**Tale of the Trail**  <http://www.colliermuseums.com/history/tale_trail.php>

[
Barron Gift Collier](http://www.colliermuseums.com/history/barron_collier.php)

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It's difficult to imagine now, but as recently as 1923 there was still not a single mile of paved road in Collier County.

For years the long-awaited highway between Tampa and Miami - the Tamiami Trail - had been stalled at the western edge of Dade County and the southern boundary of Lee County, bogged down by difficult terrain and a chronic shortage of road construction money. The longest link, some 76 miles of the proposed highway, fell in Collier County and remained unfinished.

Completion of the Tamiami Trail was a critical first step in Barron G. Collier's master plan to develop the region and link newly created Collier County to Florida's leading cities. In October 1923, as promised, he got the project underway with his own money. A retired naval officer and engineer, David Graham Copeland, was assigned the seemingly impossible task of constructing a town in the remote Florida wilderness as a base for building both the Trail and a new highway and railroad connection north to Immokalee.

Virtually overnight, Copeland transformed the frontier trading village of Everglades into a modern communications and supply center operated with almost military precision. Surveyors, engineers and architects designed new docks, public buildings, homes, stores, schools, streets, a clinic, repair shops and railroads. Electric power, water, regular mail and steamship service, a weekly newspaper, telephones, telegraphs and even an electric street trolley were provided for the workers and residents of Everglades. A new industrial section of town, Port DuPont, also contained barracks and mess halls for workers and the sawmills, boat yards and machine shops needed to maintain Collier's mechanized army of heavy equipment.

By the time the Florida State Road Department came to his aid in 1926, Collier had already invested more than a million dollars in earnings from his advertising businesses into construction of the Trail.

When the road officially opened to traffic on April 26, 1928, the final cost was a staggering $8 million, or about $25,000 a mile. But for the first time in history, motor vehicles could travel overland across the southern tip of Florida, opening Collier County to future economic development and thousands of new homebuyers.