



## DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

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

May 2025

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

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### Member Meeting:

Monday, May 19

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

Dear Members and Friends of the DeSoto County Historical Society:

I am pleased to announce that our upcoming meeting on May 19, 2025, will feature a distinguished guest speaker, Mrs. Pam Ames, Executive Director for Arcadia Main Street. Mrs. Ames will share insights into the remarkable work underway at Arcadia Main Street, outlining current projects and future plans that will benefit our vibrant community.

The meeting will take place in the McSwain Meeting Room at DeSoto Memorial Hospital. We ask that you join us promptly at 12:00 PM for the scheduled proceedings. For those arriving a bit early, lunch will be available for purchase starting at 11:30 AM, providing a welcoming atmosphere to mingle and catch up before the meeting begins.

We look forward to your participation in what promises to be an engaging and informative session. Your continued support and involvement in the Society are what makes our community so special.

Warm regards,

*Adrian H. Cline*

President, DeSoto County Historical Society



## MEMORIAL DAY

Monday, May 26

The British Plot in Oak Ridge Cemetery  
601 N. Johnson Ave.

**10:00 a.m.**

The Memorial Day Ceremony will include an invocation, raising the flags of Britain and the Royal Air Force, with traditional songs—some played on the bagpipes.

DeSoto County Memorial Day Service

**11:00 a.m.**

South lawn of the DeSoto County Courthouse  
115 East Oak St.

#### Memorial Day Services: You're Invited!

In 1940, John Paul Riddle returned to Arcadia and bought land near Carlstrom Field, the U.S. Army Aviation Training Camp where he did his primary training during World War I. He built Riddle Aeronautical Institute (RAI) to train pilots, and under the Lend-Lease Act of 1941, that included Royal Air Force cadets. Carlstrom Field was dedicated to primary training and Riddle built an advanced training "school" near Clewiston.

When the first cadet died in July 1941 in Arcadia, former Mayor and City Councilman Paul P. Speer was serving as City Recorder. He arranged the burial site for the "British Cadets" in the City's Oak Ridge Cemetery, and by the war's end, 23 cadets were buried there. Since 1956, the Arcadia Rotary Club has honored and remembered the cadets with a ceremony on Memorial Day, and in 1968, the Club installed a marker for the "British Plot."

The Memorial Day Ceremony will include an invocation, raising the flags of Britain and the Royal Air Force, with traditional songs—some played on the bagpipes. Many British Isles clubs from neighboring counties—and the British Car Club in their vintage automobiles—participate in the ceremony. A war-bird flyover is also in the plans.

## APRIL WRAP UP

### Highlands Heritage Festival: April 12-13

We appreciate Carol Mahler for setting up a display and talking with visitors in the old Basinger School House on the Edna Pearce Lockett Homestead on April 12 and 13 for the Heritage Association of Highlands County's Heritage Festival. Our display featured the County's history, information about the Society and its publications, plus details about the division of DeSoto County into the five counties that today are Charlotte, DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, and Highlands. Groups representing Charlotte, Glades, and Highlands counties also had exhibits. In addition, the school was also the location of a "quilt turning"—a fun way to learn about quilts and quilting.



### "I Spy DeSoto" Magic School Bus Rides Again

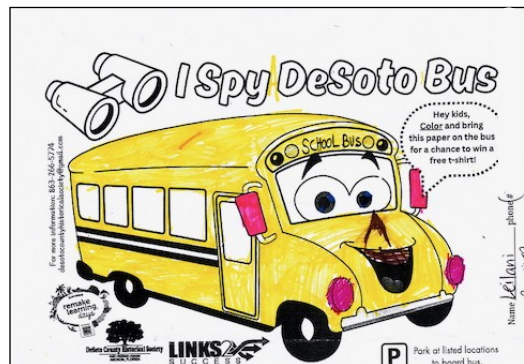
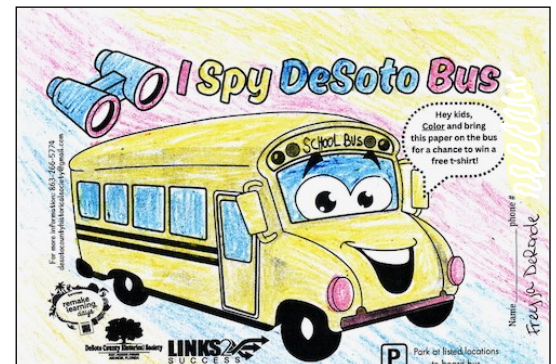
Thanks to Carol Mahler and Tonya Wallace for re-visioning the Magic School Bus activity as the "I Spy DeSoto" Magic School Bus for Suncoast Remake Learning Days (SRLD), so that families traveling between free, fun family events on Saturdays April 19 and 26 could learn about the history of DeSoto County. We appreciate everyone who rode the bus: 212 people on April 19 and 102 people on April 26. We thank the three children who brought their coloring sheets onto the bus and congratulate them for winning a Pioneer Day t-shirt: Myra Boehm, Freyja DeRonde, and Leilani Ramirez.

SRLD is a 15-day, free hands-on learning festival for children and families presented by the Suncoast Campaign for Grade Level Reading with generous support from The Patterson Foundation. SRLD included 380 events in Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties, offered by more than 265 organizations, such as after-school care, businesses, colleges, community centers, libraries, museums, media outlets, places of worship, universities, and more!

We are grateful to Carol Mahler and Tonya Wallace for organizing the events, distributing coloring sheets to the public

and private schools plus preschools, for serving as bus guides, and for making a great video to advertise the bus events. We appreciate those volunteers who helped on the bus—Nancy "Eric" Erickson, Karen Smoke, and Keith Wallace. We thank Karen and Dylan Tindall for taking great photos, Karen for all the social media postings, and Kathy Bryce and Elizabeth Kenney for helping to organize supplies and refreshments.

Thanks to Links To Success for being a great partner: designing, printing, and distributing very attractive flyers and publishing them in the "Peace River Shopper." We appreciate The First 1,000 Days for donating tote bags and crayons. We are grateful to Carol Mahler for the articles she wrote and published in "The Arcadia Community Local" about the bus activity and all the other SRLD events. Thanks to the School District of DeSoto County's amazing bus drivers: Maria Morris, T.J. and Yuritza Vargas.



—Magic School Bus photos on page 8 and April Wrap Up con't on next page

## APRIL WRAP UP—Con't

### Sensational! Florida Native Plants The Pioneers Used

We are grateful to the 80 people who enjoyed Sensational! Florida Native Plants That Pioneers Used, a Suncoast Remake Learning Days activity held on April 23 at the Arcadia Housing Authority. We appreciate Susan Kuczenska and Carol Mahler for potting Florida native plants to give away at this event. Thanks to Carol for planning and organizing the event, plus fetching and returning plants—along with Cindy Mcleod Ely—from Earth Balance native plant nursery in Nocatee. We are grateful to volunteers Kathy Apodaca, Cindy, Nancy “Eric” Erickson, Carol, and Karen Smoke for teaching about Florida native plants and how the pioneers used them.

Thanks to Becky Sue Mercer for hosting the Society’s activity at the Arcadia Housing Authority and to Sofia Gilot, director of the Louis and Gloria Flanzer Boys and Girls Club in Arcadia, for arranging for some of her club members to attend the event.

## JROTC Cadet Efrain Antonio Honored

Thanks to the Society’s President Adrian H. Cline for presenting a certificate of appreciation, framed copy of a historic photo, and a \$25.00 gift card to Martin’s Country Market to JROTC Cadet Efrain Antonio at the JROTC Awards Ceremony on April 25 at DeSoto Middle School cafeterium. We are grateful for all the cadets who volunteered at the Museum and for Pioneer Day, but LTC Ron Baynes, U.S. Army, retired, asked that we especially honor Efrain for his outstanding volunteer work with the Society. We also appreciate Carol Mahler for preparing the award items.

Adrian also gave a certificate of appreciation and a check for \$300.00 to Col. Baynes in recognition of the superlative work that he and the JROTC cadets did for Pioneer Day, including setting-up, cleaning-up, parking, serving as color guard for the opening ceremony, and volunteering in the Hands-On History area. Ron Jones, commander of the Arcadia American Legion K Post 111, matched our \$300.00 donation to the JROTC.



## Faith Community Christian Academy Field Trip

We are grateful to Administrator Chelci Davis for working with Carol Mahler to organize a field trip to the Museum for 15 first and second graders from Faith Community Christian Academy on April 29.

Thanks to volunteers Linda Keen, Vernon Keen, Carol Mahler, Karen Smoke, Keith Wallace, and Tonya Wallace, the students, teachers, and chaperones learned about washing clothes with a scrub board and hanging them in the sun to dry; using a pitcher pump, outhouse, and chamber pot; making mattresses, rubbings, and the Arcadia Coca Cola Bottling Company and the Arcadia House hotel—both owned by Roe family.

If your homeschool, summer camp, or other group would like to tour the Museum, please contact Carol Mahler.



Photos above and left by Tonya Wallace and below by Becky Sue Mercer.



—Photos on page 5.

## APRIL WRAP UP—Con't

### Pioneer Day Passport To The Past: T-Shirt Winners

Congratulations to Ruth Hurd and Ezra Swartz for being two of 51 children who completed their Pioneer Day Passports To The Past and had their names drawn to win free Pioneer Day shirts!

#### Thank You

Thanks to Cindy McLeod Ely for donating “fake” eggs—that look so real—for the wire egg basket in the kitchen of the Museum!

#### NOTICES

The John Morgan Ingraham House Museum as well as the Howard and Velma Melton Historical Research Library is 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).

**John Morgan Ingraham House Museum**  
300 N Monroe Avenue

#### *MUSEUM OPEN:*

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

and on the second and fourth Saturday of the month.

CLOSED May-June-July-August.

**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

#### Contact Information

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[adriancline@outlook.com](mailto:adriancline@outlook.com)

#### 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.**

#### Make a Memorial Donation

The Society welcomes and appreciates memorial donations in memory of those we have lost this year, or any other Society member. Funds are used for the maintenance of the Museum and Society property. Donations may be made online at <https://historicdesoto.org/>.

To donate by mail, make your check payable to Desoto County Historical Society, Inc. and mail to: DeSoto County Historical Society, Inc. P.O. Box 1824, Arcadia, FL 34265. Please include a note with the purpose of your donation.

## Photos from Faith Community Christian Academy Field Trip

From top:  
Students  
learned about  
washing  
clothes on a  
scrub board,



—Photos by  
Carol Mahler



hanging clothes to dry,  
what the pioneers used  
for mattresses, how to  
make rubbings, working  
a pitcher pump, and  
more.



## From Manatee Genealogical Society

Our society members are invited to attend the Manatee Genealogical Society meeting and program on Tuesday, June 3, 2025, 10:00 am to 12:00 pm EST. The program speaker, Sunny Jane Morton, will present "Born to be Filed: A Story of Civil Birth Registration in the United States".

Ever wonder why you can't find infant birth records for relatives even when they should exist? Or what delayed birth records are and whether they are worth finding? Learn the fascinating story of how infant and adult civil birth records came about in the United States. We'll look at the who, what, and whys through the lenses of local newspapers and the larger social conversation. We'll focus especially on little-known adult delayed birth records: what they look like, how to find them, and what they might reveal.

Sunny Jane Morton is a Contributing Editor at Family Tree Magazine and the Content Director at [YourDNAGuide.com](http://YourDNAGuide.com). She is co-author of *How to Find Your Family History in U.S. Church Records*, and author of *Story of My Life: A Workbook for Preserving Your Legacy*. Her current research on the archives of Catholic sisters and nuns has received funding from the University of Notre Dame. She will be an instructor for GRIP Genealogy Institute in 2025 in their Practical Family History Writing course.

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/>.



**"Born to be Filed: A Story of Civil Birth  
Registration in the United States"**

Speaker: Sunny Jane Morton

Zoom only

Tuesday, June 3, 2025 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. EST

Ever wonder why you can't find infant birth records for relatives even when they should exist? Or what delayed birth records are and whether they are worth finding? Learn the fascinating story of how infant and adult civil birth records came about in the United States. We'll look at the who, what and whys through the lenses of local newspapers and the larger social conversation. We'll focus especially on little-known adult delayed birth records: what they look like, how to find them, and what they might reveal.



Sunny Jane Morton is a Contributing Editor at Family Tree Magazine and the Content Director at [YourDNAGuide.com](http://YourDNAGuide.com). She is co-author of *How to Find Your Family History in U.S. Church Records*, and author of *Story of My Life: A Workbook for Preserving Your Legacy*. Her current research on the archives of Catholic sisters and nuns has received funding from the University of Notre Dame. She will be an instructor for GRIP Genealogy Institute in 2025 in their Practical Family History Writing course.

**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)

**In-person location:** Manatee Central Library,  
1301 Barcarrolla Blvd West, Bradenton, FL

**MGS meetings** are hybrid for November-May.

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

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

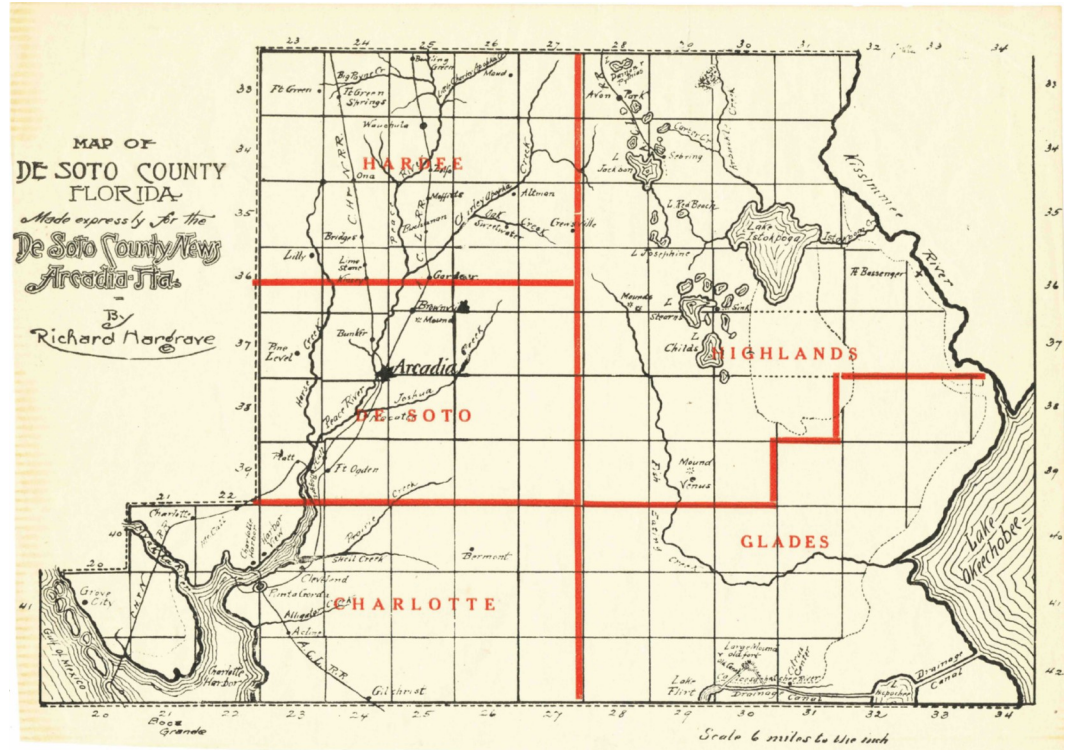
**Facebook:**  
[www.facebook.com/ManateeGenealogicalSociety](http://www.facebook.com/ManateeGenealogicalSociety)

**Next Meeting:** Tuesday, July 1, 2025

**USPS:** Manatee Genealogical Society  
PO Box 1194, Bradenton, FL 34206

## Happy 138th Birthday to DeSoto County!

On May 19, 1887, Manatee County was split: the eastern two-thirds—3,750 square miles— was named DeSoto in honor of the Spanish Conquistador Hernando DeSoto who arrived on the West Coast of Florida in May 1539. He is the only person to have two Florida counties named for him: Hernando County became his namesake in 1843. In 1921, the original DeSoto County was divided into five counties: Charlotte, DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, and Highlands. Today's DeSoto County has 639 square miles.



Courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society

## Happy Emancipation Day!

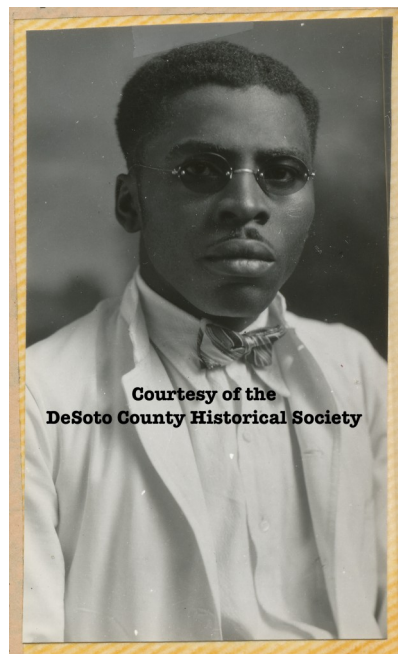
On Sept. 22, 1862, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln issued “The Emancipation Proclamation” stating that on Jan. 1, 1863, “all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.” However, no one in Florida knew about this proclamation.

On April 9, 1865, Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House in Virginia, and the Confederate States of America was defeated. However, each state's Confederate government had to surrender before the Emancipation Proclamation could take effect. Tallahassee was the only state capital east of the Mississippi that was not captured by the Union.

On May 10, Brigadier General Edward M. McCook accepted Tallahassee from C.S.A. forces and announced on May 20 that the Emancipation Proclamation was in effect. That day's train from Jacksonville also delivered Special Order #63 from Major General Quincy A. Gillmore announcing that "the people of the black race are free citizens of the United States." Since that time, Floridians have celebrated and commemorated May 20th as Emancipation Day or Freedom Day.

More information is available at <https://dos.myflorida.com/library-archives/research/explore-our-resources/emancipation>.

To commemorate Emancipation Day, remember William Burton (1900-1977) who moved to Arcadia in the 1930s and opened a barbershop. In the Feb. 12, 1987, *Arcadian*, Helen C. Washington, another civil rights pioneer, compared Burton to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., because Burton “made trips to



Courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society

Tallahassee, held meetings, had conferences with people who were in office, trying to get rights for the black people to vote. He was threatened, thrown after and talked about, but he kept fighting until we were allowed to vote. He wasn't an educated man but God gave him a talent and gave him the leadership ability that he was able to lead his people the right way.”

## In Memoriam: Sue Melton Rich

On April 16, 2025, Sue Rich lost her battle with cancer and passed away in McComb, Mississippi. She was the daughter of Howard and Velma Melton, the sister of Dr. Dale Melton and his wife Diane of Sarasota, and sister of Pat Cooper and her husband Randy of West Palm Beach.

Her oldest daughter Kimberly Young passed away in 2019 in Bogue Chitto, Mississippi. Her youngest daughter Heather White, son-in-law Tracy White, and two granddaughters Poppy and Summer live in Rockford, Illinois.

Sue was born in Arcadia. She lived in many places, but spent most of her life in St. Louis, Missouri, until she retired as a pharmacy technician, and moved to Mississippi to live with her daughter Kimberly and son-in-law Dave Young. After Kim passed, she remained in Mississippi and has been laid to rest beside her daughter. She will be greatly missed by her family and friends.



Sue Rich with Howard Melton and Pat Cooper in the Research Library shortly after it opened.

## Celebrate May As National Historic Preservation Month

In 1949, President Harry Truman signed the legislation to form The National Trust for Historic Preservation. In 1973, to recognize the importance and significance of historic resources to local communities, the Trust began National Historic Preservation Week, and in 2005, expanded it to a month-long celebration.

This year's theme is "the power of place . . . an appreciation of preservation's essential role in activating the power of historic places to serve the public good." Places connect people to the past and allow them "to imagine a shared future because we understand where we came from." Trust President and CEO Carol Quillen emphasizes that "preservation creates—experiences of joy and awe and curiosity, economic vitality and a sense of belonging, or a healthier, more sustainable planet" ([savingplaces.org](https://www.savingplaces.org)).



**Take the Mobile-Friendly,  
Online, Self-Guided  
Tour of Historic  
Downtown Arcadia**

## Celebrate National Historic Preservation Month with the following activities:

### ✓ The activities as you do them!

- 1. Take photos of historic structures or places and post them and why you like them on social media.
- 2. Visit historic exhibits in the community: South Florida State College, Truist Bank, and the DeSoto County Property Appraiser's Office, plus displays of historic photos in the Margaret Way Building, DeSoto County Administration Building, and Family Service Center.
- 3. Take the mobile-friendly, online, self-guided tour of historic downtown Arcadia or contact Carol Mahler for a guided tour for groups of five or more people.
- 4. Read about local history in the following books: "Footprints and Landmarks: Arcadia and DeSoto County, Florida" (2002) and "More Footprints and Landmarks: Arcadia and DeSoto County, Florida" (2004) by George Howard Melton; a series of four books called "Recollections: A Collection of Historical Photographs, Documents, Letters, Diaries, Stories, Recipes, Sayings, and Other Memorabilia about Arcadia and DeSoto County, Florida" (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008) edited by Carol Mahler; "Cracker Cures: A Compendium of Cures, Concoctions, Potions, Remedies, Magic, Old Wives' Tales, Omens, Luck Signs, and Talismans" (1976, 2017) published by the Peace River Valley Historical Society and reprinted by the Society; and "History of Smith-Brown High School: 1892-1950" (1950, 2021) by the Smith-Brown Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) and reprinted by the Society in partnership with the HCW Foundation. (Available to purchase from the Society or free at DeSoto County Library.)
- 5. Read about state, regional, national, and world history in resources at the DeSoto County Library, 125 N. Hillsborough Ave., including print, audiobooks, and e-books.
- 6. Set a time limit of 10 or 15 minutes to write a story about a place you remember or a story about a place important to your family, and share it by sending it to someone by mail, e-mail, or as a social media post.
- 7. Look through your old photographs, choose one, and identify the people and places in them. Challenge yourself to do this every day for a week.
- 8. Visit historical museums in Charlotte, Collier, Hardee, Highlands, Lee, Manatee, or Sarasota counties.
- 9. Talk with someone who remembers how a local place used to be and record their recollections on paper or as an audio or video file.
- 10. Support organizations that work to preserve the past, such as the Society.

# All Aboard The Magic School Bus — April 26, 2025

—Photos by Dylan Tindall



We  
hope  
you  
enjoyed  
playing  
I Spy  
DeSoto!

Thanks  
For  
Riding!