



# DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

[www.historicdesoto.org](http://www.historicdesoto.org)

June 2025

This issue sponsored by - Michelle, Dan, & Dow in loving memory of our parents, Eddie & Iris Garner.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### MONTHLY MEETING NOTICE

#### A Message From The President

Dear Members and Friends:

You are warmly invited to join us for our next meeting on June 16, 2025, at 12:00 p.m. The meeting will take place in the McSwain Meeting Room at DeSoto Memorial Hospital. Lunch is available in the DMH Cafeteria at 11:30 a.m.

We are delighted to announce that Mr. Jerry Gaskins will be presenting an engaging program on The Contributions of the Gaskins' Family to the History of DeSoto County. This presentation offers an unique opportunity to hear about the lasting legacy and impact of the Gaskins' Family on our local history, a subject deeply interwoven with the fabric of our community.

We encourage every member to attend, engage in the discussion, and take part in a session that celebrates our shared heritage.

We look forward to a memorable meeting that not only revisits our past but inspires our continued commitment to preserving it.

*Adrian H. Cline*

President, DeSoto County Historical Society

SEE PAGE 5 for notice about our July 21 meeting.

### City Proclaims Juneteenth

At the June 3 Council meeting, the “City of Arcadia proclaim [ed] June 19 as Juneteenth Day, and with the HCW Foundation—whose mission is to collect, preserve and share information about African-American history and culture in DeSoto County—encourage [ed] everyone to celebrate the end of slavery in the United States and freedom for everyone.”

Juneteenth is an elision of “June 19,” the day in 1865 when U.S. Major General Gordon Granger and his regiment arrived in Galveston and announced that slavery had been abolished and the Emancipation Proclamation was in effect. It is also known as Juneteenth Independence Day, Freedom Day, Jubilee Day, Liberation Day, and Emancipation Day. In 1866, the first official Juneteenth

celebration was held in in Texas, and its observance spread across the United States through the years. In 2021, the event became a federal holiday.



Mayor Judy Wertz-Strickland presented the Juneteenth proclamation to Darien Bailey of Building A Village at the June 3 City Council meeting.

—Photograph courtesy of Linda Reesor.

## MAY WRAP UP

### Smith Brown School Reunion: Preserving a Legacy

by Charlotte Hill Carter, Class of 1958

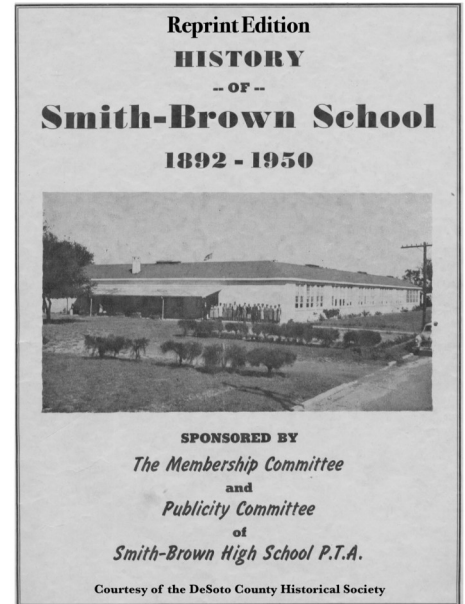
The 2025 Smith Brown School Reunion held May 23-25, 2025, in Arcadia, began with registration and T-shirt pick up at the Elizabeth Baptist Church Annex. Later that day at 6:00 p.m., the Meet and Greet session occurred at the Louis and Gloria Flanzer Boys and Girls Club gym. Sounds of “Hello,” “Great to see you,” and “Let’s take a photo” were heard from alumni, family and friends. We learned Smith-Brown Alumna Lois Gilmore-Smith has authored a new book, “God, Why Don’t You Answer Me?” Historical photos of Smith Brown students, faculty, and community members were exhibited on the walls of the gym. The tables were decorated with green and white (school colors) table clothes and Trojan (mascot) memorabilia. During the roll call of classes 1938-67, loud cheers and chants were shared.

On Saturday, May 24, a brunch was held at the pavillion behind the gym. Thunderstorms, winds and street flooding didn’t dampen the excitement and attendance at the formal Banquet Ball that evening in the gym. “Blinge” music and eloquent décor set the scene. The speakers for this event were Charlotte Hill Carter and Lee Ernest Blanden, Class of 1960. We both shared personal experiences at Smith Brown, and I also explained the history of the name Smith Brown while Lee Ernest expressed the value of academics and athletics to his future. Prior to the speeches, the attendees enjoyed a delicious meal.

The Smith Brown Reunion was an opportunity for attendees to reflect, preserve, and pass on the Legacy of obtaining an education at the Smith Brown School which served African American students during segregation (1921-1970). This education provided the foundation that helped develop teachers, politicians, entrepreneurs, doctors, nurses, authors, military officers, activists, and more. This legacy has positively affected DeSoto County and other cities and counties throughout the United States of America.

## The History of The Smith-Brown School

The Society joined with the HCW Foundation to publish this “reprint edition” of the original book: “History of the Smith-Brown School 1892-1950: Depicts its colorful unified progress through the years as well as new thoughts and trends for future programs which are sure to make the streams of learning continuous and enjoyable.” It was originally “sponsored by the Membership and Publicity Committee of the Smith-Brown Parents-Teachers Association: Mrs. Hattie J. Allen, Chairman; Mrs. Thomasena Floyd, Secretary; Mrs. Para Lee Manual; Mrs. Bernice Rubin; Mrs. Venzula Jones; Mrs. Lucia A. Watson; Mrs. Josephine Browning” and is available for \$10.00 from the Society.



### Contact Information

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Historian: Carol Mahler, 863-445-0789  
[desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com)

President: President: Adrian Cline, 863-494-5758  
[adriancline@outlook.com](mailto:adriancline@outlook.com)

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## Society Donates \$1,000.00 To DeSoto Memorial Hospital Auxiliary

Thanks to Vernon Keen for suggesting that the Society thank DeSoto Memorial Hospital for hosting the Society in the McSwain Room for our monthly meetings by making a donation. The Board of Directors voted to give \$1,000.00 to the DeSoto Memorial Hospital Auxiliary to buy wheelchairs.

DMS Auxiliary volunteers are the HAV's. “They are the wonderful team of volunteers who donate their time, skills, and talents to support our community hospital. They lend a hand wherever help is needed. They do everything from assisting the hospital departments to making stuffed Hug-A-Bears for young patients. . . . The HAV's operate the Gift Shop and are active throughout the year with fund-raising activities, which benefit patient-care programs at the Hospital.”

<https://www.dmh.org/volunteer-opportunities-1>

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### “Stories That Connect Us” At Your Library

The Society is partnering with the DeSoto County Library’s Summer Reading Program, and the theme is “Stories That Connect Us.” At noon on Tues., Wed., and Thurs., a hot lunch will be available for children, and at 1:00 p.m., a program featuring a story and a hands-on activity will follow.

On June 17, 18, and 19, the Society will provide the 1:00 program featuring families and family trees on Tues., June 17; how our families fit together into a community on Wed., June 18; and connections through the Underground Railroad for Juneteenth on Thurs., June 19. If you would like to volunteer to help the children with the hands-on activity, please call or text Carol Mahler at 863-445-0789.



### Independence Day Parade

The Society will be walking in the annual Independence Day Parade with our banner, 38-star U.S. flag (the flag used in 1887 when DeSoto County was established), explanatory signs, and our whip crackers. We appreciate Cindy McLeod Ely for submitting and organizing our parade entry. The parade starts at 10:00 a.m., so please gather near the intersection of W. Oak St. and Orange Ave. between 9:00 and 9:30 a.m.



### Historical Research Assistance

We are grateful to Carol Mahler for assisting Holly Baker, an architectural historian with Chronicle Heritage in Tallahassee, with researching a specific aspect of DeSoto County History. Carol scanned and emailed items archived in the Howard and Velma Melton Historical Research Library. She also gave Holly a brief driving tour of some local sites relevant to her research.

Carol Mahler and Holly Baker took a “selfie” in front of the Arcadia Bed and Breakfast Inn, 606 E. Oak St. built in 1917 for T. W. Parsons and Ellen Parsons, where Holly stayed during her research of DeSoto County.



The Museum and Library are closed for the summer, but research assistance is still available by contacting Carol.

## Proposed Four-Lane Highway To Impact Historic Resources

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) plans to make State Road (SR) 70 a four-lane, divided highway east of Arcadia, from SR 31 to Highlands County Line Rd., as well as west of the Arcadia from the Manatee County Line to Peace River with coordination of the SR 70 and SR 72 intersection improvement.

The 107-year-old brick road built during World War I to connect Arcadia to the U.S. Army aviation training camp known as Dorr Field—now the location of DeSoto Correctional Institution—is a historic treasure threatened by this project; however, FDOT could use it as the proposed “multi-use” trail paralleling the road. Carol Mahler brought it to the attention of FDOT staff and the Board of County Commissioners at their May 27 meeting.

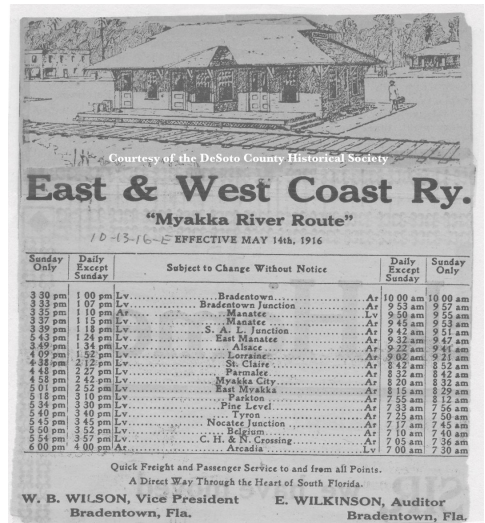
She also recounted the route for the East and West Coast Railway (1914-1933) that more-or-less paralleled SR 70 from Arcadia to Bradenton. Although physical evidence of the railroad is rare, Myakka City was built on the line, and Lorraine Rd. in Manatee County is named for the old station there. Road construction could unearth important artifacts.

The Project Development and Environment (PD&E) Studies are underway with “public outreach” scheduled for Jan. 2026, (East portion) and Nov. 2025 (West portion), respectively.

More information is available at <https://www.swflroads.com/project/451942-1> and <https://www.swflroads.com/project/454588-1>.

Contact Joe Lauk at 863-519-2525 or [Joe.Lauk@dot.state.fl.us](mailto:Joe.Lauk@dot.state.fl.us) or Kathern Cothorn at 863-519-2331 or [Kathern.Cothorn@dot.state.fl.us](mailto:Kathern.Cothorn@dot.state.fl.us).

See photos of the brick road on page 5.



This old “time-table” for the East and West Coast railroad and the old “brick-road” to Dorr Field suggest that this corridor could one day become a multi-use trail that would enhance the outdoor tourism opportunities for DeSoto County.

—Just saying...Ed.

## From Manatee Genealogical Society Zoom meeting

Our society members are invited to attend the Manatee Genealogical Society meeting and program on Tuesday, July 1, 2025, 10:00 am to 12:00 pm EST. The program speaker, Paula Stuart-Warren, will present "The U.S. National Archives: The Nation's Attic".



Sooner or later our research leads us to the treasures held at the U. S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), which houses census, military and pension records as well as records pertaining to the nation's civil, military and diplomatic activities. This session and the handout focus on the Washington, D.C. facilities, with some discussion covering regional branches of NARA.

Guests attending via Zoom must register at least one day in advance by emailing: [info@mgsfl.org](mailto:info@mgsfl.org). The Zoom meeting will begin at 10:00 a.m. EST.

For more information, please visit the website at: <https://mgsfl.org/>.



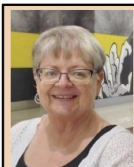
**Speaker: Paula Stuart-Warren, CG®, FMGS, FUGA**

**"The U.S. National Archives: The Nation's Attic"**

**Zoom Meeting**

**Tuesday, July 1, 2025**

**10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. EST**



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Paula, who has been a Board-Certified Genealogist since 1988, is an internationally recognized genealogical educator, researcher, and consultant, focusing on unusual resources, manuscripts, methodology, and analyzing records - specializing in WPA, railroad records, and Native American research, with extensive time spent at libraries, courthouses, state archives, historical societies, and U.S. National Archives locations. She is currently a coordinator and instructor for the GRIP Genealogy Institute and has presented courses at Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy (SLIG), Family Tree University, Texas Institute of Genealogical Research (TIGR), Ancestry Academy, and continues to present virtual seminars and webinars across the U.S and Canada. Paula descended from eight ancestral countries and has her own educational website and blog at <http://genealogybypaula.com>.

**Following the program and questions:** There will be a moderated open discussion period relative to genealogical topics. Attendees are encouraged to ask questions on issues pertaining to the program.

**For more information:**

Email: [info@mgsfl.org](mailto:info@mgsfl.org)

MGS meetings are hybrid for November-May.

Internet website: [www.mgsfl.org](http://www.mgsfl.org)

Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/ManateeGenealogicalSociety](https://www.facebook.com/ManateeGenealogicalSociety)

**Monthly Membership Meetings:** generally held first Tuesday of the month.

**Next Meeting:** Tuesday, August 5, 2025

USPS: Manatee Genealogical Society  
PO Box 1194, Bradenton, FL 3420

## 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.**

## NEWS TO SHARE

### Habitat for Humanity's Hometown Revitalization Initiative

Jennifer Bowser, director of Habitat for Humanity, announced the Hometown Revitalization Initiative at the May 20th City Council meeting. A generous donor funded the program "to improve the look of Arcadia," and work will include yard clean-up, painting, and exterior repairs "primarily for owner-occupied housing" on U.S. 17, State Road 70, and Oak St. within the City limits. She asked that everyone share information about this initiative. The Habitat office is at 10 S. DeSoto Ave., Suite 101, or call 863-494-4118 or online at [habitatdesoto.org](http://habitatdesoto.org).



### JULY MEETING

Mark your calendars for next month. On July 21 our guest speaker will be Christopher Parent. Chris is a Community Partnership Specialist for Empath Health/Tidewell Hospice. Chris will lead another Legacy Writing Workshop. This time the cue will be: "What do you remember about your oldest ancestor?" We will discuss and engage! Workbooks will be provided!



Part of the 107-year-old brick road built during World War I to connect Arcadia to Dorr Field is used as an access road along the north side of SR 70 in the vicinity of Cross Ave.

—Photos by Carol Mahler



Everyone has a story...

## Legacy Writing Workshop

Monday, July 21st | 12:15pm -1:00pm  
Desoto County Historical Society Member Meeting  
Desoto Memorial Hospital  
McSwain Room


Guest speaker: Christopher Parent-Community Partnership Specialist

Have your adult children told you they don't want your stuff, antiques or possessions?

Family stories and values recorded in a legacy workbook are the perfect gifts to share with them, consumes little space and are free. You just need some help getting started. This workshop includes:

- Legacy guide and journal
- Legacy journaling
- Legacy letter writing
- How to get started
- Tips for improving your confidence as a writer
- Thought-provoking questions
- Storytelling

Materials will be provided.

  
Empath health  
EmpathHealth.org

EHDE-23-0475

### John Morgan Ingraham House Museum

300 N Monroe Avenue

### NOTICES

The John Morgan Ingraham House Museum as well as the Howard and Velma Melton Historical Research Library are closed until Sept. 4 except by appointment.

Research assistance is still available:  
please call 863-266-5774 or by email—  
[desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com).

The Howard and Velma Melton Historical Research  
Library in the Ingraham Seed House

120 W Whidden Street

*Open by appointment only.*



116. N. Monroe Ave.

### The Changing Face of Arcadia Historic District

Here are some highlights about three historic buildings currently facing changes.

#### Townsend Home, 116. N. Monroe Ave.

Through foreclosure for code enforcement liens, the City has acquired 116 N. Monroe Ave., known as the “Townsend Home.” Pictured on the 1914 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map as “The Central Hotel Annex,” it may be the same structure occupied by William Manse Townsend and Beatrice Townsend, as listed in the 1915 Arcadia City Directory. (Demolished in 1934, the Central Hotel was located at 117 N. Polk Ave., now the parking lot north of the post office.)

William Manse Townsend (1886-1967) was a long-time barber in Arcadia, and his widow Beatrice, born in 1896, lived there until her death in 1979. At least seven other owners have held the property since then. Built in the bungalow style, the house was a contributing structure of the Arcadia Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

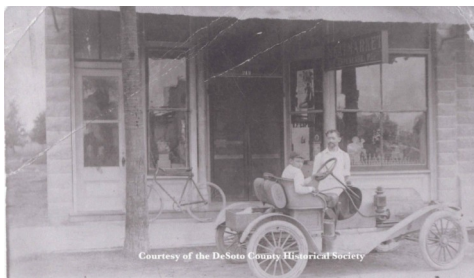
Outcome: TBD.



#### Espenlaub Meats, 114 W. Oak St.

The City has approved the demolition of the second story of 114 W. Oak St., originally built as the Espenlaub Meat Market. William Frederick Espenlaub (1863-1955) and his wife, Katharina Hahn Espenlaub (1863-1937) arrived in Arcadia in 1891. They opened the Espenlaub Meat Market in 1895. According to Howard Melton, Espenlaub “built the first ice box in DeSoto County.” Espenlaub’s first store burned to the ground in the 1905 Thanksgiving Day fire that destroyed downtown Arcadia. In Jan. 1906, he purchased the lot west of the Heard Opera House from J. J. Heard and his wife Lowe B. Heard, and built a new meat market at 114 W. Oak St. that was listed through 1923 in the city directories. It was a contributing structure of the Arcadia Historic District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. During Hurricane Ian in 2022, the west wall of the Heard Opera House fell onto the second story of 114 W. Oak St. causing serious damage.

Outcome: TBD.



114 W. Oak St.

#### Arcadia City Hall, 121 W. Hickory St.

According to the Arcadia City Hall Florida Historical Marker: “The land for Arcadia’s first city hall was a pineapple patch bought in 1917 for \$3,000 from Fred and Ida Gore. City Hall was designed in the Mediterranean Revival style and was furnished in June 1926 at a cost of \$45,216, including all furnishings. A section of the original nine-foot office counter and steel shelves for the vault are still in use. The fire station first housed a solid, rubber-tired, auto driven hose wagon with chemical tanks and a 1924 American La France fire truck which is still owned and running. The original 20-foot brass fire pole and the 400-pound siren are to be placed in the City Hall Museum. In 2004, restoration of City Hall began with funding from the Florida Division of Historical Resources [FDHR] and the City.” At the Apr. 1 meeting, the Council approved the agreement with White General Constructors, Inc., who did the 2004-2005 restoration, for additional “restoration and renovations” for \$1,668,265.00 funded by the Florida Dept. of State, Division of Historical Resources, grant and City “Fund 107.”

Outcome: A functional building to be used for city offices.

