



DeSoto County Historical Society News

P.O. Box 1824 • Arcadia FL 34265 • 863-266-5774 • www.historicdesoto.org

February 2021

This issue sponsored by J.R. Griffis & Jeff Griffis in memory of their beloved Nancy Webster

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The John Morgan Ingraham House Museum
Howard and Velma Melton Historical Research Library

REMAIN CLOSED

DeSoto County Fair: Showtime 2021

We are grateful to Cindy McLeod Ely for designing the Society's exhibit for the DeSoto County Fair and purchasing the supplies for her vision. To fit the 2021 theme of "showtime," she wanted a red-and-white striped tent, complete with popcorn and cotton candy, plus animal silhouettes and some history of the Fair as requested by the DeSoto County Fair Association.

She and Carol Mahler hung some red-and-white striped plastic table cloth material on the top of a tent frame to make the tent, and with fiber fill and spray paint, Cindy craftily made fake cotton candy, and clear-coated popcorn in traditional popcorn boxes.

We also appreciate Tonya Bordner, Stella Parker, Sydalee Parker, and Keith Wallace for helping Cindy and Carol decorate the exhibit. The Fair opens on Friday, Jan. 29, and continues through Sunday, Feb. 7. Please visit the Society's exhibit as well as all the others while you enjoy the Fair! Your admission fee helps the DeSoto County Fair Association be able to award scholarships to graduating high school students.

Thanks to Carol for scanning and printing copies of the Society's incomplete collection of Fair "Souvenir Programs." If you have old Fair programs you would like to donate or allow the Society to copy digitally, please contact Carol Mahler at 863-445-0789 or desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

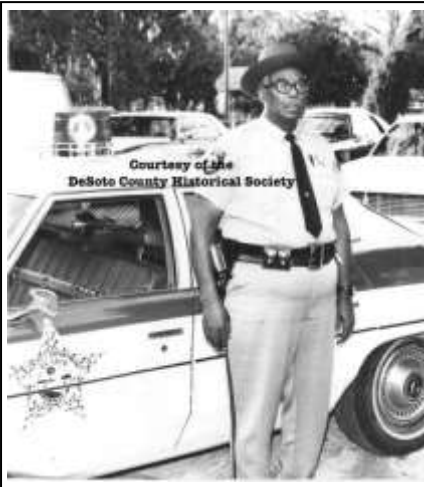
The DeSoto County Historical Society's monthly meetings will be suspended. There will be no meetings for now as we choose to follow recommended social gathering suggestions and suspend our meetings until we are told it is safe to resume.



—photos by Carol Mahler.
More DeSoto County Fair photos pg. 5

Black History Month

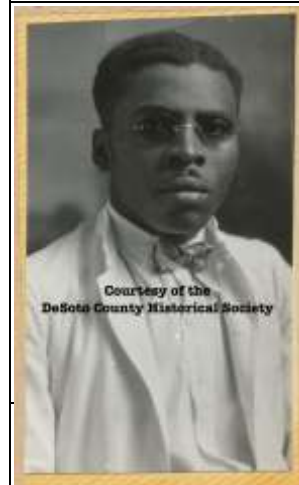
First recognized by the U.S. Government in 1976, Black **History Month began as “Negro History Week”** in honor of the February birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. Dr. Carter G. Woodson established the commemoration in 1926 to change the custom of excluding African-Americans and their achievements in the educational curricula of the time. Some outstanding African-American Arcadians include George Brown, Minnie Brown, William Burton, Thomasena Floyd, Eugene Hickson, and Clarence Walton.



DeSoto County Deputy Sheriff George Brown served as Florida's first African-American Deputy Sheriff, and was honored as such by DeSoto County in 1987 and by the Florida State Legislature in 1988.

Minnie L. Brown owned **Brown's** Funeral Home and donated land for the activity building named in her honor at Elizabeth Missionary Baptist Church.

Courtesy of the
DeSoto County Historical Society



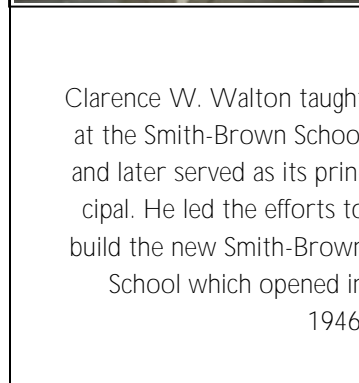
Owner and operator of **Burton's** Barber Shop, William Burton worked for voting rights, so that African-Americans in DeSoto County would be able to vote.



Thomasena Floyd worked in DeSoto County schools for 45 years. With Hattie J. Allen, she co-edited the **“History of Smith-Brown School (1892-1950).”**



Owner of Hickson Funeral Home, Eugene Hickson was the first African-American elected to **Arcadia's City Council** and to serve as Vice-Mayor and Mayor of the City of Arcadia.



Clarence W. Walton taught at the Smith-Brown School and later served as its principal. He led the efforts to build the new Smith-Brown School which opened in 1946.



The Arcadia Community Local newspaper that began as an online publication on Thanksgiving, 2020, had its first print issue on Jan. 21, 2021, featuring on the front page Carol Mahler's article about the HCW Foundation's celebration/commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Day! Her history of phosphate mining in DeSoto County was also published inside. Print copies are available every Thursday in *The Peace River Shopper* red distribution boxes. You can also listen to Carol talk about local history from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m., on Thurs., Feb. 25, with Mark Anderson on his "Mark in the Morning Show" on 104.5 Classic Country radio station.

A Message From The President

Another month has come and gone, but COVID-19 is still with us. January had the highest number of new cases so far, which has been attributed to the number of people traveling during the holidays despite warnings by the CDC not to. Now, there are new strains that are more infectious and potentially more deadly. Current figures reveal 1,687,594 positive cases in Florida, requiring 71,535 hospitalizations and causing 26,035 deaths. DeSoto County has 3,322 cases with 243 hospitalizations and 66 deaths. The Society extends our sympathy to all families who have lost a loved one.

I was lucky and was able to get my first vaccination. I was one of the last of 500 to get in, and I waited five hours. My wife has not been as lucky. She waited in line last week, only to be turned away as the supply had run out. She called the number provided to make an appointment all day, but all she ever got was a busy signal.

Since the pandemic still makes it unsafe to gather, all indoor Society functions remain suspended for now. However, we do hope to have the Museum open again in March. To keep up with the latest Society news, check us out on our Web site or Facebook page.

Speaking of March, the Board voted to hold Pioneer Day this year, but with several changes. The biggest change is that we will have a **co-event with the Arcadia American Legion's** Antique Tractor and Hit & Miss Engine Show, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., the fourth Saturday, March 27 not on the grounds of the Turner Center. To help prevent the spreading of COVID-19, the festival will have no **"hands on" exhibits or entertainment**, and attendees will be requested to wear masks. For further information, please read the articles in this newsletter. My biggest concern is the need for volunteers for Pioneer Day, so please, if you are able, volunteer to help. We will be setting up on Friday, March 26, and disassembling after the event on Saturday. Since this event will be held outdoors, it should be fairly safe. So please mark your calendar, plan to attend, and spread the word.

In case you forgot, membership dues are payable in January. A review of our roster reveals several of you who haven't paid yet. I hope that this is an oversight, as we don't want to lose you. Our organization is vital to the preservation of the history of DeSoto County, and we need the support of our membership to do this important work. So please, if you haven't already done so, pay your dues! I also noticed that we have some new members, and to them, I say welcome and thank you for joining us! I want to thank those who also made donations. It is through your dues, gifts, and our fund-raising events like Pioneer Day that we are able keep our organization afloat.

Historical Society Newsletter Sponsors

- Jan. - Alvie Davidson in memory of his parents, Ollie & Mary Lee Davidson
- Feb. - J.R. Griffis & Jeff Griffis in memory of their beloved, Nancy Webster
- March - Dale, Patty & Sue in loving memory of our parents, Howard & Velma Melton
- April - Warren & Arlene Conley in memory of Hazel & Leo Williams
- May - Marshall and Hazel Whidden in memory of our parents, Marshall and Barbara Whidden, and our beloved son Douglas Marshall Whidden
- June - Michelle, Dan, & Dow in loving memory of our parents, Eddie & Iris Garner
- July - Ruth Dunn in loving memory of her late husband, Rudolph Dunn.
- Aug. - Charlotte Hill Carter in loving memory of her husband, Frederick Lawrence Carter
- Sept. - Marguerite & Tom Hankins in memory of Mr. & Mrs. T.J. Pipkin (Pip & Alison Pickard Pipkin)
- Oct. - People for Protecting Peace River
- Nov. - Betty Hall Wood in memory of her late husband, G. Pierce Wood, Jr.
- Dec. - The McLeod children in memory of their Dad, Harold McLeod

I will close by once again expressing my heartfelt gratitude to all of those on the front line of this pandemic and thereby risking their own lives. The doctors, nurses, support staff at the hospitals, health departments, emergency responders, firefighters, law enforcement personnel and those serving in the Armed Services, here and abroad are all heroes in my mind, and I hope that you feel the same way. Although I have been vaccinated, I will not let down my guard and will continue to follow CDC guidelines. I hope that you will do the same.

Until the next time, please stay smart, stay home, and stay safe!
May God bless and keep us all safe,

Lewis H. Parker IV
President, DeSoto County Historical Society

Pioneer Day & BBQ 2021

The Society's Board of Directors voted to partner with the Arcadia American Legion to hold Pioneer Day 2021 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sat., Mar. 27, on the grounds of the Turner Agri-Civic Center. The Legion will sponsor an Antique Tractor and Hit & Miss Engine Show with plenty of machines and associated "flea market" in front of the Exhibition Hall.

Between the Turner Center's paved parking lot and the retention pond, the Society will hold a socially-distanced, with-face-coverings, Pioneer Day 2021, in centennial commemoration of Arcadia General Hospital in 2020 and County Division in 2021. Our usual BBQ vendors will be preparing their delicious BBQ with sides, but we will not have any entertainment in an effort to prevent people from "gathering."

Instead of hands-on activities that may spread COVID-19, the Society will offer children the chance to have their "Passport to the Past" stamped and their names entered into a drawing for gifts. We will need volunteers for the following tasks: to help with demonstrations of pioneer skills and crafts, to "stamp" the passports, to sell bottled water, and more. Please consider donating a few hours to helping us preserve and promote the history of DeSoto County, Florida, for future generations!



Save the date!
DeSoto County Historical Society's 16th/17th Annual
Pioneer Day
*in centennial commemoration of
Arcadia General Hospital in 2020
and DeSoto County's Division Into Five Counties in 2021*
March 27, 2021
P.O. Box 1824, Arcadia, FL 34265 • 863-266-5774
desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com
www.historicdesoto.org • Like us on Facebook!
with the Arcadia American Legion sponsored
Antique Tractor and Hit & Miss Engine Show*
9 to 4 on the grounds of the Turner Agri-Civic Center, 2250 NE Roan St.
*Contact Ronald Jones, Sr.: 941-806-7108 or jonespin11@yahoo.com
or Arthur Southwell: 863-990-8906 or asouth42@embarqmail.com

Upkeep of Society Property

John Morgan Ingraham House Bathroom

Thanks to Stuart Swanberg, Sr., Pastor of Victory Baptist Church, located in the old St. Paul's Catholic Church across the street from the Museum, for some much needed muscle assistance. On Sat. Jan. 2, he, his sons Stuart, Jr., and Shayne, plus their friend Christopher Hicks, helped Carol Mahler reinstall the non-working commode and clawfoot tub in the Museum bathroom after the floor was refinished and the walls painted by Lewis Parker and Tommy Parker. Reseating the bowl of the commode was a challenge, but Carol crawled under the floor to shine a flashlight up through the holes to make them easier to locate. We appreciate all their efforts!



Gratitude for Gifts

Memorial Stone for Frances Pooser (1918-2019)

Thanks to everyone who donated funds in honor of Frances Pooser who died two months after her 101st birthday. At her request, the Society had purchased and installed a flag and flagpole in front of the John Morgan Ingraham Museum to commemorate her centennial birthday. Now, the Society used some of the funds donated to purchase a memorial stone to mark the flagpole. Thanks to Bill Wooten for designing and delivering the monument.

A dedication of the stone with Frances' nephew and his wife, grand-niece, and great-grand-niece will be scheduled for a future date.



Above and left—Bill Wooten with memorial stone.

Below and lower left—more DeSoto County Fair photos—

Cindy McLeod Ely and Keith Wallace set up **the Society's** exhibit,

Sydalee Parker bags fake cotton candy.

—photos by Carol Mahler



COVID-19 Vaccine info

To be added to the local waiting list, seniors over 65 should call 863-491-5335 during regular business hours. Call Center staff can assist from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

A statewide registration platform is now available. Go to: <https://myvaccine.fl.gov/>

Select DeSoto County and then click GET IN LINE and enter your information.

Nocatee Old Timers Reunion cancelled by Luke Wilson

For the first time since its inception, the annual Nocatee Old Timers Reunion will not take place. The reason, understandably, is COVID 19, which has affected nearly every facet of life known to mankind. Members of the reunion committee made a mutual decision via e-mail to pull the plug, regrettably.

Nobody seems to be able to agree on just how long the reunion has been going on. Some say about 50 years, and some will tell you around 75 years, but the only thing they all agree on is that it was founded on Peace River. Old friends Leon Waters and Clyde Kelly and maybe one or two more got together once upon a time, catching some fish on the river and cutting swamp cabbage to cook and enjoyed a meal there. The story goes that one of them declared that they should do this again, and invite more old friends. And so the reunion began.

It was held at Sapp Lake* by the river, near the community of Hull for many years, and was unofficially called the Nocatee Men's Old Timers Reunion, and the only participation by Nocatee women/wives was that they could prepare dishes and desserts to send to the gathering. That went on for many years, until the reunion was moved to the Nocatee Civic Center, and in 1996 the women came to join in, and they have been part of it ever since.

The teams of cooks that have cooked chicken and ribs have changed multiple times over the years, and there are way too many men to try to name, and the same goes for the reunion committee. The civic center fell into disrepair, and the reunion was relocated to Nocatee Baptist Church in 2003, and returned to the civic center in 2010. It is held there on the second Saturday of February each year.

Nearly all of those who attended the early meetings have passed away, and ensuing generations are taking their place. Gatherings have seen as many as 250 present, and it's been like a family reunion each time, with old friends spending the day reminiscing about old times. It is sad that there'll be no reunion in 2021, but the committee has high hopes of it returning next year.



**Sapp Lake was the site of Hoist No. One where they first unloaded phosphate from the barges by cable car onto narrow-gauge railroad cars and was then carried to Hull for processing. My Dad, Sam Reynolds, told me that Victor "Vic" Sapp farmed a pond near the lake one year when it was dry, which was then named after him; i.e., Sapp Lake.*

—John Reynolds



Here are a few photos taken at the Nocatee Old Timers Reunion gatherings. One was taken down on Peace River and shows old friends gathered around a table near the grills, another was taken years later at the Nocatee Civic Center and features J.G. "Shorty" Bragdon being flanked by two of our society's early members, Berndetta Whidden Johnson, and Nell Gammage, and the third features reunion founder Leon Waters with Ernest "Doc" Cowart. All are deceased.

—photos provided by Luke Wilson