



DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

www.historicdesoto.org

May 2026

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

ALL UPCOMING DATES

Hands-On History—May 18 and May 19—Volunteer Opportunities

The Memorial Elementary School Third Grade Classes will visit the John Morgan Ingraham House Museum on the mornings of May 18 and May 19 to learn local history through hands-on activities. If you would like to volunteer, please contact Carol Mahler.

Happy 139th Birthday to DeSoto County!—May 19

On May 19, 1887, Manatee County was divided: 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. The western one-third remained Manatee County.

Pine Level, established in 1866 as Manatee's county seat, was within the new county's boundaries, so it became DeSoto's first county seat until voters chose Arcadia in Nov. 1888. In 1921, the old DeSoto County was split into five counties: Charlotte, DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, and Highlands. Arcadia remained the county seat for DeSoto County, now only 639 square miles.

—See map on page 6

Happy Emancipation Day!—May 20 See article on page 6

Memorial Day, Mon., May 25 See article on right and next page

You're Invited To Memorial Day Services

During World War I, John Paul Riddle completed his primary pilot training at Carlstrom Field, one of two U.S. Army aviation training camps built near Arcadia that were closed after the conflict. In 1940, he returned



to Arcadia, bought land near the World War I Carlstrom Field site and, built Riddle Aeronautical Institute (RAI) to train pilots. Under the Lend-Lease Act of 1941, those pilots included Royal Air Force (RAF) cadets who completed their primary training at Carlstrom Field and

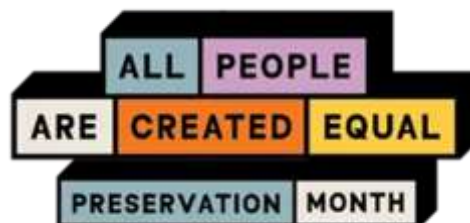
their advanced training at Riddle Field near Clewiston in special British Flying Training Schools (BFTS).

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Celebrate May As Historic Preservation Month!

President Harry Truman signed the legislation forming the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1949. To recognize the significance and importance of historic resources to local communities, the Trust instituted National Historic Preservation week in 1973 and expanded it to a month-long celebration in 2005. When the Society held its first Annual Pioneer Day in 2005, it was in celebration of National Historic Preservation Month!

As the United States celebrates the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the National Trust wants to focus “the places that bring its most powerful promise to life, that ‘all people are created equal,’ and to the preservationists making sure those places endure. . . . Places that remind us of how far we’ve come and how far we still have to go.” <https://savingplaces.org/stories/preservation-month>



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You're Invited To Memorial Day Services

When the first RAF cadet died of disease in July 1941 in Arcadia, former Mayor and City Councilman Paul P. Speer was serving as City Recorder. He arranged a burial site for the "British Cadets" in the City's Oak Ridge Cemetery, and by the war's end, 23 cadets were buried there. (They mostly died during advanced training but also of disease, drowning, and in a car accident.)

Since 1956, the Arcadia Rotary Club has honored and remembered the cadets with a ceremony on Memorial Day that includes a speech, traditional songs, and placing a flag at the graves of the cadets. In past years, many British Isles clubs from neighboring counties have participated in the ceremony bringing memorial wreaths and their antique vehicles.



Above—Piper Ross Allen. Below—Arcadia American Legion K-Post 11 Honor Guard.



You're invited to that ceremony at 10:00 a.m., on Memorial Day, Mon., May 25, at the British Plot in Oak Ridge Cemetery, 601 N. Johnson Ave., and then to the DeSoto County Memorial Day Service at 11:00 a.m. on the south lawn of the DeSoto County Courthouse, 115 E. Oak St., Arcadia.



Left—DeSoto County Veterans Service Office Steve Rickard and Veteran Eric Erickson.

Photographs from 2025 observances courtesy of Carol Mahler.

RECENT EVENTS

Grand Re-Opening and Ribbon Cutting

The Society is grateful to Linda Williams for organizing an excellent Grand Re-Opening and Ribbon Cutting for the John Morgan Ingraham House Museum at 10:00 a.m. on May 1 in celebration of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. We thank her for arranging for the DeSoto



From left—Luke Wilson, Society President Adrian Cline, and Mayor Judy Wertz-Strickland.

Inmate work crew to clean up the Society's property and mulch the flower beds plus add some new plants in addition to the plantings and mulching done by Carol Mahler. We appreciate all their work as well as assistance from DCI Assistant Warden William Bowden, Lt. Eddie Talley, and Corrections Officer Kevin McHargue.

Thanks to Society President Adrian Cline for organizing a wonderful program for the event! We appreciate him for serving as emcee and giving the welcome; Member Luke Wilson for entertaining before the program started and loaning his sound system; Vice-President Vernon Keen for offering the invocation and benediction; Member Ron Jones, Sr., for leading the recitation of the pledge; Member and Mayor Judy Wertz-Strickland for serving as special guest speaker; Member Cindy McLeod Ely for recounting the history of House and Museum; and Chamber of Commerce Director Taylor Jones and Arcadia Main Street Director Pam Ames for holding a ribbon cutting for the Museum.



Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Taylor Jones, third from left, cut the ribbon at the Grand Re-Opening of the John Morgan Ingraham House Museum: from left, Society Member Cindy McLeod Ely, Arcadia Main Street Director Pam Ames, Jones, Mayor Judy Wertz-Strickland, Society Vice-President Vernon Keen, and Society President Adrian Cline.

—Cont. from previous page

Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Taylor Jones, third from left, cut the ribbon at the Grand Re-Opening of the John Morgan Ingraham House Museum: from left, Society Member Cindy McLeod Ely, Arcadia Main Street Director Pam Ames, Jones, Mayor Judy Wertz-Strickland, Society Vice-President Vernon Keen, and Society President Adrian Cline.

Thanks to those who prepared and donated food for the event: Kathy Apocada, Ruth Reynolds Dunn, Cindy, Linda Keen, Carol, and Linda Williams. For helping with set up and clean up, we appreciate Pam, Kathy, Ruth, Pastor of Arcadia Baptist Church Nathan Heinz, Marshal Quinn Jones, Ron, Linda Keen, Carol, Member Duffy O'Donnell, and Linda Williams.

We are grateful to Nancy Erickson, Elizabeth Kenney, Carol, and Milo Moreno for cleaning inside the Museum, and to Cindy, Nancy, and Carol for cleaning up the love bugs on Thursday and Friday mornings! We appreciate Carol for giving a tour of the Museum after the program was complete.

Thanks to Member Tonya Wallace who brought her ESL class to the Grand Re-Opening of the Museum, and they—along with Member Vivian



Auster—enjoyed a tour of the Museum with Carol.

From left, Tonya Wallace, Yesica DeLeon, Mariela Garcia, Irma Correa, Vivian Auster, Elizabet Mondragon, Diana Lopez, Francesca Brutus, and Carol Mahler.



131st Annual “May Day” Picnic

Although the day started with much-needed rain, Fort Ogden residents and friends kept the 131-year-old tradition of the “May Day” Picnic on May 3, the first Sun. of the month instead May 1, at the Ziba King Memorial Recreation Park. Under cloudy skies, people gathered at noon to set up their tables and chairs or use the picnic tables surrounding the park pavilion where the buffet of covered dishes was arranged.

Everyone signed the guest book, made a name tag, gave a donation, and visited with family and friends—old and new.



Traditionally, the organizer of the picnic is called the “Mayor of Fort Ogden,” and Trish Howard served again as she has for the past eight or nine years. She welcomed everyone to the event and noted the passing of Carol Boggess and Gordon Hay. Then she introduced Ernie Gass who asked the blessing.



First held in 1896 by Mr. and Mrs. W. F. Martin, the “May Day” Picnic was described in the May 2, 1903, “Tampa Tribune” as “a frolic in the river” because it used to be held on the banks of Peace River closer to where the

original Camp Ogden was constructed by the U.S. Army in 1841 during the Second Seminole War (1835-1842). The U.S. never reactivated the site named for Capt. Edmund Ogden of the 8th U.S. Infantry. However, settlers changed the name to “Fort Ogden” to make it sound more permanent. Established in 1876, the Fort Ogden Post Office is the oldest in the County to be in continuous service.

The Historical Society thanked everyone who helped with the Grand Re-opening event: Society Member and Event Organizer Linda Williams; Society Vice-President Vernon Keen; Marshal Quinn Jones; Society Member Cindy McLeod Ely; Pastor Nathan Heinz of Arcadia Baptist Church; Sheriff Jim Potter; City Council Member Keith Keene, Society Member Ron Jones, Sr.; DeSoto Correctional Institution Assistant Warden William Bowden, Lt. Eddie Talley, Corrections Officer Kevin McHargue, Mayor Judy Wertz-Strickland, County Commissioner Judy Schaefer, City Administrator Beth Carsten, and Society President Adrian Cline.

APRIL WRAP UP

Highlands Heritage Festival

We appreciate Karen Smoke for including information about the Society with her Crewsville History Project display for the Heritage Association of Highlands County's Heritage Festival on April 11 and 12 at the Edna Pearce Lockett Homestead, 70 Boondock Rd., Fort Basinger, (near the corner of US 98 N and State Road 721).

Inspired by the Kentucky Graveyard quilt made by a grieving mother in about 1840 as well as by noting that two infants in the Midway Cemetery near Crewsville died on the same day one year apart, Karen made the Midway Cemetery Memorial Quilt, and she hopes to connect with descendants of those buried in the cemetery.

Midway Cemetery is located on Crewsville Rd., about two miles southwest of Crewsville Bethel Baptist Church that has a graveyard beside it. The name of the roadway and church are what remains of Crewsville, a settlement in DeSoto County that prospered from 1890 to 1910 with two stores, a school, church, and post office that closed in 1916. It became part of Hardee County in 1921.



The annual event featured a quilt turning.

"I Spy DeSoto" Bus

From 9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on April 18, the Society participated with the "I Spy DeSoto Bus," during the Suncoast Remake Learning Days, the 15-Day Hands-On Learning Free Family Festival from April 18 to May 2, presented by the Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and generously funded by The Patterson Foundation. The bus logged a total of 123 riders, some of whom rode last year, and everyone seemed to enjoy learning history and traveling from one free hands-on activity to the next. We appreciate Links To Success and the DeSoto County School District for partnering with the Society for this event. Links To Success designed a fabulous logo and flyer and then helped to publicize the event distributing flyers (in English and in Spanish!) to afterschool programs, daycares, and private schools as well as arranging for four weeks of publication in the "Peace River Shopper." The School District outfitted two school buses with carseats

and provided excellent drivers—Mark and Rosa—who worked from 9:30 to 2:00 p.m. on April 18. Thanks to Florida Power and Light for donating tote bags for this event!

We are grateful to Tonya Wallace for completing the paperwork, designing the bus route and the "I Spy" card, ordering and purchasing supplies, placing all the "bus stop" signs, and serving as a bus guide; Carol Mahler for assisting with the design of the bus route



and the "I Spy" card, designing the "bus stop" signs, preparing the supplies with help from Elizabeth Kenney, writing the history notes and an article for the "Arcadia Community Local," and serving as a bus guide; Nancy "Eric" Erickson, Milo Moreno, and Rocio Munoz for serving as assistants on the buses; and Karen Smoke for riding one bus and making 20 Facebook posts throughout the day as invitations to join the fun.

Painting The Museum And More

The crew of R.D. Welch Company did a fantastic job of replacing the deteriorated siding and wood trim on the John Morgan Ingraham House Museum and then giving it a fresh coat of paint, and we are thankful for their craftsmanship and work.

We also appreciate Ron Jones and Amber Jones for painting the outhouse, new back steps, and one of the historic seeders. We thank them for hanging one old and two new display cases in the Museum as well as the new sign for



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We are grateful to Ron for making the flagpole permanent by installing a solar-powered light at the top that he donated as well as a new motion detector light for the west door of the Research Library as the original outdoor light was stolen.



From left—
Amber Jones
and Ron
Jones, Sr.

East view of
Museum



South side
of Museum

North side of
Museum
Photographs
courtesy of
Carol Mahler.



Museum and Research Library Closed For The Summer

The Museum and Research Library will be closed for the months of June, July, and August, so that volunteers may clean and update the displays. The closure will include the 4th Sat. this month, May 23. Research assistance is available by contacting Carol Mahler.

Historical Society Newsletter Sponsors

Jan. - **Adrian and Jane Cline** in loving memory of
Howard and Celia Sorrells.

Feb. - **René Collins** in memory of **Terry and
Evelyn Collins.**

March - **Dale & Patty** in loving memory of our parents,
Howard & Velma Melton, and our sister **Sue Melton
Rich.**

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. - **Adrian and Jane Cline** in loving memory of **Ada
Carlton Cline, Adrian B. Cline, Hazel G. Cline, and
Donna Faye Cline.**

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

and on the second and fourth Saturday of the month.

CLOSED 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

Happy Emancipation Day!—May 20

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 until May 10, 1865, when Brigadier General Edward M. McCook accepted Tallahassee from C.S.A. forces and announced on May 20 that the Emancipation Proclamation was in effect. Since that time, Floridians have celebrated and commemorated May 20th as Emancipation Day or Freedom Day.

More Photos from Museum Grand Re-Opening

Right—from left—Society Vice-President Vernon Keen, Mayor Judy Wertz-Strickland, and Society President Adrian Cline.

Below—Cindy McLeod Ely. Center—Luke Wilson. Bottom—Mayor Judy Wertz-Strickland.

Contact Information

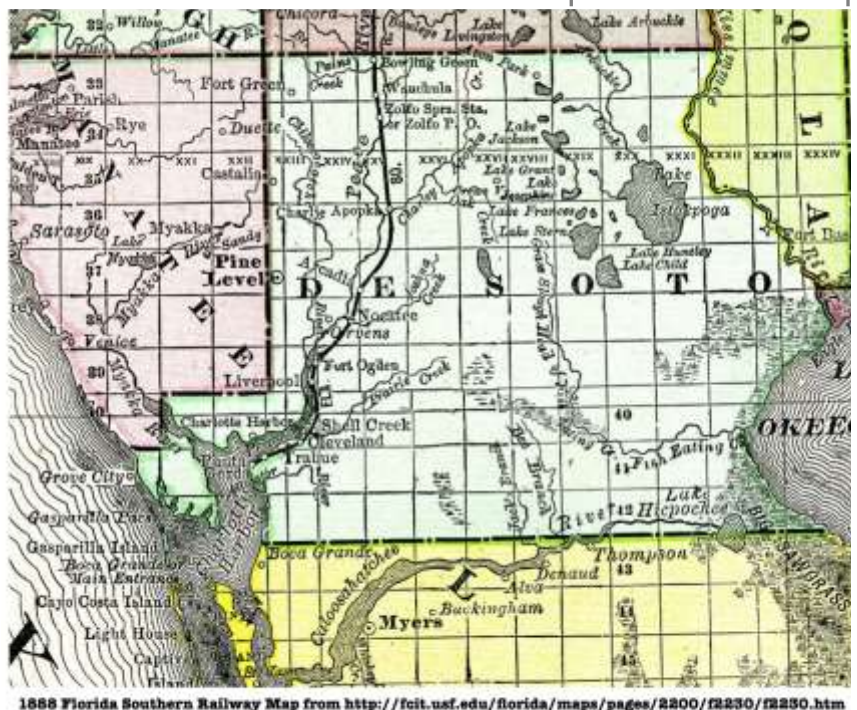
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Map of DeSoto County as it existed from May 19, 1887 until 1921.



1888 Florida Southern Railway Map from <http://fcit.usf.edu/florida/maps/pages/2200/12230/12230.htm>