



DeSoto County Historical Society

PAST • PRESENT • FUTURE
ARCADIA, FLORIDA

DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

www.historicdesoto.org

April 2023

This issue sponsored by - **Arlene Conley** in loving memory of my husband, **Warren Conley**, and my parents, **Leo and Hazel Williams**.



Pioneer Day 2023 THANKS

Our 19th Annual Pioneer Day was a huge success thanks to all who Sponsored, Volunteered and Participated!

Hats off to the Arcadia Garden Club who came through with not only a fabulous plant booth, but at the last minute they took

—Continued next page



Member Meeting:

*****NOW ON THIRD MONDAY*****

Monday, April 17

**DeSoto Memorial Hospital -
McSwain Room**

Room open at 11:30 a.m.

Meeting 12 noon

Son of Owen Keen and Lillie Mae Carlton Keen, **Vernon Keen** and his two brothers grew up in Duette in Manatee County. He will talk about his early years and attending the five-room Duette School built in 1930, now a Museum listed since 2018 in the National Register of Historic Places.

Please arrive early so you can go through the line ahead of the hospital employees.

Parking is currently tight due to construction—please park where you find space available away from the hospital entrance if you are able to walk the distance.



—Continued from front page

Pioneer Day 2023 THANKS

on providing the Strawberry Shortcake! It is so wonderful to see other organizations GROW and thrive through joining us as we celebrate our history and our community.

This is the third year we have partnered with the Arcadia American Legion to put on a show with lots of features to attract a crowd. Many other organizations collaborated with us to spread their message about their role in our community.

Pioneer Day Banners

We appreciate Carol Mahler for asking for—and receiving—permission for the Society to display our Pioneer Day banners at eight locations. We are grateful to Bill McGavic and Keith Wallace for installing the banners at Fenders Auto Parts, Peace River Campground, Sevigny Eye Associates, across S.R. 70 from Lake Katherine, and west of the SuperMatt Laundry on S.R. 70. We thank Carol for hanging the banners at the fences around Maassen Oil, Rogers Oil, and the Turner Center, and to her and Kathy Bryce for placing our 18” x 24” signs. Our thanks, also, to Carol, Jahna Leonard, and Dave Hutchinson for taking down the banners, and to Carol for collecting the signs.

**More Pioneer Day Thanks on page 5
and more Photos on back page**

Thank you to our 19th Annual Pioneer Day Sponsors!

Please thank our sponsors for supporting The DeSoto County Historical Society when you do business with them.

Bronze Sponsors: \$500

Copart
MyShelly’s Kitchen
Peace River Electric Cooperative

Event Sponsors: \$250

A+ Environmental Restoration
Arcadia Stockyard
Arcadia Centennial Lions Club
Cowpens, LLC
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Paul Bennett Seusy
People for Protecting Peace River
Performance Automotive
Rotary Club of Arcadia
Wellpath Recovery Solutions

Entertainment Sponsor: \$100

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Peace River Tax Services
Rene Collins
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Ruth Reynolds Dunn
Sheriff Jim and Michelle Potter
Smith’s Ranch and Garden
Steve and Allison Flint
United Country / Gulfland Real Estate

Victory Baptist Church
White Sands Construction
William and Susan Pooley
Williamson Group Realty - \$150

Friends of the Society: \$25

Ann and Hans Bursa
Arcadia Garden Club
Arlene Conley
Asena Mott
Dr. Sharon Goodman
Ellen Hutson
In Memory of Charles J. Mahler
James D. Brewer
Jenny and Charlie Tanner
Jerod Gross
Jim Dooley
John Olin
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Marshal Quinn Jones
Morgan Stanley
Norma and Marsha
Tim and Cathy Carpenter
Valerie Sciarretta
The Valley Florist
Vernon and Linda Keen
Wingman Aviation

In Kind Donations

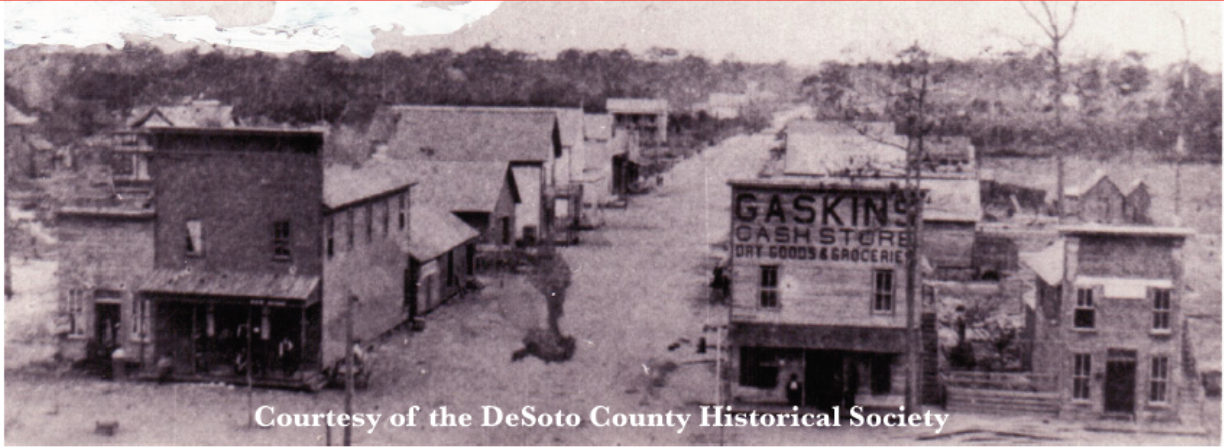
A+ Environmental Restoration
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DeSoto Signs
Fussell Meats
Joshua Citrus
Peace River Shopper
Publix-Arcadia Crossroads
Victory Baptist Church



Celebrate Earth Day Using Your Senses!

- Smell, taste, and touch some Florida native plants that the pioneers used for food, medicine, and materials
- Make rubbings of leaves and stems.
- Make a simple seed-starting pot to take home.
- Enjoy an exhibit in the library's conference room curated by the DeSoto County Historical Society and a third-grade class at West Elementary School
- Plant the seed of a Florida native plant and go fossilizing @ the DeSoto County Library.

10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., April 22, DeSoto County Library, 125 N. Hillsborough Ave., Arcadia



Courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society

Discover History In Downtown Arcadia: Let's Go On a Scavenger Hunt!

- Start at Old City Hall to learn about the fire that devastated downtown Arcadia in 1905 and try out a bucket brigade—one of the methods used to extinguish the fire.
- Go on a scavenger hunt using a virtual or paper list of details to discover history on and in the buildings on Oak St., Monroe Ave., and Polk Ave.
- Take a “selfie” at a special “Selfie Station” in the Tree of Knowledge Park.
- Discover more history in the Amazing Race @ the DeSoto County Library!

10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., April 29, Start Your Discovery at 121 W. Hickory St., Arcadia

Make Memories With Your Family @ The DeSoto County Library!

- April 21, 3:15 p.m. - Cooking with All Faiths
 - April 22, 10:30 a.m. - Love Your Earth, Get Kinder Ready, Parents As Teachers, Bridge the Gap
 - April 25, 3:15 p.m. - Engineer A Hovercraft
 - April 26, 3:15 p.m. - Kahoot! Family Trivia
 - April 27, 3:15 p.m. - Bounce Into Science
 - April 29, 10:30 a.m. - Amazing Race Scavenger Hunt
- 125 N. Hillsborough Ave. ~ 863-993-4851
myhlc.org/desoto-county-library

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Celebrate April As National Poetry Month
With
“A Pioneer Memory”

by Carol Mahler

The poem, “A Pioneer Memory” was written by Ed Johnson’s great aunt, Bessie Mae Lastinger Peeples, and we are only reprinting the first 13 stanzas. Ed wrote, The poem “was written circa 1930’s (after the death of her parents in 1930). It was published, and I have a copy of the original booklet (somewhere) in my files. . . . (Unfortunately, the transcriber has Aunt Bessie’s married name spelled incorrectly, the correct spelling is Peeples.) I remember her well; I have letters written by her dating back nearly 100 years ago. She was a school teacher.

“Born Thursday, September 10, 1885, Bessie Mae Lastinger married John Dozier Peeples in Zolfo Springs, FL, on Sunday, August 4, 1912. She died, on Thursday, July 7, 1966, and is buried at Mt Ephraim Baptist Church Cemetery in Owens.

“She was the seventh child born to Joshua Berrien and Louisa Green Bowden Lastinger, who homesteaded along the southern shore of Lake Stearns in 1890-91. Lake Stearns was later renamed Lake June-In-Winter. Lake Stearns was in DeSoto County until separated to Highlands County in 1921.”

Established by the Academy of American Poets, National Poetry Month reminds us “that poets have an integral role to play in our culture and that poetry matters. It has become the largest literary festival in the world” (<https://poets.org/national-poetry-month>). The Academy invites everyone to participate in a variety of activities as posted on their Website.

John Morgan Ingraham House Museum
300 N Monroe Avenue

MUSEUM OPEN:

9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Thursdays.

9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the second and fourth Saturday of the month.

**The Howard and Velma Melton Historical
Research Library in the Ingraham Seed House**
120 W Whidden Street

Open by appointment only:

Research assistance available. 863-266-5774

A Pioneer Memory

by Bessie M. Peeples

Said Father Josh to Mother Lou, “The hills are calling me,
My heart is fondly longing for a land that’s wild and free,
I heard that crystal lakes abound, ‘mong hills and hammock dells,
that homesteads there may now be had, by those that meanth well.

“So pack our small belongings, dress well the children, dear,
and with our faithful oxen-team, we’ll hie away from here.
We’ll take a homestead ‘mong the hills, away from noise and strife,
We’ll ask the Lord, our work to bless, and guide us on through life.”

For many days, sweet mother Lou, was busy here and there,
While gay and gleeful children, for the journey did prepare.
And then at last, the day arrived, a lovely Springtime day,
When fond farewell were said to friends, and the wagon rolled away.

Along the quiet country road, familiar scenes passed by,
Until the prairie came in view, where landscape met the sky.
One lonely group of stately pines, across the plain did rise.
‘twas here we planned to camp that night, and rest our weary eyes.

When at early dawning, the sun rose o’er the plain,
We quickly packed our camp things, and resumed our trek again.
Another day of travel, another day across the cattled plain,
Where miles of lovely flowers, waved like fields of ripened grain.

Again the sun passed overhead, and glided to the West,
Again a glowing campfire, and a night of peaceful rest.
At early morn we once again, behold the blazing sun,
And we knew that ere it rose again, we’d be a-nearing home.

We now had reached the timbered land, and next the lakes and hills,
Our faithful father blazed the trail, our hearts with gladness filled,
Said Father Josh to Mother Lou, “Guide well, the team, my dear,
For should they espy the lake so blue, we might have cause to fear.

Then Mother Lou, in apron white, so feminine and so sweet,
Sat primly up and drew the lines, to guide the oxen’s feet.
But now, alas, the thirsty steers the shimmering lake had espied,
And lifted high their horned heads, they ran in rapid strides.

“Oh, stop them! Stop Them! Joshua, dear, they’re headed for the lake!
As down the hillside steep they ran, dust rising in their wake.
Then climbing quickly to his seat, dear father seized the lines,
Then swung them around across the hill, just in the nick of time.

Three large oak trees, with branches spread, a kindly shelter made,
They also gave protection from the rain, also a welcome shade.
‘Twas here we loosed the oxen, the weary journey done,
On the beautiful shores of old Lake Stearns, eighteen hundred, ninety-one.

The stove was firm set in place, against a hickory tree,
The stove pipe wired to the body large, was as steady as could be.
The dining table next we set in place, upon the hillside steep,
We children found it very hard—food in our plates to keep.

But father was a carpenter, and his spirit leveler brought,
Which with his ingenuity, some needed changes wrought.
Next were the beds to set in place, with ends both up and down,
For should we roll into the lake, we knew we’d surely drown.

Cheesecloth nets were firmly stretched, from boughs of nearby trees,
The lively tune of mosquitoes said we’d have good need of these.
After a good hot supper and the evening prayers were said,
Seven tired and weary souls tumbled into bed.

(poem continues, this excerpt ends)

Appreciation For Amazing Volunteers!

The 19th Annual Pioneer Day was a success because of the incredible volunteers who worked to make it happen! Thanks to Kathy Bryce, Elizabeth Kenney, and Carol Mahler who worked on Thursday to pack up the items that had to be moved to the Turner Center, and to Jeff Griffis for bringing his truck and trailer on Friday morning to load everything with Carol and transport the items to the Turner Center.

We appreciate the Friday set-up crew of Norma Banas, Cindy McLeod Ely, Dave Hutchinson, Linda Keen (who folded all the passports!), Vernon Keen, Marsha Kransdorf, Carol, Sam McLeod (also for driving his truck and trailer), and Karen Smoke. Thanks to Arlene Conley, Ruth Reynolds Dunn, Piper Phillips, Stella Parker, and Sydalee Parker who helped later. We also appreciate assistance from the JROTC classes directed by Col. Ron Baynes and Sgt. Robert Newell. Norma, Marsha, Stella and Linda spent Friday afternoon and Saturday morning checking in the forty vendors and to be sure vendors were happy, Norma roamed all day Saturday between outside and inside on the cart Publix lent for her to use for the day.



—Photos in this newsletter by Karen Smoke unless indicated otherwise.

We are grateful to Kathy Bryce for inventorying and placing the order for Pioneer Day t-shirts—and then folding them and transporting them to Society’s booth along with Society caps, books, and postcards. She set up the booth, sold items all day, then packed it all up and took it home where she re-inventoried everything. We also appreciate her daughter Erin Hoffer who worked with Kathy and also at the sewing/quilting passport station. Thanks to the other volunteers at the booth: Arlene Conley, Ellen Hutson, and outstanding saleslady René Collins.

Thanks to Jahna Leonard who set out the passport stamps, and to her and Marsha for keeping everyone guessing at the General Store passport station. We are grateful for other passport station volunteers: Zane Dyal, Cindy, Ken Galt, Sue Galt, Allie Jane Griffin, Kathy Griffin, Jeff Griffis, Jackie Hampton, Dave, Elizabeth Kenney, Charlie Kerber,

Mason Kerber, Allison Mastrodonato, Adria Niklas, Anne Niklas, Marie Niklas, Paul Niklas, Peter Niklas, Stella Parker, Sydalee Parker, Piper Phillips, Karen Smoke and Lou Towne. We also appreciate our excellent whip-crackers: Zane Dyal, Jackie Hampton, and Mason Kerber.



—Photograph courtesy of Dan Sutphin.

We are grateful to Asena Mott for volunteering at the passport table and inviting the members of the DHS Interact Club to volunteer. We appreciate the two Interact Club members who volunteered: Evelin Barrera and Luz Hernandez. Past President Bebe Bradbury visiting from Tampa, stopped to help. Thanks to Linda Keen for also serving at the passport table and to Vernon Keen for providing transportation (via golf-cart) when needed. We are grateful to Nancy Erickson for handing out passports in the crowd.

Thanks to Greg Albritton, Dan Garner, and Tim Johnson for staffing the Florida Cracker Cow Camp and to Cindy for designing and setting up—with help from Steven Ames and Devin Young—a splendid new entry-way for the camp. We are grateful to Michael Haymans for giving a swamp cabbage demonstration at the camp.

We appreciate Bruce Neveau and Dennis Tyson for visiting from their new home in Georgia to collect the parking fee at the gate, and to Col. Baynes and his dedicated JROTC cadets for organizing the parking: Jair Arellano, Haley Burch, Nicholas Casteel, Anaysia Foreman, Ana Hernandez, Xander Heyne, Regina Hudson, Isabella Jablon (Bates), Selina Montes, Nicole Morgan, Katherine Orozco, Vincent Tew, Jimmy Valdez, Marisol Zamora, Joy Zhang, and Chaperone Wendy Moore.

We thank the following cadets for serving in the color guard for the opening ceremony: Jair Arellano, Anaysia Foreman, Katherine Orozco, and Marisol Zamora. We are grateful to Dr. Sharon Goodman for giving the invocation and to Terry Stewart for singing the National Anthem. We appreciate the musicians who donated their time and talent to the Society—John Bois, Keith Mathys, Steve Owens, and Rita Youngman—and to Carol for serving as emcee.

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We are grateful to Carol for making the display about Memorial Grammar School and the certificate of congratulations, and to Superintendent of Schools Dr. Bobby Bennet for accepting the certificate. Thanks to David Needs for impersonating Acrefoot Johnson, Carol for telling stories about him, and Jahna for impersonating Lydia Ann Albritton in a short skit with Carol. Thanks to Karen Smoke for designing the program, QR code for the program, sponsor banner for the stage, name badges for the volunteers, and so much more!

We are grateful to Cindy for cooking the hotdogs and to Stuart Swanberg, Jr., for setting up lunches for the volunteers, and to Keith Wallace and Vernon Keen for delivering the lunches to the parking crew. We also thank Keith for emptying trashcans and the recycling bins all day on Saturday and for fetching the sand for the fossil dig on Friday, plus shoveling it into the sandbox along with Dave and Vernon.

We appreciate Cindy for fetching the donations of four boxes of oranges from Joshua Citrus, six gallons of cream from Dakin Dairy, and hotdogs from Fussell Meats on Thursday. Thanks to Cindy for setting up the hands-on history area—especially the shelves for the general store—and for donating tent stakes and paper bags for the fossil dig.

Thanks to Jeff for driving his truck and trailer and Dave for driving his truck to transport everything back to the Museum and Research Library, and to the clean-up crew of JROTC cadets plus Alice Ames, Steven, Nancy, Cindy, Allie Jane, Kathy G. (also for driving her truck), Jahna, Carol, Sam (for driving his van and trailer), Adria, Anne, Marie, Paul, and Peter.

If we have forgotten to mention anyone, please know that your help did not go unnoticed or appreciated, but was unintentionally overlooked on this lengthy list of our invaluable helpers!

A Message From The President

Happy Easter. The air is full of sunshine and happy people. Arcadia is recovering thanks to all the cooperative people and agencies. The Historical Society just completed the best ever Pioneer Day. We could not have done well without the support of volunteers and wonderful sponsors. Vendors and visitors were happy and looking forward to next year.

A standing ovation for Carol Mahler without whom the Historical Society would not function nor Pioneer Day be as successful!!!!!!

Watch for your newsletter, as much is yet to come. Now that our meetings are on the third Monday of the month, we will be sending out the newsletter a few days after the first on the month. We have Remake Learning Days coming up on April 22 & 29—bring your young people, and/or volunteer to help. We are planning an open house at the Museum in May to celebrate National Historic Preservation Month—plus more great monthly programs. Join us monthly at our new meeting place at DeSoto Memorial Hospital. Do keep in touch.

Norma

Leadership DeSoto Tours With Carol & Kathy



—Photo provided by Carol Mahler

Thanks to Carol Mahler for giving a guided tour of McSwain Park, Tree of Knowledge Park, downtown Arcadia, and Lake Katherine Park to the Leadership DeSoto Class on March 15. We also are grateful to Kathy Bryce for giving the half of the class a tour of the John Morgan Ingraham House Museum while Carol entertained the other half with unusual artifacts. Then they switched groups, so everyone had a chance to tour the Museum and guess the artifacts. We are grateful to Courtney Jones and Gaby Becerra for inviting the Society to participate in the Community History and Culture Day.

Presentation to the Arcadia Garden Club

Thanks to Carol Mahler for presenting “Florida Plants That The Pioneers Used” to the Arcadia Garden Club at their meeting on March 6. Her combination of facts and storytelling was well-received, and the Club was delighted when she demonstrated how to prepare swamp cabbage thanks to a gift of a terminal bud of our Florida state tree from Michael Haymans. We are also grateful to Michael for doing a swamp cabbage demonstration at the Florida Cracker Cow Camp during Pioneer Day.

Featured "Sister" Society



Venice Area Historical Society

Visit The Depot

Tour the Historic Venice Train Depot and Circus Car

The Historic Venice Train Depot (303 E. Venice Ave., Venice FL 34285), built in 1927 and renovated in 2002-2003, was central to the founding and development of Venice, Florida. Volunteer docents from VAHS provide free public tours of the Depot and surrounding campus. Panel displays and artifacts in the Depot's two waiting rooms illustrate key events in Venice's history and the history of the Depot itself. Tours of the Circus Car and Train Depot are given on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Tours of the Depot start in the main waiting room. The length of tours can be tailored to your needs. In addition to docent-led tours, self-guided tours are an option. The Depot, Circus Car, and the caboose are accessible facilities. Donations are appreciated to help defray expenses. If you plan to bring a group of 10 or more people to the Depot, please call 941-412-0151 or e-mail depot@veniceareahistoricalsociety.org



For more information about the Depot, download this brochure:

[https://veniceareahistoricalsociety.org/resources/Documents/Depot%20Brochure%20September%202021%20\(Word\)%20edit-justified.pdf](https://veniceareahistoricalsociety.org/resources/Documents/Depot%20Brochure%20September%202021%20(Word)%20edit-justified.pdf)

Watch a 19-minute video of the Circus Train Car move to the Depot:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbSj7Uegrt4>

Historical Society Newsletter Sponsors

- Jan. - **Alvie Davidson** in memory of his parents, **Ollie & Mary Lee Davidson**
- Feb. - **Rene Collins** in memory of **Terry and Evelyn Collins**.
- March - **Dale, Patty & Sue** in loving memory of our parents, **Howard & Velma Melton**
- April - **Arlene Conley** in loving memory of my husband, **Warren Conley**, and my parents, **Leo and Hazel 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**

Contact Information

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Saturday—April 22 & 29

Lots of hands-on help is needed for **Remake Learning Days** ! Contact Carol Mahler, 863-445-0789

desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Text or leave a message on the Society phone: 863-266-5774



Thanks to Ron Jones and the American Legion K Post-11 for partnering with the Society in the 19th Annual Pioneer Day & BBQ! We are grateful to them for hosting the Florida West Coast Car Club Car Show of 44 vintage vehicles and hotrods as well as the Antique Tractor and Hit & Miss Engine Show with 18 vendors displaying 200 pieces of equipment.

—Photograph courtesy of Dan Sutphin.



Save the Date...
20th Annual
Pioneer Day
March 23, 2024