



DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

www.historicdesoto.org

September 2026

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mark Your Calendars: Upcoming Events

25th Anniversary of The 9/11 Tragedy
Friday, Sept. 11, 2026, 9 a.m.
DeSoto County Courthouse Lawn
See below.

BOARD of DIRECTORS MEETING
Monday, September 28, 2026. See Letter from
the President on page 2.

FLORIDA CRACKER MEAL
Saturday, October 3, 2026 ... See right

OCTOBER MEETING
Monday, Oct. 19, **12:00 noon** in the **McSwain**
Room at DeSoto Memorial Hospital. See
Letter from the President on page 2.

SCHOOL GROUP TOURS
The Gathering Grove Homeschoolers will enjoy
hands-on activities from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
on Tuesday, October 20. If you would like to help,
please contact Carol Mahler.

BINGO AT THE BREWERY
The Society will host—and benefit from the
proceeds of—a bingo game every Tuesday during
the month of February 2027 at Three Trees
Brewery, 5 E. Oak St. in Arcadia. If you would like
to volunteer to assist, please contact Adrian Cline.

PIONEER DAY
Saturday, March 20, 2027 ... See page 5.

Come To The Sixth Annual Florida Cracker Meal

Tickets are now available for our Florida Cracker Meal on Saturday,
Oct. 3, 2026. You may purchase them online using PayPal, or pick up at
the Seed House on Thursdays, 9 to 1 p.m., or at Radio Shack and Crews
Bank and Trust, Member FDIC, 2747 SE Highway 70 location ONLY.
Seating is limited and we suggest you get your tickets early.

Come enjoy authentic foods and great company. Kin to Southern
cooking, the Florida Cracker cuisine dates from the 19th and early 20th
centuries when the Florida frontier was home to the cowman or
cowhunter. He cracked a cow whip to drive his herds, and the noise
carried a mile or more. Folks started to say, "Listen. Here come the
Crackers." Churn butter for your cornbread at your table. It's always a
memorable evening, and we hope to see you there!

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

Come to our Sixth Annual
Florida Cracker Meal
5:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, October 3
Pine Level Church
Fellowship Hall
9596 NW Pine Level Street

Tickets \$20.00 each.

LIMITED SEATING
Get your tickets early!
Tickets available from the **Society, Radio Shack and Crews Bank and Trust, Member FDIC, 2747 SE Highway 70 location ONLY.**

MENU
Traditional Florida Cracker foods:
Pork Steaks
Rice and Tomato Gravy
Black Eyed Peas
Sweet Potatoes
Collard Greens
Cornmeal Muffins
Fresh Churned Butter
Peach Cobbler
Peanut Butter Pie
Other Delicious Desserts

HistoricDeSoto.org
863-266-5774
desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com



25th Anniversary of The 9/11 Tragedy

At 9:00 a.m. on Fri., Sept. 11, DeSoto County Fire Rescue (DCFR) invites you to a remembrance ceremony on the 25th anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy on the courthouse lawn, 115 E. Oak St., in Arcadia. Fire Chief Chad Jorgensen will conduct the program with help from his staff. Sheriff Jim Potter and Marshal Quinn Jones and their staff members will also attend. The American Legion K-Post 11 Honor Guard will fire a gun salute, and the Rev. David Stewart, pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church, will offer the invocation. For more information, contact DCFR Administration at 863-993-4842.

Letter From The President

Dear Members and Friends:

We wish to inform you of important changes to our upcoming meeting schedule. The membership meeting originally planned for **September 21, 2026**, has been **rescheduled**. In its place, our Society will gather at the **Florida Cracker Meal on October 3, 2026**, held at the **Pine Level Church**. This beloved community tradition celebrates our shared heritage, brings friends and families together, and honors the history that makes DeSoto County so special.

This year's Florida Cracker Meal will feature a special program presented by the Pine Level Church Youth. Their presentation will highlight **the 250th Anniversary of our nation** and explore **the rich history of DeSoto County**, offering a meaningful reflection on our shared heritage.

The next Board Meeting of the Society is scheduled for September 28, 2026, at 12:00 pm in the McSwain Conference Room.

Our regular October membership meeting will take place as scheduled on **October 19, 2026**, at **12:00 noon** in the **McSwain Room at DeSoto Memorial Hospital**. Christopher Parent will be sharing a wonderful program on the importance and process of documenting family legacies.

We appreciate your flexibility and look forward to seeing you as we continue celebrating and preserving the history of our community.

Sincerely,

Adrian H. Cline

President
DeSoto County Historical Society

AUGUST WRAP UP

Society President Adrian Cline presented a certificate of appreciation to Judy Wertz-Strickland for sharing the reminiscence of growing up in Limestone, Florida, by Betty Jean Albirtton Grady at our August meeting.



Society President Adrian Cline presented a certificate of appreciation to Luke Wilson for his presentation of the "History of G. Pierce Wood Hospital" on June 9 as part of the Arcadia Main Street's local history luncheon program series funded, in part, by an America 250 Initiative Grant.



Society Takes Interest in Brownville School



The Society has opened discussion with the School Board of DeSoto County regarding the Brownville School. School Boards are required to report an inventory of properties annually to the state. Recent changes to Florida Statutes (§ 1013.28), effective July 1, 2026 include provisions that may prompt the school board to look at disposing of unused properties. The Brownville School has long sat vacant, but has been maintained and is in good shape. It is not in danger of demolition, but the Society feels this historic building should be preserved and if possible used for community purposes. In his letter of August 24, 2026, President Adrian Cline wrote: "The Brownville School is an important part of DeSoto County's educational and cultural heritage. Preserving this historic property will help ensure that future generations can learn about and appreciate the people communities, and traditions that shaped our county."

AUGUST WRAP UP—Con't

Museum Repairs and Upgrades

Thanks to Ron Jones, Sr., for coordinating repairs and upgrades to the John Morgan Ingraham Museum. He straightened the museum sign originally built and installed by Jim Potter that had been blown to a tilt by Hurricane Ian in 2022. He also coordinated with Gary Miller to repair the front porch with materials purchased by the Society. The repair delayed the opening of the Museum after being closed for the months of June, July, and August.



We appreciate Carol Mahler for keeping the flower beds weeded and picking up the palm fronds and limbs blown down by the summer rainstorms as well as the trash.

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.

**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

I Wonder Wednesday Photographs Identified

Thanks to Lawanda Dennis Campbell, who identified her second-grade photograph that we posted on our Facebook page on Aug. 5, 2026: "Hello, It's me!!! Lawanda Dennis Campbell. I had Miss Pooser in the second grade at West Elementary School. I graduated from DeSoto High School in 1991. Thank you for the feature." Lawanda also shared the photo to her Facebook page: "I have been featured by our Historical Society. Thank you for the feature. This is my second grade picture in Miss Pooser's class at West Elementary. Class of 1991, DeSoto High School."



For the photograph we posted on Aug. 12, thanks for the identification of Tasha Brown from Claritte Jackson, Jacqueline Rice, Kenya Hudson, Cricket McMillion, and Coretta Brown. The posting of Tasha's photo so near the time of her death (July 31, 2026) was random and not intentional, but perhaps it is a message from her soul asking to be remembered.

Our thoughts and prayers are with her family and friends, and we share their grief and sorrow.

How Genealogists Identify Photographs and How Even a "Best Guess" Can Be Wrong

Genealogist Amy Ballor did her best to identify the unknown baby photograph that we posted on Facebook on July 15; however, her guesswork was incorrect as confirmed by John Conroy, nephew of Frances Pooser, and his wife Linda Wilson Conroy.

"Hello DeSoto County Historical Society. I came across your call for help identifying the baby in the photo from 1974. I did some research and lots of digging and I believe I have found a match for you. Here is what I found out. I cannot say 100% sure that I am completely correct but it's very likely. Here is the breakdown of who this baby is very likely to be:



"* The Suspected Identity:
This baby girl strongly matches Tammy Nadine Conroy (now Tammy Burch Warrington of Tallahassee, FL).

"* The Family Connection:
She is the daughter of Johnny Conroy and Linda Ryals. Johnny Conroy was the biological nephew of Eva Marie Conroy (who married Jack L. Pooser in 1943), which would make this baby the

maternal great-niece of your beloved local schoolteacher, Miss Frances Pooser. This explains perfectly why the photo was treasured in her private estate.

"* The Timeline Match (The 1974 Stamp): The photo border is stamped "• 74 • 19", which suggests a late 1973/1974 timeframe. However, public records show that Tammy graduated from Amos P. Godby High School in Tallahassee, FL, in the Class of 1988. This would place her birth closer to 1970. In the 1970s, it was incredibly common for families to leave a roll of film sitting inside a camera for three or four years before finally completing the roll and developing it. The baby in the photo appears to be a slightly older infant or young toddler, which fits a 1970 birth date perfectly.

"* Why the Trail Went Cold in Arcadia: Shortly after this film was processed in early 1974, Johnny and Linda Conroy moved their young family away from Arcadia up to Tallahassee. Because they exited DeSoto County when she was a toddler, her local school and public footprint vanished from Arcadia records, leaving this snapshot behind as an "orphan artifact" in Miss Pooser's home files.

"* The Visual Correlation: A structural comparison between the 1974 infant portrait and a current photograph of Tammy displays highly consistent, unaltering facial bone landmarks. They share an identical, unique wide-set eye placement, a high rounded forehead structure, a soft button nose tip, and the exact same short lip-to-nose (philtrum) distance.

"*How your team can verify this lead: Since you hold Miss Pooser's physical files, you can check if you have any Ryals-Conroy marriage records from the late 1960s or early 1970s, or any other photos of Johnny and Linda Conroy in her boxes to see if the handwriting or household contexts match.

"Even if this turns out to be an incredible coincidence rather than a definitive match, I hope this gives your researchers a solid branch of the family tree to investigate or rule out!"

AUGUST WRAP UP—Con't

New Museum Sign

For a sign to advertise the museum exhibit at Biggar and Biggar Antique Mall, 133 W. Oak St., we are grateful to the City Council for granting a waiver of the fees for the Certificate of Appropriateness and Signage Certificate Application. Thanks to Carol Mahler for designing the sign and filling out the paperwork.

Signs To Identify Historic Downtown Buildings

Adrian Cline, Ruth Dunn, Jeff Griffis, Carol Mahler, Edward Maassen, Jill Maassen, and Linda Williams met with Arcadia Main Street (AMS) Director Pam Ames and AMS Volunteer Sheila Bowden to discuss signs for marking the historic buildings in downtown Arcadia. Potential sources of funding include the County's Tourism Dept, State Dept. of Historic Resources, Florida Humanities Council, plus private and business donations.

The signs will mark historic buildings in the 18-block downtown area: from Volusia to Orange avenues and from Hickory to Magnolia streets. The signs will be similar in design to the way-finding signs that AMS installed downtown thanks to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Community Challenge grant of \$25,000.00.

Each sign will state the name and construction date of the historic building with one or two sentences about its history and a QR code for more detailed information that will be posted on the Society's Website. The Society already has a Mobile-Friendly, Online, Self-Guided Tour of Historic Downtown Arcadia that includes some of the information needed for the signs: http://libguides.southflorida.edu/florida/desoto_walking_tour.



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

SCHOOL GROUP TOURS

The Gathering Grove Homeschoolers will enjoy hands-on activities from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on **Tuesday, October 20**. If you would like to help, please contact Carol Mahler.



Pioneer Day Planning

To accomplish the goals of Pioneer Day, the following committees and coordinators have been established:

Volunteer Coordinator: Kathy Apodaca

Publicity Coordinator: Carol Mahler

1. Print
2. Social Media
3. Signage

Hands-On History Coordinator: Cindy Ely

1. Planning
2. Setup

Sponsor Coordinators: Nancy Humphrey and Linda Williams

Entertainment Coordinator: Luke Wilson

Parking Coordinator: Ron Jones

Vendor Coordinator: Karen Smoke



Save the date!

23rd Annual


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

PIONEER DAY

MARCH 20, 2027

with the Arcadia American Legion sponsored Antique Tractor and Hit & Miss Engine Show and Peace River Car Club Car Show

Turner Agri-Civic Center, 2250 NE Roan St., Arcadia

863-266-5774 ~ historicsdesoto.org ~ desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

CLICK THE BUTTON TO SEND AN
EMAIL TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT
VOLUNTEERING.

Volunteer to help with Pioneer Day!

Contact the Society or any of the coordinators listed above for the area you are interested in helping out with.

In Memoriam

Herbert Randolph "Randy" Cooper, Jr.
(October 9, 1943-August 8, 2026)

Herbert Randolph "Randy" Cooper, Jr., passed away on August 8, 2026, after complications of multiple illnesses at the age of 82. He was a resident of West Palm Beach. Randy was born in Louisville, Kentucky. He attended Durrett High School and Trevecca Nazarene College, where he met his wife of 61 years Patricia Melton Cooper, daughter of Howard and Velma Melton.



His first job was as a butcher at the A&P. He later worked for JC Penney and Grant's as an appliance salesman before training to become a restaurant manager. Over a 40-year career, he worked for Dutch Pantry, Aunt Emma's, Day's Inn, Holiday House, Sambo's, Wags, and finally Denny's where he retired.

His pastimes included watching football and gospel music programs, reading mysteries and biographies, and listening to an eclectic variety of music. He was a generous, hardworking, thoughtful man with a great sense of humor. Family was his priority and he was a dedicated husband, father, brother, grandfather, great-grandfather and friend. He lived by "the Golden Rule."

He is survived by his wife Patricia, daughter Michelle (John) and son Ken (Kris), brother Gary (Rosemary), granddaughter Melissa (Nick) and great-grandson Matthaïos. A remembrance celebration will be held 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 11, 2026, at the West Palm Beach Elks Lodge 6188 Belvedere Rd., Greenacres, FL 33413.

In lieu of flowers, please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Howard and Velma Melton

Historical Research Library. Make check payable to the DeSoto County Historical Society, P.O. Box 1824, Arcadia, FL 34265. You may make an online donation at the website: historicdesoto.org. Please indicate it is for the Howard and Velma Melton Research Library in the notes section.



What To Do With An Old Yearbook? Donate It!

On July 21, the Arcadia-DeSoto County Habitat for Humanity celebrated the grand opening of the Bulldog Corner in their ReStore, 114 N. Polk Ave., in Arcadia. The Bulldog Corner is dedicated to selling school spirit merchandise that is made locally and priced as inexpensively as possible, so the money stays in the community. Local craftspeople are also invited to discuss how their custom work can be sold in the Store.



In addition, the Bulldog Corner will feature historic photographs of school sports from the Society's Howard and Velma Historical Research Library. It will also offer a collection of DeSoto High School yearbooks available for those visiting the store to peruse. Habitat Development Director Lindsay Heine said, "Please call 863-494-4118 before donating your yearbook to make sure we don't get duplicates."



The Society has an incomplete collection of DeSoto High School yearbooks, so please also consider donating the following years to our collection: 1952-1955, 1960-1961, 1970-1971, 1976, 1981, 1985, 1987, 1991-1995, 1997-2002, 2004-2006, 2008, 2010-2011, 2017-2026.

Contact Information

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