



# DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

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

September 2025

This issue sponsored by - **Marguerite & Tom Hankins in memory of Mr. & Mrs. T.J. Pipkin (Pip & Alison Pickard Pipkin.)**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### MONTHLY MEETING NOTICE

**Monday, Sept 15**

DeSoto Memorial Hospital -  
McSwain Room

### A Message From The President

Dear Members and Friends,

We hope this message finds you well and enjoying the final days of summer. As we look ahead to the fall season, we are excited to invite you to our upcoming **Membership Meeting on Monday, September 15, 2025, at 12:00 p.m.**, in the DeSoto Memorial Hospital McSwain Room. Lunch will be available for purchase in the cafeteria at 11:30 a.m. We will be discussing one of our most cherished traditions—the **Florida Cracker Meal Dinner** coming up on Oct 4 at Pine Level Church.

This annual event is not only a celebration of our local heritage, but also a wonderful opportunity to gather as a community and share stories, laughter, and good food. At Monday's meeting, we will go over the dinner plans, volunteer opportunities, and how you can help make this year's event the best yet.

We also invite you to **purchase a ticket and attend the Florida Cracker Meal Dinner**, see details in the article at right. Tickets are only \$15 and will be available for purchase at the membership meeting, and several other locations, see the continuation of the article on page 2.

We look forward to seeing you on September 15 and again at the dinner in October. Thank you for being a vital part of our historical community.

Warm regards,

*Adrian H. Cline*, President

### 5th Annual Florida Cracker Meal

Enjoy some food and fun at the Society's 5th Annual Florida Cracker Meal at 5:30 p.m. on Sat., Oct. 4, in the Fellowship Hall of Pine Level Church, 9596 NW Pine Level St. The event is open to the public, and seating is limited. The buffet will include traditional Florida Cracker foods such as pork steaks, collards, black-eyed peas, tomato gravy and rice, sweet potatoes, cornmeal muffins with freshly churned butter, and more.

Florida Cracker cuisine is related to—but distinct from—Southern cooking, and dates from when Florida was a frontier and home to the cowman or cowhunter. He cracked a cow whip over the bovines to drive the herd, and the noise carried quite a distance. People started to say, "Listen. Here come the Crackers." That's one explanation of the name "Florida Crackers."

Another story tells how Arcadia was named. After the Rev. James M. Hendry moved his sawmill to the eastern shore of Peace River in 1883, the settlers applied for a post office. He suggested the name "Arcadia" to thank Arcadia Albritton Coker, who had baked him a birthday cake when he stayed overnight with her family on his journey. When the settlers first incorporated the town in 1886, and when the townspeople incorporated the city in 1901, they used the name Arcadia.

In honor of that tradition, those attending the event are invited to enter the Arcadia Albritton Coker Cake Contest by baking their most traditional or most creative "from scratch" cake recipes. Winners will be announced, prizes awarded, and all cakes will be plated and served.

The program will be by Connie Bateman, who will present the history of Pine Level Church and Pine Level itself. Founded as county seat of Manatee County in 1866, it became the county seat of DeSoto when it was

formed in 1887. The next year, voters chose Arcadia as the new county seat, and Pine Level began a slow but steady decline. Bypassed by two railways, it became a "ghost town." The only original structure left is the old school that the Church bought and uses every Sunday as their sanctuary.

*Will you bake a cake for us?*

Please enter the Arcadia Albritton Coker Cake Contest!



Help make our Florida Cracker Meal a success! Please make your favorite cake "from scratch" and use your most traditional recipe or make up something fun. The judge will sample the cakes, and they will be judged on taste and texture. Two winning cakes will be chosen, "best traditional cake" and one that is "most creative cake."

Cakes must be delivered to Pine Level Church - Fellowship Hall, 9596 NW Pine Level Street, by 5 p.m. on Saturday, October 4.

DeSoto County Historical Society  
PAST • PRESENT • FUTURE  
ARCADIA, FLORIDA

Email or call to let us know you will bake a cake!  
To sign up please call: 863-266-5774 or 863-445-0789 or email Carol at [desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com)

—Continued next page

## 5th Annual Florida Cracker Meal

—Continued from pg 1

The original 40-acre townsite—including the church property—was listed in the National Register of Historic Places thanks to the efforts of Jana Futch who wrote her thesis about Pine Level for her Masters degree in archaeology at the University of South Florida and worked with the Florida Public Archaeology Network West Central Region and Carol Mahler who wrote and administered the grant from the Florida Division of Historical Resources that funded the preparation of the National Register Application.

Tickets for the Florida Cracker Meal are \$15.00 for adults and available for purchase during regular business hours at Crews Bank and Trust, Member FDIC, 2747 S.W. State Road 70; Radio Shack, 707 N. Brevard Ave.; Rosé Cafe and Bakery, 14 N. DeSoto Ave.; and Sweet Magnolia Creamery and Confectionery, 203 W. Oak St.. Tickets may also be bought online using PayPal at [historidesoto.org](http://historidesoto.org).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

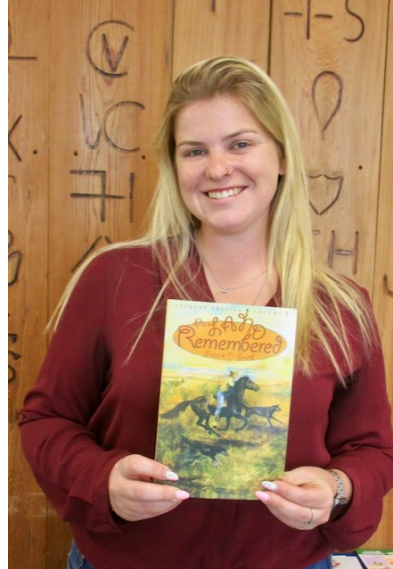
### 4th Graders To Learn From Reading “A Land Remembered”

A version of this article written by Carol Mahler was published in the Aug. 28 issue of The Arcadia Community Local.

At the beginning of June, Polk County Livestock Agent Bridgit Stice offered free copies of “A Land Remembered” (Vol 1, Student Edition) by Patrick Smith to the first 25 classes to sign up to use the curriculum she was writing based on the book as posted on Facebook. She started the project in March after talking with a member of The Great Florida Cattle Drive, an event scheduled every ten years. However, development of the open space needed for the cattle drive inspired the organizers to hold the event after only five years as it may soon be impossible ([greatfloridacattledrive.com](http://greatfloridacattledrive.com)).

Our County Livestock Agent Kendall Gill has helped Stice develop the curriculum, “a six-week journey into Florida’s past [as] students explore how cattle, cowhunters, and conservation helped shape Florida through engaging lessons in reading, science, history, and agriculture—all centered around ‘A Land Remembered.’” State-wide, 15,000 students have registered to use the curriculum as well as a class in Georgia and another in Iowa.

After Gill shared information about developing the curriculum with the Board of County Commissioners at their Aug. 12 meeting, A+ Environmental Restoration and Sheriff Jim and Michelle Potter donated funds to purchase books for 600 students (30 classes of 20 students) in our county.



Registrations will be accepted through Sept. 26; please contact Gill at [kendall.gill@ufl.edu](mailto:kendall.gill@ufl.edu) or call the extension office at 863-993-4846 or her cell phone at 941-258-4043.

The donations will also pay for her to participate in The Great Florida Cattle Drive that includes five days on the drive and four nights of primitive camping. Every day of the drive, a livestream

video at 10:00 a.m. will be shared with those using the curriculum. It will also be recorded and used until the drive is held again. Teachers may submit questions from students that will be answered as part of the webcast.

Geared for 4th grade, the curriculum includes daily readings from the book; “standards-based in English/Language Arts, science, and social studies; hands-on activities: journal, maps, and vocabulary;” comparisons of pioneer life versus modern ranching; opinion, narrative, informative writing; livestream of The Great Florida Cattle Drive on Jan. 26-30, 2026; and a Family Day Celebration in Okeechobee on Jan. 31, 2026.

As our county’s students will probably not be able to attend the celebration day in Okeechobee, Gill wants to have a similar local event that includes cow sorting or some other demonstration with cattle and horses. She may incorporate some of the Ag-Venture program that used to offer a “hands-on agricultural learning event” for students in which the Society may participate.



### Repairs At The Museum

The Museum and Research is **closed for the month of September** so that some much needed repairs and improvements may be made.

A new outhouse.

—More on page 3.

## APPRECIATION & THANKS

### Gratitude For Donations

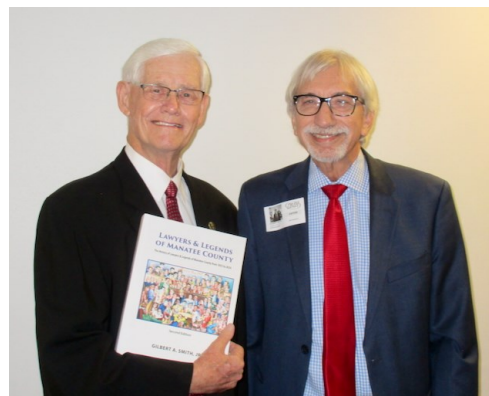
Thanks to Habitat for Humanity for donating framed photographs of George S. Sroufe (1855-1930) and Sarah Downey Sroufe (1861-1947), to the Society. These are the parents of Margaret Way's mother, Amy Sroufe Way (1890-1967), and her sister Dora Sroufe (1883-1975). George and Sarah married in 1879, in Clark County, Ohio, and moved to Arcadia in 1928. After being struck by a motorcycle, George died of a brain injury. He also suffered a compound fracture of his left leg. The Sroufe and Way families are buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery.



We appreciate Kenneth Follmann of Cape Coral who not only donated a hobble-skirt Coca-Cola bottle but also delivered it to the City of Arcadia offices so that Carol Mahler could pick it up. The bottle has the "Bottle Pat'd Nov. 16, 1915" date on the front and "Arcadia, FLA" on the base, so Ken thought it was a 1915 bottle from Arcadia. However, although what is known as the "hobble skirt" bottle was patented in 1915, it was produced from 1916 until 1930. The bottle was probably not made until Arthur I. Roe, Jr., bought the Arcadia Bottling Works in 1916 and ordered a railroad car load of Coca-Cola bottles from Laurens Glass Work of South Carolina.



We are grateful to Judge Gilbert Smith, Jr., for his presentation at our August meeting about his book, "Lawyers and Legends of Manatee County: The History of Lawyers and Legends in Manatee County from 1855-2024," and for donating a copy of the second edition to the Society's Howard and Velma Melton Historical Research Library. You may purchase a copy online at <https://bookshop.org/shop/dragonsdenbooks> in support Arcadia's local independent bookstore, Dragon's Den Books, [dragonsdenbooks.com](https://dragonsdenbooks.com) or 941-447-4685.



Adrian Cline holds the copy of "Lawyers and Legends of Manatee County" donated by author Judge Gilbert Smith, Jr.

### Appreciation for Volunteers

We are grateful Milo Moreno for volunteering at the Museum: he assisted Carol Mahler in weeding the flower gardens in the front of the Museum, and he finished cleaning the historic chairs from the courthouse and vacuumed the Museum. We especially appreciate Milo for finding the water on the floor that alerted us that the motor in the air handler had failed. The air conditioning system was no longer under warranty, so we are grateful to Rick Forbes at Arcadia Electric for ordering a reasonably-priced motor that one of his employees changed out.

### Repairs At The Museum

The Society usually closes the Museum and Research Library for the months of June, July, and August, and this year, we're also **closed for the month of September** so that some much needed repairs and improvements may be made.



## AUGUST WRAP UP

### Historic Boat On Display at the Florida Cracker Trail Museum

Thanks to Myron Wickey for storing the boat since May 2023 at his cabinet shop in the old Fenton Feeders warehouse, and for using his forklift to hoist the boat onto the trailer.



We appreciate Jeff Griffis for transporting the boat in his truck and trailer to the Florida Cracker Trail Museum, and we thank him plus Amber Jones, Ron Jones, Carol Mahler, and Luke Wilson for helping to strap and unstrap the boat and unload it with additional assistance from Jesse Johnson.



We are grateful to Joyce Tullis, director of the Florida Cracker Trail Museum, for accepting the boat "on loan" from the Society, and to Carol for designing and writing the sign so that people will understand the artifact.

Thanks to Jesse and Joyce for loaning their tools, and to Jeff, Jesse, Carol, and Luke for uncrating the boat. We appreciate Jeff and Carol for hauling the crate materials back to Arcadia.



Joyce Tullis, Jeff Griffis, Carol Mahler and Jesse Johnson with the sign explaining the historic boat.

Amber Jones, Ron Jones, and Luke Wilson also helped out with the move.

—Photos by Carol Mahler

### City Approves Demolition of 147 S. Sumter Ave.

A version of this article written by Carol Mahler was published in the Aug. 28 issue of The Arcadia Community Local.

At the Aug. 19 meeting, the Council overturned the decision of the Historic Preservation Commission and approved the demolition of 147 S. Sumter Ave. during a quasi-judicial hearing. The required simultaneous submission of plans for new construction were approved at the Sept. 2 meeting.



—Continued on page 5

### City Approves Demolition of 147 S. Sumter Ave.

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The home sustained undisclosed damage in Hurricane Ian and so qualified for the Rebuild Florida Housing Repair and Replacement Program (HRRP), “a partnership of Florida Commerce and the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)” (<https://ian.rebuildflorida.gov>). Applications were accepted at 921 E. Oak St. through March 2025.

The HHRP Structural Assessment Report (SAR) “Not Suitable For Rehabilitation” (NSFR) for 147 S. Sumter was based on damage and structural assessments conducted by Professional Engineer Benjamin A. Blich on Jan. 5 and June 25, respectively.



HRRP will fund not only the demolition but also the construction of a new home that will be worth at least \$250,000.00, according to Steven Weirup of BHL Federal, “a family-owned and operated company that specializes in emergency management construction contracting” ([bhlfederal.com](http://bhlfederal.com)). HRRP will pay BHL Federal for the work, and the homeowner, Maria Cano Nieves, will owe nothing and is only required to live in the new home for three years. According to the recorded deeds, she and Fausto Fernando Ramirez Ruiz purchased the property for \$55,000.00 in 2010, and two years later, he deeded the property, subject to a mortgage, solely to her.

A contributing structure in the Arcadia Historic District listed in the National Register of Historic Places since 1984, the house at 147 S. Sumter was built sometime before 1923 when it appears on the Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. It is listed in the 1926 Arcadia City Directory as the home of John J. Reedy and Alma Reedy. 1984 Photo below.



The Florida Master Site File record (DE00344), completed in 1984 when the house at 147 S. Sumter Ave. was owned by Charles and Jean Draper, identifies the home as “frame vernacular” in style, “built between 1914 and 1923, likely closer to 1914, typical of homes of this period . . .” At that time, the front porch had not been enclosed.

The “frame vernacular” style of architecture is “practical responses to the state’s humid, subtropical climate,” according to the City of Groveland in Lake County, Florida. “Using wood from hardwood hammocks, cypress swamps and pine forests, early pioneers [built] high ceilings and large windows to allow heat to rise above the living space and to facilitate a stream of breeze through the home’s interior. On the exterior, large porches and extensive roof overhangs offered additional protection from the summer sun along with greater access to a cooling breeze . . . The steep roof overhang also easily shed rain and allowed the windows to remain open during rainfall.” ([groveland-fl.gov](http://groveland-fl.gov)).

Supporting their vote to deny the demolition, the Historic Preservation Commission followed City Ordinance 11.14.04.A.9.c.i: “The existence of one or more of the following conditions may be the basis for denial of a demolition application: . . . (B) The resource is listed on the National Register . . . (D) The resource is capable of being repaired and repaired and reused in a practical and feasible manner. (E) Retention of the resource would promote the general welfare of the city by providing an opportunity to study local history, architecture and design, or by developing an understanding of the importance and value of a particular culture or heritage.”

#### 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.

**CLOSED SEPTEMBER FOR RENOVATIONS**

#### 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

Check out our Downtown! —See page 6

Check Out Our Downtown!

ART  
ON  
OAK



A note from Jimmy Peters:

Hi everyone, hope you are all having a good summer. We are completing the first phase of our public service project, "Art on Oak", with the cooperation of the Main Street Program. Members of our photo club submitted photos of local birds, reptiles, and insects to be printed on 5' x 7' canvas prints. The prints are sticky back and are adhered to the outside of the windows. We will be putting a black border around the two photos on the left as soon as the inside has been prepped. Stop by and take a look if you have a chance.

The idea has really caught on with everyone and we now are being asked to decorate 12 windows (to date) for the upcoming rodeo season. After rodeo season, the theme will be "Kids in Arcadia".

Hope you like the project.

Jimmy Peters, DeSoto Arts Center President

### 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**.



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

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