

\*\*\*\*\*BREAKING NEWS\*\*\*\*\*

During the week of June 26th-30th John Robinson and his crew from Accu-cut Concrete Services out of Clearwater will be in Buckingham at the home where the original 1924-1979 Fort Myers Beach Arch stone has been stored since 2019 to cut and prepare the stone. This is a significant milestone for our project and historic event in Fort Myers Beach history.

There was an attempt by our Vice President Darcy Bowman's Mother June Naas in 1979 to get the Arches added to the National Historic Register. They were told they were not old enough in 1979.

Built by Tom Phillips (one of the 1st developers in the Fort Myers Beach Area) in 1924 the Arches served as the entrance to a sales pavilion for his San Carlos on the Golf Development. After, the 1926 hurricane washed away the original Matanzas Pass wooden bridge in 1924. The swing bridge was aligned to the Arches and Tom Phillips gave right of way to the Arches to planners for the construction of a shorter way to the beach via San Carlos Blvd.

The Arches were to be destroyed when the new sky bridge over the pass replace the swing bridge in 1979. Citizens, the FMB Jaycees, Lee County Commissioners and the bridge contractor agreed to relocate the Arches to a county park instead of destroying them. Nobody told the wrecking ball sub contractor.

It was always an idea to rebuild the Arches. This plan was included in the 1st Town of Fort Myers Beach Comp plan. It never happened. Instead the Town commissioned a mural by local artist Jan Ellen Atkielski in town council chambers. This mural was destroyed by Hurricane Ian. There is a plan to have it repainted in the new Town Hall at some point.

The remains of the Arches (stored in a yard in Tip Top Isles for over 40 years) were hauled away to Buckingham. The Grandson of Frank Hemelgarn (who 1st transported after they were destroyed), worked with our group so we could reuse them. Our group removed them from over burden, had them 3-D imaged by USF Archeologist, and transported them to Buckingham.

The Coquina Limestone surfaces of the original arches that are aesthetically pleasing will be cut into 3 inch thick slabs using a wire saw and palletted awaiting our projects contract award by Lee County Parks sometime in the future. Where possible we will reuse the original stone and hundred year old concrete in the Commemorative Arch on Bowditch Point. In some way our beloved Arches that stood for over a half century as the entrance to Fort Myers Beach will be back. Our marketing strategy for the new Commemorative Arch includes this message: "Take a picture under the Arch, and you will return to Fort Myer Beach" Just like the Arches did. In some way our arches will be move to a public park fulfilling the plan made in 1979.

In April of 2024 we hope the 4th Annual Rock The Arches Music Festival finishes our fundraising efforts started 6 years ago and our project can be funded 100% and turned over to Lee County.

Steven Ray McDonald

President, Restore Fort Myers Beach Arches, Inc.

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**1924 arches &  
Pavalian**



**Take A Photo Under The Commemorative Arch And You Will Come  
Back To Fort Myers Beach, Just Like The Arch Did**



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**NCH**  
NCH 501





# Fort Myers Beach arches torn down despite assurances

By JOHN DOUSSARD  
News-Press Staff Writer

The Fort Myers Beach arches are gone and several Lee County officials are wondering why.

The arches, reduced Friday to piles of coralstone and splintered cypress sitting forlornly along the roadside, had greeted visitors and residents to the area since Tom Phillips erected them in a business brainstorm in 1925.

But after enduring the rains and winds of 53 years, the arches fell quickly to the business end of a bulldozer Friday, less than 24 hours after several county officials said they had received assurances from the state that no action would be taken until Lee County had a chance to save the old structures. They were razed to make way for a new bridge to the beach.

Mike Roeder, a member of the county's planning department, said he was assigned the task of trying to move the coralstone arches to a new location this week by department head William Johnstone.

Thursday night, Roeder said he called Rodney Little, a state historic preservation officer in the Division of Archives, History and Records Management in Tallahassee. Roeder had called Little in the wake of the Florida National Register Review Committee's decision Monday not to recommend that the arches be placed on the National Register of Historical Places.

Had the arches made that exclusive listing, they would have been saved from destruction by federal law.

"I talked with Rodney last (Thursday) night, and he told me that he wanted to make sure nothing was done to the arches until we had a chance to move them," Roeder said. "He said he would call the state DOT (Department of Transportation) and they would call us today to assure us nothing would happen until we got something together."

"They never called."

Little could not be reached for comment Friday night.

On Monday, the arches failed to make the historical register because of their relatively recent construction date, 1925, their isolation from the original atmosphere of the area and their loss of architectural integrity.

Roeder, surprised late Friday with the news of the arches' destruction, said the state also had failed to notify him and other interested parties about Monday's hearings.

"We were told we would be notified and have a chance to address the committee," Roeder said. "But Rodney told me it probably wouldn't have made much difference anyway."



News-Press/Thomas A. Price

**WHAT'S LEFT OF THE FORT MYERS BEACH ARCHES**  
... 53-year-old structure destroyed Friday after preservation attempts failed

**50's Arches**

