the gated community brings.

The question exists about what kind of environmental impact this residential community has had on the springs in the area, including Sanlando and Palm, both of which feed into the Little Wekiva River. Environmental groups, like "Save our Springs," argue that the residential development in the area has negatively affected the springs, including reduced waterflow and decreased quality. However, it should be recognized that both Sanlando and

Palm Springs were not pristine when “The Springs” residential community was developed. According to historian Dr. Jerrell Shofner, both springs were previously part of a recreation area known as “Sanlando Tropical Park” (Source: “A History of Altamonte Springs” by Jerrell H. Shofner, 1995). Sanlando Spring continues to be used as a private recreation facility for the gated community.

## The Future

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*The spring at the Barker’s cottage in 2001 (USF)*

When asked about the future of Starbuck Spring, Jinny said that she hoped it could be protected. One of her fears is that without protection, there might be development around the spring that does not fit with the natural environment. If new buildings spoil the beauty of the spring, Jinny says:

*“It would just break my heart. There’s just something about Florida as is. It means so much to us emotionally.”*

Jinny’s other concern for the future of Starbuck Spring is if it would be condemned for a water source. However, she feels that this is unlikely to happen because the spring does not have a big enough flow.

Starbuck Spring has been a very important part of Don and Jinny’s lives. Don says, “We’ve been so fortunate to have the spring.” They would both like to see the spring remain in its natural state. In the 1960s, Don spoke with Seminole County about buying the land and creating a land trust. At the time, the county was not interested. However, as the Barkers grow older, they realize that something needs to be done to protect Starbuck Spring. Jinny explains their situation:

*“I think we ought to do something about having it preserved for the future. I don’t know how to do it. Don doesn’t know how to do it.”*

Other citizens in Seminole County also believe that Starbuck Springs should be protected. In the Summer of 2001, “Save our Springs” began a petition to encourage Seminole County to purchase the spring to protect it from development. The group suggests putting the land into a natural preserve or creating a limited public recreation area.

If the Barkers and Seminole County are able to come to an agreement about creating a land trust for Starbuck Spring, then the future of the spring might be protected. If, however, an agreement cannot be reached, it is possible that once the spring’s ownership is out of the Barkers’ hands, unrestricted development might occur. The future of Starbuck Springs is currently unknown, but with cooperation between citizens and the county, protection of the area can hopefully be ensured.

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