



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

March 2024

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

Pioneer Day – March 23 – we'll be looking for YOU!

Please gather with the Society to celebrate our county's history and heritage during the Society's 20th Annual Pioneer Day and BBQ with the Arcadia American Legion sponsored Antique Tractor and Hit & Miss Engine Show—plus United We Roll Car Club Car Show—from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Sat., March 23, at the Turner Agri-Civic Center, 2250 NE Roan St.

This family-fun festival will commemorate the centennial anniversary of the Arcadia Tourist Camp—now the City Mobile Home Park—and over 50 feet of historic photographs and other memorabilia will be on display. Society President Adrian H. Cline will present a certificate of congratulations to the City of Arcadia Mayor Robert W. Heine, Jr., during a centennial commemoration ceremony at noon.

The Society will also celebrate the centennial anniversary of the bridge over Peace River built in 1924 by the Luten Bridge Company as well as of the classic 1924 LaFrance fire engine owned by the City of Arcadia. It will be on display at the festival, and the DeSoto County Fire Department will have a fire hose demonstration and host an exhibit about how a fire destroyed downtown Arcadia in 1905.



Photo courtesy FDOT

DeSoto County Property Appraiser David Williams will have searchable digital copies of the historic tax rolls, and the DeSoto County Sheriff's office will present its history. Charlotte County Libraries and History Services, Mount Ephraim Baptist Church, Pine Level Church, and Sebring Historical Society will showcase their history, and other organizations will offer information about their work in the community.

Before 1949, cattle roamed freely through Florida's frontier, so cowmen camped on the prairie to accomplish their annual round-ups. Working and retired cattlemen will set up a traditional cow camp—complete with animals—and share their stories. Whip crackers will display their skill that gave rise to the name "Florida Cracker."

—Con't next page

Member Meeting:

Monday, March 18

DeSoto Memorial Hospital -

McSwain Room

Room open at 11:30 a.m.

Meeting 12 noon

How well do you know DeSoto County history? Put your knowledge to the test and play a lively game of trivia. You may just learn a thing or two. You will need a cell phone or other device with Wi-Fi to play this game that Tonya Bordner will present at the March meeting. Tonya and Carol Mahler wrote the questions, and Tonya designed the online trivia game for a family program at the library. A longtime teacher at West Elementary School and Society member, Tonya now works as the DeSoto County Children's Library Manager.

Play on your cell phone or other device with WiFi.

Presenter: Tonya Bordner, DeSoto County Children's Library Manager.



LOCAL HISTORY TRIVIA GAME

March 18

Meeting

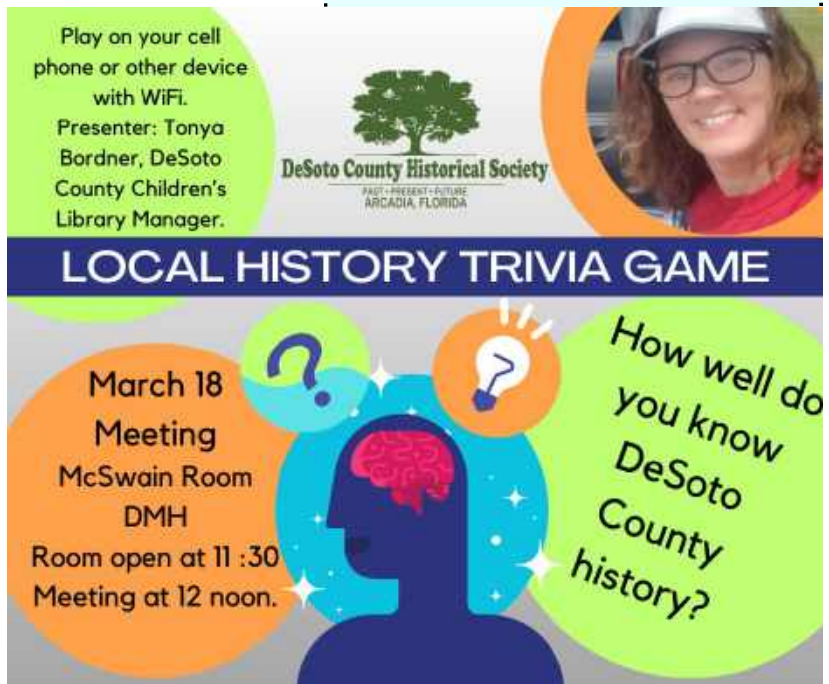
McSwain Room

DMH

Room open at 11 :30

Meeting at 12 noon.

How well do you know DeSoto County history?



—Con't from previous page

Pioneer Day – March 23 – we'll be looking for YOU!

During the opening ceremony, Dr. Sharon Goodman will sing the National Anthem while the DeSoto High School JROTC cadets present the colors, and the Rev. Jerry Waters will give the invocation. Musicians John Bois, George Hausman, Dennis Mader, Keith Mathys, Johnny Shannon, Vgo, and Rita Youngman—a member of the Seminole Tribe of Florida—will perform on the Turner Center stage.

Also making an appearance are legendary characters Arcadia Albritton Coker—the woman who had a town named for her because she baked a cake—and Acrefoot Johnson who walked 60 miles in one day to deliver the mail between Fort Ogden and Fort Meade.

Pioneer Day offers bodacious barbecue, luscious strawberry shortcake, home-baked goods, jams, jellies, and other tasty treats as well as traditional Florida foods, such as boiled peanuts.



Demonstrators will show off their pioneer skills in wood carving and crafting, toy making, tatting, spinning, rag-rug making, quilting, butter churning, and more—both inside and outside the Turner Center. The Hands-on History area will offer the opportunity for festival-goers to try some of those activities for themselves as well as old-fashioned games and a fossil dig.

Books by local authors, hand-crafted cottage goods, hand-painted ceramics, leatherwork, jewelry, organic soap, plants, wooden items, worm-casting compost and more will be available for purchase.

Pioneer Day embodies that old saying: “many hands make light work.” Please consider volunteering—no matter your age or ability, you can help preserve and promote the history of DeSoto County for future generations. Please contact Norma Banas at 863-558-6115 or email sanctuaryofarcadia@gmail.com.

See also the Pioneer Day Sponsor list on page 6.

Third Graders Enjoyed Hands-On History

Thanks to Jody South, a third-grade teacher at Memorial Elementary School, for contacting Carol Mahler about sharing local history with her students. Jody and Carol made arrangements for all seven classes of third graders to visit the Museum and participate in eight hands-on activities: making quilt patterns, juicing oranges with a reamer, washing clothes, using a pitcher pump, dialing a rotary telephone, stuffing the mattress, dip-pen writing, and typewriting. We are grateful that each student donated \$1.00 for a total donation of \$115.00 to the Society! The donation will pay the electric bill for the museum for one month.

We appreciate Carol for gathering all supplies and materials for the activities, and to Joshua Citrus for donating oranges for the students to squeeze. Thanks to Carol and Stella for setting up the Museum and Research Library for the hands-on activities, and to Jeff Griffis for mowing prior to the students' visit. We are grateful to those who volunteered to demonstrate the hands-on activities on Feb. 20 or Feb. 27 or both: Kathy Bryce, Adrian Cline, René Collins, Nancy “Eric” Erickson, Ken Galt, Susie Galt, Bobbie Mears, Pam Miller, and Keith Wallace, plus Carol Mahler for being the time keeper and moving the students from one activity to the next.



Students got to try their hand at many pioneer skills such as clothes washing and writing with a dip pen.

—Photos by Carol Mahler. More photos of the Memorial Elementary field trip on page 8.

A Message From The President

Dear Members of the DeSoto County Historical Society and the DeSoto Community:

We are thrilled to extend a warm invitation to you for the 20th Annual Pioneer Day, a cherished tradition that celebrates the rich history of DeSoto County. Join us on **March 23rd** from **9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.** at the **Turner Center**, for a day filled with learning, fun, and community spirit.

This year's Pioneer Day promises an array of activities designed to enrich your knowledge of our county's past and engage participants of all ages. From historical exhibits to hands-on experiences, there's something for everyone to enjoy.

Highlights of the Day:

- **Educational Activities:** Engage in interactive sessions and displays that bring our county's history to life.
- **Live Music:** Enjoy the sounds of local musicians as they provide a lively backdrop to the day's events.
- **Delicious Food:** Savor a variety of culinary delights available throughout the event.
- **Antique Tractor and Auto Show:** Marvel at the craftsmanship and history of vintage vehicles, sponsored by the Arcadia American Legion.
- **Hit and Miss Engine Show:** Witness the mechanical wonders of yesteryear with demonstrations of these fascinating engines, sponsored by the Arcadia American Legion.

Pioneer Day is more than just an event; it's a celebration of our collective heritage and a fantastic opportunity for families to explore and appreciate the history that shapes our community.

We look forward to welcoming you to this special occasion and creating memories that will last a lifetime.

Warm regards,

Adrian H. Cline, President

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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.**



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

Society At CCC Festival

Thanks to Nancy “Eric” Erickson and Karen Smoke for attending the CCC festival at Highlands Hammock State Park on Feb. 10. They gave out Pioneer Day flyers and sold some books and blanket flower seeds.

They had a beautiful display about Pioneer Day that Karen made last year and revived for this year. After the festival, the display then went to the DeSoto County Library—thanks to Karen—and finally



to the Joshua Citrus Grove Stand—thanks to Carol and Karen. We appreciate Library Director Linda Waters and Joshua Citrus Owner Lynn Shelfer for hosting the display at those locations.



—Photos by Karen Smoke

The Bounty of The County’s Past

We appreciate Carol Mahler for designing, setting up, and tearing down the Society’s booth at the DeSoto County Fair on display from Feb. 2 until Feb. 10. She added copies of historic newspaper articles announcing the largest crop or sale of the biggest herd to three display boards featuring some



history of the county’s citrus, cattle, and truck farming to try to fit the Fair’s annual theme: “Bounty of the County.” The booth also included information about the Society’s activities, publications, and—of course—Pioneer Day flyers.



The Society displayed some history of citrus, cattle, and truck farming plus information about its activities and publications at the DeSoto County Fair from Feb. 2 through Feb. 10.

—Photos by Carol Mahler

Guided Walking Tours of Historic Downtown Arcadia

We are grateful to Carol Mahler for offering guided walking tours of historic downtown Arcadia during Arcadia Main Street’s Oak Street Market from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Feb. 10. She gave one tour to a couple and then sent them to the Museum—plus directed other visitors to the Museum. Thanks to Stella Parker and Kathy Bryce for staffing the Museum and giving tours there.

Following the Arcadia Rodeo Parade on March 9, Carol will be offering guided walking tours until 12:30 p.m. during the Oak Street Market.

Carol Mahler stands by her stand offering guided walking tours of historic downtown Arcadia during the Oak Street Market on Feb. 10.

—Photograph courtesy of Briana Harris.



Edible Florida Native Plants at Community Day

Thanks to Carol Mahler for setting up a booth and displaying plants that the Florida pioneers used for food and medicine, and offering samples to visitors at the Community Day hosted by the Arcadia Housing Authority from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Feb. 16. She distributed Pioneer Day flyers to both visitors and other community organizations.



Carol Mahler offered samples of edible Florida native plants as well as information about the Society and Pioneer Day flyers at the Arcadia Housing Authority’s Community Day on Feb. 16. —Photo by Carol Mahler

Banking On The Past

We appreciate Carol Mahler for making an exhibit about the DeSoto National Bank of Arcadia for the display case in the lobby of Truist Bank, 10 S. DeSoto Ave. She scanned historic photographs, counter checks, and other documents plus she included some artifacts—such as a drawstring depot bag and a pencil topped with a wood football and printed with the DeSoto County High School football games for the 1964 season. Chartered in 1907 by W. G. Welles and his brother B. F. Welles, the DeSoto National Bank of Arcadia has had plenty of different

names over the years, including Sun Bank, Sun Trust, and now Truist. Located where the parking on Oak St. is today, the original building was torn down in 1974.



History of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church

Thanks to Pastor Louis C. Anderson, Jr., for attending the membership meeting on Feb. 19 and sharing the history of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, 304 W. Myrtle St., in Arcadia.

In 1910, the Reverend Oscar Middleton transformed a house that he owned on the corner of W. Myrtle St. and Hector Ave. into Friendship Missionary Baptist Church and served as pastor. The church’s founding members were Middleton, the Rev. Willie Bell, the Rev. William Robinson, Deacon Herbert Carlton, and Sister Emma Griffin.

After the death of Middleton, the Rev. Willie Bell became pastor, followed by the Rev. C. J. Jones. He supervised the addition of a kitchen and dining room to the church building. In 1963, the Rev. Jones resigned, and Rev. P. V. Bowen became pastor. In 1976, the old church was torn down and a new structure—including a baptismal pool—was built, and church furniture was purchased.

In 1977, the Rev. Bowen became ill, and remained as “pastor emeritus” until he was no longer able to attend. In his place, the Rev. James Wells, Sr., became pastor, and in 1978, the mortgage was burned. Pastor Wells served until his death in 2008.

In 2009, the Rev. Louis C. Anderson, Jr., was elected pastor, and he continues to serve as pastor/teacher/leader of the church. In 2014, the church was incorporated.



Society President Adrian Cline presents a certificate to Pastor Louis C. Anderson, Jr., after his presentation about the history of Friendship

Missionary Baptist Church at the Feb. 19 membership meeting in the McSwain Room at DeSoto Memorial Hospital.

—Photo by Carol Mahler

Thanks to Truist Bank, 10 S. Desoto Ave., for hosting the Society’s display case in their lobby, and to Carol Mahler for making an exhibit about the DeSoto National Bank of Arcadia for it.

—Photo by Carol Mahler

**Our Superb Pioneer Day Sponsors—to date
03/10/2024**

We are grateful to the following businesses, individuals, and organizations for sponsoring our 20th Annual Pioneer Day & BBQ! Please patronize the businesses and thank each and every one for their generosity and support of the Society.

Bronze Sponsor: \$500

Copart
Millennium Physician Group
Peace River Electric Coop (PRECO)

Event Sponsors: \$250

A+ Environmental Restoration
Adrian and Jane Cline
Arcadia Centennial Lions Club
Arcadia Stockyard
Cowpens, LLC
David Abraham
In Memory of John and Flora Reynolds
Kinards Tree Service
Kiwanis Club of Arcadia, Florida
MyShelly's Kitchen
People for Protecting Peace River (3PR)
Performance Automotive
Rotary Club of Arcadia

Entertainment Sponsor: \$100

Allen and Linda Reesor
Bethel Farms
Crews Bank and Trust
DeSoto County Democratic Executive Committee
Fender Auto Parts
Jean Vitali, Realtor at Collins Realty
Keith Keene
Maassen Oil Company
Maassen Oil Company
Paul Bennett Seusy
Peace River Campground
Peace River Tax Services
René Collins
Robert W. Heine, Jr.
Sheriff Jim and Michelle Potter
United Country / Gulfland Real Estate
Wingman Aviation

Pioneer Friends of the Society: \$50.00

Cindy McLeod Ely
Glass, Antique or Not
Judy Wertz-Strickland
Karen Smoke
Susan Kuczenska
Williamson Group Realty

Friends of the Society: \$25

Arlene Conley
In Memory of Charles J. Mahler
Marshal Quinn Jones
Norma and Marsha

In Kind Donations

A+ Environmental Restoration
Arcadia Printing
Arcadia Computer
Bryan Farm Supply
Dakin Dairy
DeSoto Sign Company
Fussell Meats
Joshua Citrus
Peace River Shopper
Publix Market at Arcadia Crossing

In centennial commemoration of the Arcadia Tourist Camp
DeSoto County Historical Society's 20th Annual

Pioneer Day

*with the Arcadia American Legion sponsored
Antique Tractor and Hit & Miss Engine Show*

& BBQ!

**9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
March 23, 2024
Turner Agri-Civic Center
2250 NE Roan St., Arcadia**



- Delicious BBQ, Luscious Strawberry Shortcake, Traditional Florida Treats, and many other treats
- Classic Tractor and Hit & Miss Shows
- Demonstrations of Time-Honored Skills
- Florida Authors and Artists
- Florida Canebrake Cane Camp & Maple Canebrake
- Hands-On History Area with Fossil Dig and Old-Time Games
- Legendary Characters
- Musical entertainment & March Mores!

Parking \$5.00 per vehicle. Like us on Facebook!
www.historicdesoto.org * 863-266-5774 * desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Lots of hands-on help is needed for Pioneer Day!

Contact Carol Mahler, 863-445-0789

desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Text or leave a message on the Society phone:

863-266-5774



Volunteer for Suncoast Remake Learning Days

Suncoast Remake Learning Days is a 15-day festival of free events for children and families... think of it as the world's largest multi-site open house from April 20 to May 4, 2024. Besides our own event on May 1 at the Arcadia Housing Authority as described in the box on the right, we will also be partnering on the kick off date, April 20, with the Suncoast Remake Learning Days Bus.

The Historical Society will provide the docents on the bus, but we could use some helpers to work with the children, as we'll be making an old-fashioned folded map as we travel the route. It will be printed, but very generally, so the bus riders may customize the map as they travel with what they see and learn using crayons and stickers.

Click the Volunteer button on right to send Carol Mahler an email, or call 863-445-0789.

Mark Your Calendars For May Day!

As part of the "bigger and better" 2024 Suncoast Remake Learning Days Festival, April 20 to May 4, the Society will hold a "Hands On History" event from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. on Wed., May 1, 2024, at the Arcadia Housing Authority, 7 Booker T. Washington Rd. in Arcadia. We'll be dip-pen writing, typewriting, cane pole fishing, orange juicing, making a bucket brigade, and more! To join in the fun, please call or email Carol Mahler.



Magic School Bus

April 20
9:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.

FREE
hop on
hop off
Bus

Stops will include:
DeSoto County Library
McSwain Cultural Center
Casa San Juan Bosco
Nocatee Church of God
House of God
Friendship Baptist Church
Arcadia Golf Course

Activities on the bus
between locations!!!

Memorial Elementary Third Graders Enjoyed Hands-On History



It is always so wonderful to see our young people enjoying learning about the past as they prepare for their future! Thank you students for your donation of \$115, which will pay the electric bill for the museum for one month.

—Photos by Carol Mahler