



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

November 2025

This issue sponsored by - THIS SPACE AVAILABLE

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### November Program

At **6:00 p.m.**, on **Mon., Nov. 17**, the Society will meet for supper and a program at the **Arcadia American Legion**, 2124 NW American Legion Dr. A buffet will be available for \$8.00.

Members of the American Legion will present the meaning of the 13 folds that are used when the U.S. flag is folded into the traditional triangular shape.

Then Retired U.S. Army officer, James D. Brewer will present his most recent novel: *Blood at the Whistlestop: Murder on Florida's Peace River, A Choctaw Parker Mystery/Adventure*. After his presentation, he will sell and sign copies of his book, the third in the Choctaw Parker Mystery Adventure Series that also includes *Blood on the Crossties* and *Blood on the Trestle*.



Brewer is also a writer, musician, and teacher of composition and rhetoric at Polk State College. A former professor at the U.S. Military Academy and editor of a national magazine, he has written seven novels, three non-fiction books, numerous magazine articles, and a two-act play during 40 years of writing. He researched early Arcadia and DeSoto County and lists Carol Mahler and Kathy Bryce of the DeSoto County Historical Society on the acknowledgements page of his book. More information is available at [www.jamesdbrewerwriter.com](http://www.jamesdbrewerwriter.com).



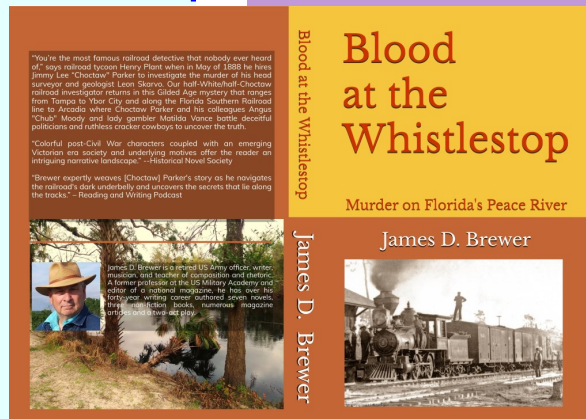
Looking for something to do?

Veterans Day observances, a Thankful Fest, special evening meeting and program at Arcadia American Legion, with buffet dinner for \$8, and a guest author and book signing...take your pick!

### Enjoy the Arcadia Garden Club's "Thankful Fest III"

**9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Saturday, Nov. 15**, at their clubhouse, 1005 W. Magnolia St., featuring a sale of native, rare, succulent, and vegetable plants, plus houseplants, as well as vendors, food and refreshments, origami, bake sale, crystals, local honey, and more.

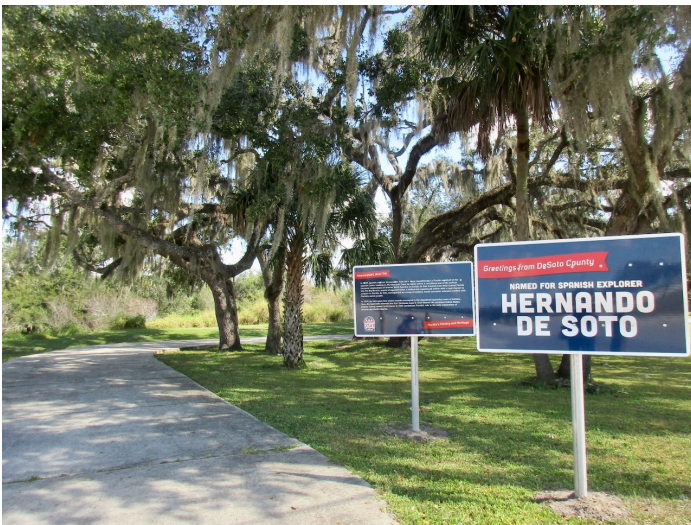
See flyer elsewhere in this newsletter.



## OCTOBER WRAP UP

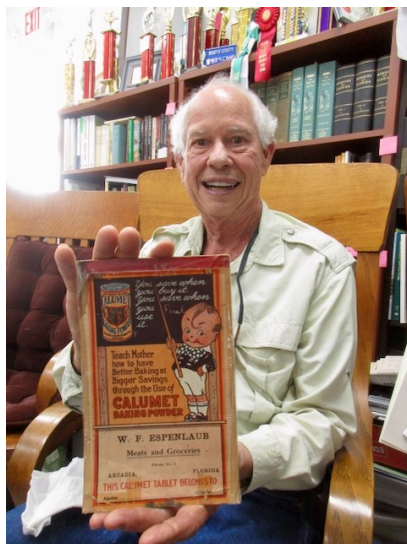
### America 250 Signs in DeSoto Veterans Memorial Park

The Florida Dept. of Transportation (FDOT) has installed two signs as part of the America 250 Celebrations identifying our County as the namesake of Spanish Explorer Hernando DeSoto and a brief summary of his Florida Adventures in 1539: “DeSoto County, named in his honor in 1887, symbolizes Florida’s role in the early exploration of present-day North America.” The signs are part of FDOT’s America 250 Florida: Road Trip: check online at <https://america250fl.com/roadtrip>.



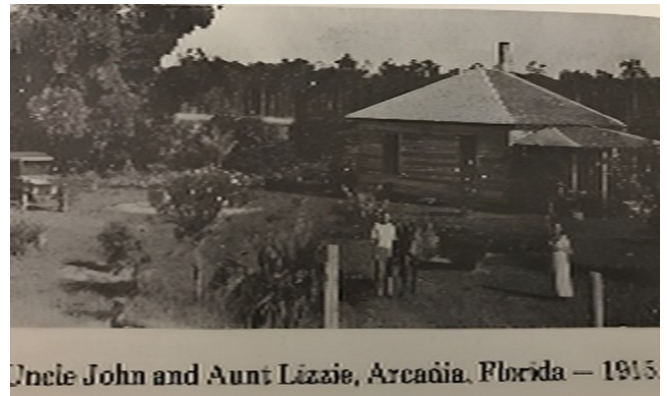
### Learning Local History

Thanks to Carol Mahler for presenting the early years of Arcadia and DeSoto County to the Peace River Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution at their October meeting. Although she spoke and shared historical images from the Research Library for 40 minutes, she did not present all that she had prepared, so the members invited her back to complete her presentation at the Jan. 13, 2026 meeting. If your club or organization would like to learn more about the history of the City or the County, please contact Carol Mahler.



## Gratitude For Gifts

Thanks to Joe Boatwright who donated \$50.00 to the Society for the research that Carol Mahler did on finding the land owned by his great-grandfather John Frederick Matthies, who moved from Nebraska to Brownville, bought property, and built a house. Although Carol found the Matthies family in the 1920 and 1930 U.S. Census living in Brownville, she had to research the property in the County Courthouse to find out where the house was located, and the present address is 1768 NE Bishop St. Unfortunately, the historic home no longer exists, but Boatwright sent a photograph of it.



Thanks to Wilson “Will” Wetzler, great grandson of W. F. Espenlaub who owned and operated Arcadia’s first meat market, for donating historic photographs including one of the Espenlaub Store, recently demolished after damage from Hurricane Ian in 2022. He also donated some historic postcards of the Seminoles and some that were mailed to his Aunt Pauline at her various residences in Fort Pierce, Bonita Springs, and Naples. We are also grateful that in 2013, Wetzler donated a photograph of Arcadia immediately following the fire on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 30, 1905, that destroyed downtown Arcadia.



Espenlaub family photographs are also online at Florida Memory, including Wetzler’s great uncle: “George Espenlaub operated one of the first guide services in the Florida Everglades in the 1950s and 1960s. His brother-in-law, Ed Frank [Wetzler’s grandfather], is credited with inventing the first “swamp buggy.” Espenlaub used these buggies for his tours through the wet Everglades environment. In the 1950s, Espenlaub also competed in “swamp buggy” races.” <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/18291> The “swamp buggy” used oversized tires fitted with a variation of “snow chains.”

## Museum and Research Library Gardens

We are grateful to Carol Mahler who volunteered for the task of weeding and mulching the gardens at the Museum and Research Library and to renew the Florida native plants growing there. We appreciate Sandhill Native Growers, 5980 SE County Road 760, for donating dune sunflower plants (*Helianthus debilis*) for the gardens. We also appreciate the Arcadia Garden Club for donating dune sunflowers as well as blanket flowers (*Gaillardia pulchella*).

### 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.

### Museum and Library Holiday Closures

The John Morgan Ingraham House Museum and the Howard and Velma Melton Historical Research Library will be closed on Nov. 27, Thanksgiving Day; Dec. 25, Christmas Day; and Dec. 27, the 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

## Your Support is Appreciated!

Dues are payable by calendar year—Please renew now for 2026!

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.

## Historical Society Newsletter Sponsors

Jan. - **THIS SPACE AVAILABLE**

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. - **THIS SPACE AVAILABLE**

Dec. - **The McLeod children in memory of their Dad, Harold McLeod.**

## NEWSLETTER SPONSORSHIP SPACES AVAILABLE

We have two months open for Newsletter Sponsorship—**January** and **November**. To have your message prominently displayed on the masthead, make a \$100 annual donation in addition to your membership and choose your month.

## Contact Information

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

### Gratitude For Gifts —Con't

We thank William “Ky” Nicholson for donating \$100.00 to the Society for research that Kathy Bryce and Carol Mahler completed about his family—not only in the Howard and Velma Historical Research Library, but also in the records at the County Courthouse. He included the following note with his donation: “Honoring the memory of those who came before — and the hands today who helped us find them again. Thank you so much Carol! The Nicholson family.”

In addition, he helped to positively identify a photograph in the Society’s collection, and he wrote the following: “I also wanted to let you know that the photograph you sent of Paul Stanley Nicholson is indeed my grandfather. We actually have a copy of that same photo in our family collection, which

made it even more meaningful to see it appear in the Historical Society’s records as well. It’s a small but powerful connection — almost like two pieces of family history finding their way back together.

“The census pages, plats, and other documents you’ve shared have been incredible to go through. They’ve added so much depth to our understanding of how the Nicholson family put down roots in Arcadia, and your efforts have truly helped bring that story to life. We’re so grateful for the time and care you’ve given to this research and look forward to anything else you might uncover whenever time allows.

“As a small gesture of thanks, we’re also making a donation to the Historical Society this week to support the wonderful work you and your team continue to do in preserving Arcadia’s history for future generations.”

**THE Arcadia Garden Club**  
**PRESENTS:**  
**THANKFUL**  
*Fest III*  
**PLANT SALE!!! NATIVE, RARE,  
HOUSEPLANTS, SUCCULENTS &  
VEGETABLE PLANTS!!!**  
**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15TH, 2025**  
**9 AM - 1 PM**  
VENDORS | FOOD & REFRESHMENTS | FREE ENTRY  
**BOUNCY HOUSE BY SPLASH N BLAST!!!**  
**ORIGAMI! BAKE SALE! CRYSTALS! LOCAL HONEY !**  
1005 W. MAGNOLIA STREET, ARCADIA, FL 34266  
CONTACT: MARIA PACE 863-354-0808  
OR  
EMAIL: ARCADIAGARDENCLUB2022@GMAIL.COM

**From Manatee Genealogical Society**

**MANATEE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY**

Manatee County has a rich history from the Spanish landing of 1539 to the thriving Sun Coast area of today.

If you are interested in learning more about your ancestors, we urge you to checkout the

Manatee Genealogical Society - Calendar of Events

<https://share.google/yQDe4EaVXLRBUhXc1>

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/>.