



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

May 2023

This issue sponsored by - Marshall and Hazel Whidden
in memory of our parents, Marshall and Barbara Whidden,
and our beloved son, Douglas Marshall Whidden

Celebrate May as National Historic Preservation Month!

Legislation to form the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) was signed into law by President Harry Truman in 1949. NTHP started National Historic Preservation Week in 1973 to recognize the significance and importance of historic resources—especially to local communities—and expanded the observance to a month-long celebration in 2005.

This year’s theme of “People Saving Places” is a “national high-five to everyone doing the great work of saving places—in ways big and small—and inspiring others to do the same.” Many people who work to save historic places use their energy, resources, and time to protect the “places they care about, often without recognition” (savingplaces.org).

Enhancing the quality of life and helping residents understand each other better, plus the diverse heritage of Florida are three benefits of historic preservation. The local economy also improves as historic properties and sites attract those living nearby as well as out of town to visit.

Downtown Arcadia—with its handsome brick and block buildings and unique history—draws residents and visitors for business, dining, shopping, and more.

Celebrate National Historic Preservation Month by learning about historical buildings in downtown Arcadia! Scan this QR code or visit the Museum for paper copy of the Discover History in Downtown Arcadia Scavenger Hunt.

Please take a “selfie” at one of the locations and send it to desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

Floridians can participate in this year’s National Historic Preservation Month efforts in the state by documenting historic resources in their own communities using the online form (floridadhr.wufoo.com/forms/preservation-month-historic-resource-form). Using the form, citizens can supply basic information about historic structures, such as their location, history, and photographic documentation of the resource. This effort aims to increase awareness about how historic resources in Florida are recorded and entered into the Florida Master Site File.



Member Meeting:

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

Monday, May 15

**DeSoto Memorial Hospital -
McSwain Room
Room open at 11:30 a.m.
Meeting 12 noon**

In honor of National Historic Preservation Month, Carol Mahler will talk about the City of Arcadia’s Historic Preservation Commission.

- 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.

Congratulations To Our Pioneer Day T-Shirt Winners!

Congratulations to Rosetta Detwiler, Jeana Wheeling, and Max Zinkand for winning Pioneer Day T-shirts! We thank all 85 children who completed their passports and entered the drawing for doing so, and we also appreciate everyone who had fun learning about the past with hands-on activities.

Arcadia Rotary Club Will Honor British Cadets

At 10:00 a.m., on Memorial Day, May 29, you are invited to witness an exceptional event: the Arcadia Rotary Club will again honor and remember the 23 British cadets buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery. The ceremony will include an invocation, speaker, raising the British and U.S. flag, and songs—some played on the bagpipes. The event is free and open to the public.

During World War I, the U.S. Army had built two aviation camps to train pilots: Carlstrom and Dorr Fields. They remained open to train pilots after Armistice Day, but were finally closed in the early 1920s. Having learned to fly at Carlstrom Field, John Paul Riddle remembered the location when the U.S. began to train pilots before the U.S. entered World War II.

The Dec. 5, 1940, “Arcadian” reported that “Arcadia was visited yesterday morning about 10:30 by a board of inspectors for the Air Corps of the U.S. Army . . . the purpose of the trip was to determine the advisability of granting permission, and the leasing of Carlstrom Field, for a privately-operated school of flying instruction for which application was recently made by J. P. Riddle of Miami, and a number of associates.”

Riddle built a new Carlstrom Field adjacent to the old site, and several hundred Britons learned to fly there. Two died—one of disease and the other in a mishap. All the British cadets who died while training elsewhere in southwest Florida are buried in “The British Plot,” in Oak Ridge Cemetery as commemorated on the historical marker installed there by the Rotary Club in 1968.

Florida Emancipation Day Is May 20

On Sept. 22, 1862, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln issued “The Emancipation Proclamation” stating “That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.” On Jan. 1, 1863, he signed the proclamation into law, but residents of the southern states did not know anything about it.

On April 9, 1865, Union General Ulysses S. Grant accepted the surrender of Confederate General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House in Virginia. Although the Confederate States of America (C.S.A.) was defeated, each state had to surrender before the Emancipation Proclamation could take effect.

The only state capital east of the Mississippi that was not captured by the Union was Tallahassee, Florida. On May 10, Brigadier General Edward M. McCook accepted Tallahassee from C.S.A. forces, and on May 20, he announced that the Emancipation Proclamation was in effect. That day’s train from Jacksonville also brought Special Order #63 signed by Major General Quincy A. Gillmore stating that “the people of the black race are free citizens of the United States.”

On May 9, DeSoto County’s Board of County Commissioners, and on May 15, the City of Arcadia Council will issue proclamations recognizing and celebrating May 20th as Emancipation Day or Freedom Day in Florida.



Earth Day Celebration: Plants That The Pioneers Used

As part of the Suncoast Campaign for Grade Level Reading Remake Learning Days Festival (April 21-30), the Society offered an Earth Day Celebration Focused on Plants That The Pioneers Used from 10:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. in the conference room of the DeSoto County Library. Families saw, smelled, tasted, and touched Florida native plants and learned how the pioneers used them. They also made a rubbing of the leaves of one of the plants and a simple seed starting pot made out of newspaper that they took to the library's children's wing where they filled the starting pot with dirt and planted a wildflower seed.

Thank you to volunteers René Collins, Nancy Erickson, Stella Parker, Sydalee Parker, Piper Phillips, and Carol Mahler who worked with the families and then cleaned up. We also appreciate Carol for preparing the materials and advertising the event. Thanks, too, to Cindy Ely for posting and sharing about the event on Facebook.

Between 40 and 45 people attended, and eleven adults filled out the surveys provided by the Patterson Foundation. All rated this as "excellent" except for one "very good." Nine surveys indicated that the family will "come back to this organization for other events." Eight surveys noted that the child had "learned a new skill" and seven surveys stated that the parent "learned something new for myself."

As April 22 was also a fourth Saturday of the month, we are grateful to Kathy Bryce and Jahna Leonard for staffing the Museum!

Gratitude For The Donations

The Society thanks the Patterson Foundation for their donation of \$2500.00 for the two Suncoast Campaign for Grade Level Reading Remake Learning Days events that the Society hosted as well as the \$500.00 donation for the participation of Carol and Cindy in the required "labinars."



At right, Nancy Erickson talked about—and offered samples of—elderflowers that the pioneers ate and used as medicine.



Above, Stella Parker shows how to make a simple seed starting pot from newspaper. Below, René Collins helps a girl make a rubbing of a leaf from a plant the pioneers used.





At right, Nancy Erickson teaches about the pitcher pump.



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

As part of the Suncoast Campaign for Grade Level Reading Remake Learning Days Festival (April 21-30), the Society offered Discover History In Downtown Arcadia from 10:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in downtown Arcadia on April 29—a fifth Saturday of the month! Families started in the grassy area to the south of old City Hall, 121 W. Hickory St., where they learned about the Thanksgiving Day Fire of 1905 that decimated downtown Arcadia and inspired shop owners to rebuild in block and brick resulting in our beautiful, historic downtown.



We appreciate Nancy Erickson for purchasing and donating small metal pails so that families could try out a “bucket brigade”—one of the ways that

Arcadians tried to extinguish the great fire. We also thank Eric for teaching families about the pitcher pump and the bucket brigade—plus help in setting up and cleaning up the event!

Thanks to Norma Banas and Marsha Kransdorf for being the “spotters” on Oak Street waiting to give assistance to any scavengers who had trouble finding their treasures and to Jahna Leonard for hosting the “selfie station” in the Tree of Knowledge Park. She collected the surveys, gave out stickers, and was a impromptu spokesperson for the Society garnering \$5.00 in donations from passersby!

We are grateful to Carol Mahler for writing the scavenger hunt, printing paper copies and working with Tonya Bordner to make a virtual version with a QR code, preparing and printing the selfie station signs and producing a symbolic downtown Arcadia on fire for the families to dowse in the bucket brigade. We also appreciate Carol and Jahna for setting up and cleaning up the event as well as Carol and Cindy Ely for publicizing the event.

Only 14 people participated in the event—including Kellie Alexander of the Patterson Foundation and her friend Caleb, and the three surveys all rated the event as “excellent.”

More Gratitude for Pioneer Day!

Thanks to Mac Martin for making a recording of his mother, Genie McSwain Martin, singing the Memorial School Song for us to play during the Centennial Celebration of Memorial Grammar School, now Memorial Elementary School.

We appreciate Jimmy and Susan Lanier for loaning the Memorial Grammar School bell for the centennial celebration. Although Carol Mahler forgot to ring it at the noon-time ceremony, she did use it to call everyone to attention during the Pioneer Day opening ceremony.

We are grateful to Lee Austin for copying his photograph of the “Wedding of the Flowers” performed at Memorial Grammar School in 1946 and sending it for Centennial Anniversary of Memorial Grammar School display at Pioneer Day.



Vernon Keen, left, and Dave Hutchinson craft a crate.



From left, Mike Spahr, Dante Wilson, and Sebastian Hull did a great job moving the crated boat from the Opera House to Myron Wickey's Wood Shop

Phosphate Tender: On The Move

In 1995 when Peace River had very little water, Hal Thompson, Howard Melton, Tommy Howard, and others unearthed a boat probably used by a phosphate mining company. It looks very much like the one in a historic photograph that was used as a “tender” to ferry workers from the shore to the phosphate dredge and back to shore again.

When the Society helped to set up a “museum” in the auditorium of the Heard Opera House, the boat was mounted on old metal wheels and installed on the stage where it had been ever since until Hurricane Ian. The storm blew out two of the large north windows in the auditorium plus the wall behind the stage. Workers moved the boat to safety and then to the downstairs shop once known as Doziers.

Thanks to Carol Mahler for fetching the materials to wrap and crate the boat, and to Dave Hutchinson for designing the crate and building it with help from Vernon Keen.

We are deeply grateful to Gardiner and Sons Moving and Storage, Inc., for their donation of moving the crated boat from Doziers to Myron Wickey's Wood Shop, and to Myron for donating storage of the boat until we can find a suitable place to display it. **Please contact Gardiner and Sons for your next move: (941) 423-5311 or online www.gardinerandsonsmoving.com.**



Message from President Norma Banas

Spring and summer are a bit more restful for us and gives us time for planning for the fall activities and spending time organizing and improving the Museum. It occurs to me that a too large number of Society members have never visited our Museum. In fact, I actually had a few tell me they did not know we had a museum. We are located just a block behind the post office on Whidden.

I challenge each and every member of the Society to stop by as soon as possible and maybe even bring a friend!

Hungry Goat Lawn Mowing:

Swan[berg] Song

The Society is grateful to Stuart Swanberg for mowing the lawn at the Museum and Research Library “one last time” before his family moves away from Arcadia this summer. We also appreciate all the effort, expertise, material, and time that Stuart and his family have donated to the Society. We especially appreciate that Stuart served on our Board of Directors. We will miss the Swanberg family and wish them well in their new home.

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 2nd and 4th Saturdays.

Closed on May 27

for the Memorial Day Weekend.

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.

MUSEUM CLOSED FOR THE SUMMER

The Museum and Research Library will be closed for the months of June, July, and August, so that our volunteers may clean and update the exhibits and research space. Research assistance and tours will

be available by appointment only:

please call Carol Mahler at 863-445-0789.

Historical Society Newsletter Sponsors

Jan. - Alvie Davidson in memory of his parents, Ollie & Mary Lee Davidson

Feb. - René 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

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