



DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

March 2021

This issue sponsored by Dale, Patty & Sue in loving memory of our parents, Howard & Velma Melton

In centennial commemoration of Arcadia General Hospital in 2020 and Division of DeSoto County in 2021!

16th-17th Annual

DeSoto County Historical Society's

Pioneer Day & BBQ!



9 a.m. to 4 p.m., March 27, 2021
with the Arcadia American Legion sponsored Antique Tractor and Hit & Miss Engine Show
Turner Agri-Civic Center
2250 NE Roan St., Arcadia

- Arcadia Abnuttin Coker Bake Sale
- Bodacious BBQ & traditional Florida foods
- Demonstrations of Old-Fashioned Skills & Crafts
- Civil-War Weapons Demonstrations
- Florida Cracker Cow Camp & Whip Crackers
- Old-time Music Jam
- Florida Authors and Artists
- Classic Firetruck and Fire Hose demo
- Antique automobiles, animals, and more!

James Mitchell "Aerofoot" Johnson (1850-1922) Nearly seven feet tall & 250 lbs., "Aerofoot" was named for his size—14 shoe or for walking 150 miles round-trip to deliver the mail from Fort Ogden to Fort Meade.

Thanks to our Silver Sponsors:
A-Plus Environmental Restoration & Alico, Inc.

FREE ADMISSION! Parking \$5.00 per vehicle.
www.historicdesoto.org — 863-266-5774 — Like us on Facebook!

Pioneer Day needs you!

We are counting on all our members and friends to help make our combined 2020/2021 event a success. Even if you are not attending in-person events, will you bake some cookies or brownies? (See details on pg. 4) Will you help spread the word by telling friends and neighbors about our event?

The DeSoto County Historical Society's 16th/17th Annual Pioneer Day will be socially distanced this year, encourage the wearing of face coverings, and commemorate the centennial anniversary of Arcadia General Hospital and DeSoto Divided Into Five Counties: Charlotte, DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, and Highlands. We have a new location, the grounds of the Turner Agri-Civic Center, 2250 NE Roan St., and are partnering with the Arcadia American Legion sponsored Antique Tractor and Hit & Miss Engine Show.

Finger-licking, mouth-watering, tastebud tingling BBQ tops the menu along with other traditional and Florida foods, such as strawberry shortcake. Our demonstrators—butter churning, for example, and a traditional cow camp—and vendors of unique handmade items will be spread out in the large field in front of the Turner Center. As children learn about the past, their "passport" will be rubber stamped, and a completed passport will enter them into a drawing for a free Pioneer Day t-shirt.

Contact Information

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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.

Celebrate March as Women's History Month!



Courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society

In 1894, Nevada "Neva" Chase Child (1850-1937) moved from Pueblo, CO, to Bowling Green, FL, where she started *The DeSoto County Champion* newspaper and then moved it to Arcadia the following year.



Courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society

An attorney, Iris Bell (1917-1994) published two books: *Backward Glances* about her family and *Los Alamos WAACS/WACS: World War II 1943-1946* about the development of atomic bomb. She served as the Society's president 1990-1991. Residing at 227 N. Brevard Ave., the Bell family, from left, back row: Douglas, Judge W. D. Bell, his wife Blanche Williams, and Iris Bell; front row: Wally, Evelyn, Rudyard, and Edith.



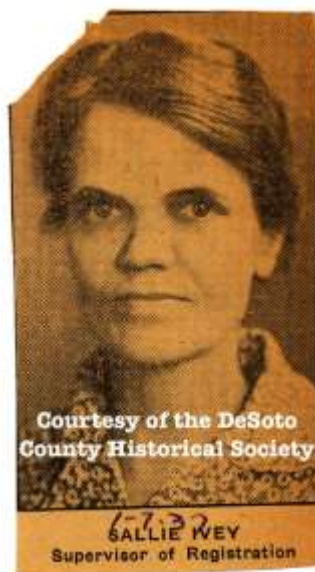
Courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society

Leota Caruthers Dozier (1900-1980) moved from Texas to Arcadia, received her degree in English from Florida State College for Women (now FSU), and taught at DeSoto County High School. She and her students also did oral history interviews.



Courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society

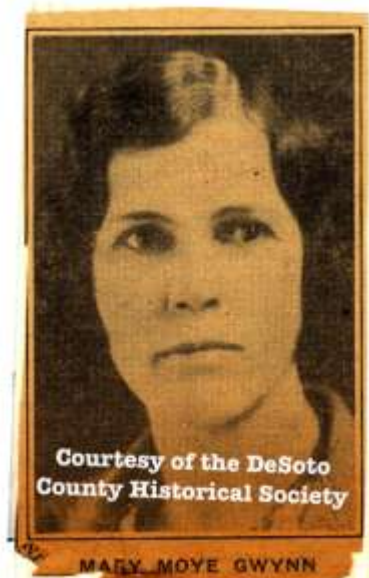
Adella "Della" Whidden Robertson (1868-1952) served from 1927 to 1936 as Supervisor of Registration. She also owned and operated a boarding house.



Courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society

SALLIE IVEY
Supervisor of Registration

Sallie Ivey (1886-1987) served from 1937 to 1956 as Supervisor of Registration, now known as Supervisor of Elections. Born in Valdosta, GA, she moved to Arcadia in 1895 and began as public stenographer and bookkeeper in 1915.



Courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society

MARY MOYE GWYNN

Mary Elizabeth Moyer Gwynn (1883-1952) served from 1937 to 1945 as Clerk of Court, and she had worked in the Clerk's office since 1910 before being elected.

Celebrate March as Florida Archaeology Month!

by Carol Mahler

March is Florida Archaeology Month, and DeSoto County has plenty of archaeology to celebrate. The Society successfully nominated the Pine Level 40-acre townsite to the National Register of Historic Places in 2014. It is one of **Florida's seven Reconstruction-Era sites.**

After the U.S. Civil War, Pine Level was established as the county seat. It had nothing to recommend it—no river or railroad or roads, but it was the geographical center of old Manatee County that comprised the present-day counties of Charlotte, DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Highlands, Manatee and Sarasota.

When DeSoto was formed of Manatee's eastern half in May 1887, Pine Level served as the new county's seat of government until the voters chose Arcadia in November 1889. After that, Pine Level began a slow decline, and all that is left of the once thriving town is the Pine Level Methodist Church.

Arrowheads appeared among the artifacts collected from the townsite to prepare the National Register Nomination. They indicate that Native Floridians used this area. In fact, the county has several Native American burial mounds, the most well-known located near Indian Mound Cemetery, aka the Keen Family Cemetery in Pine Level.

In addition, people have found fossils of ancient creatures—such as the giant ground sloth—for centuries **giving the name “Bone Valley” to the Peace River Valley.** One of the earliest recorded discoveries was in 1849 when George Payne moved his store from Charlotte Harbor to his **namesake creek and saw “the skeleton of a mastodon . . . exposed on the river bank,” as noted by Canter Brown, Jr., in *Florida's Peace River Frontier.*** Many such treasures have been excavated over the years, and some are now in the collection of the Florida Museum of Natural History in Gainesville. For information about who owns the fossils in Florida, check online:

<https://floridadep.gov/fgs/geologic-topics/content/florida-fossil-collecting>



Photos by Carol Mahler

A Message from the President

Dear Friends,

COVID-19 has been with us for over a year now and still dominates the headlines. Current figures reveal that Florida has 1,885,661 positive cases, with 78,472 hospitalization and 30,340 deaths. DeSoto County has 3,712 cases with 269 requiring hospitalization and 72 deaths. The Historical Society extends our condolences to all of the affected families. However, it does appear that we may have finally turned the corner. For the first time in months, the number of new cases has been dropping, and more people are getting vaccinated. While I believe that we are finally on the right track, it is still not over, so we need to remain vigilant and continue to follow all recommended CDC guidelines.

I don't know about you, but I'm ready for a change, and I am getting excited about our 16th/17th Annual Pioneer Day and BBQ! This event will be held outside, and CDC guidelines will be observed, so this should be a safe event for all. We were able to rent the restrooms and pavilion in the front of the Turner Agri-Civic Center eliminating the need for portable

Continued next page—

Message from the President—Continued from previous page

toilets and wash stations, as well as providing shelter in the case of inclement weather. We still need sponsors, vendors, and most of all, volunteers. If you are able to help in any way, please call me at 863-990-0273. Plain and simply, our success is dependent on volunteers, and we need all the help we can get. If you are unable to help, consider the possibility of a monetary donation. At the very least, plan to attend, and help spread the word! A copy of the Pioneer Day flyer is included in this newsletter—please find a place to post it and/or give a copy to a family member, friend, or neighbor.

As always I am thankful to the front line workers in this pandemic. By this time, we all know who they are, so I will not reiterate. Nonetheless, they are all heroes and deserving of our gratitude and praise.

See you at Pioneer Day! Until then, 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

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

REMAIN CLOSED

Arcadia Albritton Coker Bake Sale



In honor of Arcadia Matilda Albritton Coker (1860-1932), the woman who had a town named for her because she baked a birthday cake, the Society will have a bake sale at Pioneer Day. We need volunteers to bake cookies and brownies and other items that can be packaged as individual servings and to bring their items to the Historical Research Library from 2 to 4 p.m. on Thurs., March 25. Please call Linda Keen at 863-990-7953 and tell her what you will be baking. *Thanks!*

**Virtual Lemon Bay Fest:
*Englewood history with a little zest!***

Sponsored by Sarasota County's Elsie Quirk Library and the Englewood-Charlotte Library, the Lemon Bay Festival was a virtual event this year because of concerns about the spread of COVID-19. Every year, the week-long event chronicles and celebrates the history of Englewood and ends with the Lemon Bay Historical Society's Annual Cracker Fair, canceled this year because of the virus. As part of the program, Carol Mahler presented "Englewood Area History in Poems," and her presentation can be viewed at:

<https://youtu.be/IXhXfpdbDWM>

DeSoto County Historical Society
Thanks our Sponsors **Please support them!**

Norma & Marsha • Cindy Ely • Arcadia Woman's Club • Arcadia Garden Club • Karen Smoke • Mary Margaret's Tea & Biscuit • Lewis Parker • Stella Parker • Franklin's Nail & Spa • Jesse D'Aurora • Wingman Aviation • Susan Kuczenska

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

DeSoto County Fair Exhibition Hall Theme First Place Award

Congratulations especially to Cindy McLeod Ely for her design for the exhibit at the DeSoto County Fair that won Exhibition Hall Theme Competition First Place! We also appreciate Cindy, Carol Mahler, and Stella Parker for cleaning up the **Society's exhibit after the Fair closed on Feb. 6, and to Kathy Bryce and Carol for cleaning all the banners and signs.**



Gratitude for Gifts

The Society thanks the following people for their generous donations: Laurie Baker for digital files of old newspaper articles about the Rupert Smith family; Jackie Bierman for a 2020 DeSoto County Fair program and allowing the Society to scan a 2019 program; Cindy McLeod Ely for a palmetto scrubber with information card plus two pine needle baskets; Dale Melton for 6 floppy disks and 4 CDs with the digital files **of his father's two books recorded on them; Jerald Newberry** for nine binders full of historical material, including the Arcadia Historic District, Brownville School, DeSoto County walking tour, Ingraham House, National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Oak Hill Baptist Church, and more; Barbara Nicholson for old photos and documents collected by her mother-in-law Doris Cato Nicholson plus a treasure of Nicholson genealogical material; Lewis Parker and Stella Parker for donating a roll of white plastic tablecloth material, a roll of paper tablecloth, a roll of newsprint, a small wooden shelf and 8 old medicine bottles, woven wood clothes hamper and laundry basket, and more.



The DeSoto Arts Center invites Historical Society members to view the gallery at 209 West Oak St. on March 6, 2021 from 1 to 3 p.m. The Victor Amemiya Gallery honors his generous gift with a special section devoted to his scratchboard art. We have renovated the space with paint, lights, and a special hanging system. The walls are full of paintings, photography, stained glass and several cabinets contain jewelry, baskets and crafts. DAC members are invited to bring their art so we can showcase their creativity and be an asset to our community. The gallery is open every Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; and on March 6 we will be open until 3 p.m. with drinks and snacks. We look forward to seeing our old friends, covid protocols apply.

RSVP at <https://www.desotoartscenter.org/pizza-party>

Amber Collins—President Jimmy Peters—Vice-President Joan Cranor—Secretary

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