



DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

www.historicdesoto.org

August 2023

This issue sponsored by - Charlotte Hill Carter in loving memory of her husband, Frederick Lawrence Carter.

Tickets On Sale For 3rd Annual Florida Cracker Meal!



Save the Date!

Third Annual FLORIDA CRACKER MEAL

PORK STEAKS, TOMATO GRAVY AND RICE, COLLARDS,
CORN ON THE COB, GUAVA COBBLER, AND MORE
**PLUS ARCADIA ALBRITTON COKER
CAKE CONTEST**

Donate to the
Society's
scholarship
fund and
choose a
"thank you"
gift or gift
card.

5:30 to 7:30 p.m., September 30, 2023
Pine Level United Methodist Church
Fellowship Hall, 9695 NW Pine Level St.



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

Limited seating. Starting Aug. 21,
tickets available from the Society,
Batter Up Bakery/Rosé Cafe, or
Crews Bank and Trust, Member FDIC.

Tickets
\$15.00
for
adults
\$8.00 for
children

Seating is limited for the **Third Annual Florida Cracker Meal** from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on **Sat., Sept. 30**, in the **Pine Level United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall**, 9695 NW Pine Level St., so buy your tickets ASAP! Tickets are \$15.00 for an adult and \$8.00 for a child up to 12 years of age, and they go on sale at the Society's Aug. meeting. After that, tickets will be available at Batter Up Bakery/Rosé Cafe, 12-14 N. DeSoto Ave.; Crews Bank and Trust, Member FDIC, 2747 SE State Road 70; or online via PayPal (historicdesoto.org).

The menu will consist of traditional Florida Cracker foods, including pork steaks, tomato gravy and rice, collard greens, corn on the cob, guava cobbler, and more. Dessert will be the cakes in the Arcadia Albritton Coker Cake Contest. Jessi Cline of Batter Up Bakery will judge the cakes and help plate them for dessert. Anyone may enter the baking contest, if you are interested please call or email the Historical Society.

The program will include the centennial anniversary of the purchase of the old Pine Level School by the Pine Level Methodist Church; the history of Florida Cracker foods, and some musical entertainment.

The Society will also welcome donations to our scholarship fund for a DeSoto County resident who is graduating from high school. A variety of "thank-you" gifts for those who make a donation—including antiques and gift cards—will be available to those who make a donation.

Member Meeting:

NOW ON THIRD MONDAY

Monday, August 21

DeSoto Memorial Hospital -

McSwain Room

Room open at 11:30 a.m.

Meeting 12 noon

August Program: A Hot Topic

A resident on the property where the forestry tower once stood near State Road 70 west of Arcadia, **Kellyn Ursin** works for the **Florida Forest Service** as a Wildland Firefighter. At Oregon State University, she studied natural resource management with a focus on fish and wildlife sustainability. As an AmeriCorps member, she worked on the resource management team at Myakka River State Park and developed a passion for Florida native plants, wildlife, and the important role of fire in Florida ecosystems.



She will present a slide show about prescribed burns and how they work to protect and preserve our state's unique ecosystems.

• Please arrive early so you can go through the line ahead of the hospital employees.

A Message From The President

I am inviting all Society members and friends to come together and make our Florida Cracker Meal a highlight of the year for us and for our visitors.

This meal is being entirely put together by members and friends. But cooking and shopping for potentially 100 plus dinners will be a chore. The more who sign up to do a dish or part of a dish will make it less work for everyone. Won't you please call and be another member or friend who will help lighten the load and make the meal a success. There are many ways we can assign you to help if you are willing. Please do call, my number is: 863-558-6115.

Norma

Museum Maintenance

Thanks to LTC Ron Baynes, U.S. Army retired, and DeSoto High School JROTC Cadets Joel Camacho, Julian King, and Vincent Tew for working in the heat and dirt for 2.5 hours on July 20 to reattach the insulation board and insulation to the underside of the John Morgan Ingraham House Museum! This hardworking and dedicated team repaired the damage done by Hurricane Ian on Sept. 27, 2022.



LTC Ron Baynes, with Cadets Tew, and Comancho. Not pictured, Cadet King.

—Photo by Carol Mahler

We also appreciate Jeff Griffis and Cindy McLeod Ely for donating fasteners and Carol Mahler for making the arrangements and providing beverages and snacks for the workers. The Board of Directors had authorized up to \$200.00 to pay a contractor for this work, and in gratitude, they unanimously voted to donate the funds to the JROTC program.

Moveable Outhouse Makeover

We appreciate Dave Hutchinson for the “makeover” he did for the moveable outhouse that Sam McLeod designed and built several years ago for use at Pioneer Day. Some of the original plywood had rotted, so Dave measured and cut new pieces and painted black circles on the seat to mimic the holes. Outhouses had two holes to more evenly distribute the waste in the pit beneath, and sometimes the holes were different sizes to accommodate both large and small behinds.

Research Library Reorganized

Thanks to Carol Mahler for working diligently to reorganize the Howard and Velma Melton Historical Research Library and purchase new shelving units. We also appreciate Jeff Griffis for helping her move the wall-mounted display cases; Jahna Leonard for helping assemble a new metal shelving unit and moving and repacking items; Kathy Bryce and Elizabeth Kenney for inventorying, researching, and filing so many documents!

The Board of Directors approved (with Carol abstaining) to pay for the lunches of the three dedicated volunteers (Kathy, Elizabeth, and Carol) who work from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. every Thursday at the Library and Museum. The volunteers accepted the gift once, but asked that the Board reconsider and use the money to purchase much needed supplies. On behalf of the three volunteers, Elizabeth Kenney wrote the following to the Board:

“Thank you very much for paying for our lunch on Thursday, the 20th of July. We sincerely appreciate your thoughtfulness, though once we understood the plan, we were quite overwhelmed. Upon reflection, we would like to suggest that [the] motion, which was passed, be put on pause for the rest of the year, and that the money be used to purchase a flat file, shelving, and other materials sorely needed in the Research Library. We truly wish you will accept our proposal.

Thank you, again, so much—your always-learning-something—new volunteers: Kathy, Elizabeth, and Carol.”

Contact Information

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President: Norma Banas, 863-558-6115
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Gratitude for Gifts

Thanks to Joe Casey for making a \$1,500.00 donation for the research on his property in DeSoto County done by Kathy Bryce and Carol Mahler. We also appreciate Cindy McLeod Ely's donation of \$50.00 in memory of Terrence "Terry" L. Welles (1942-2023). We welcome memorial donations for our members and friends who have passed away.

Florida Historical Marker for the Arcadia Golf Course

The Board of Directors voted to donate \$500.00 to Arcadia Main Street for the purchase of a Florida Historical Marker to commemorate the century-old Arcadia Golf Course. We thank Norma Banas and Vernon Keen for presenting the check to Arcadia Main Street's Executive Director Alessia Trujillo—and Carol Mahler for making the announcement—at the Aug. 1 Arcadia City Council meeting. We also are grateful to Carol for donating her time and effort—on behalf of the Society—to complete the Florida Master Site File and Florida Historical Marker applications.



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 our volunteers may clean and update the exhibits and research space. Research assistance and tours will be available by appointment only: please call Carol Mahler at 863-445-0789.

John Morgan Ingraham House Museum
300 N. Monroe Avenue
The Howard and Velma Melton Historical
Research Library in the Ingraham Seed House
120 W. Whidden Street

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.**

From our scholarship recipient—

Dear DeSoto County Historical Society:

Thank you so much for selecting me to be the recipient of the DeSoto County Historical Society Scholarship! I thoroughly enjoyed the time that I spent volunteering as I learned many new things and met so many great people. Most importantly, I am appreciative because by receiving this scholarship, my post-secondary education goals are now achievable. Through this scholarship, I have access to many new opportunities and opened doors.

Thank you, again,

Piper Phillips

Terrific Tuesdays

We are grateful to Carol Mahler for organizing our booth at DeSoto County's first ever Terrific Tuesdays family nights from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on July 11 and 25 at the Turner Agri-Civic Center. She hauled supplies, hung our banner, and set out old-fashioned games such as checkers, hopscotch, jacks, marbles, and pickup sticks.

Thanks to volunteers René Collins, Nancy Erickson, Linda Keen, Vernon Keen, Carol Mahler, and Karen Smoke for helping people learn how to play the games.

People also enjoyed our "Do You Know Your Local History" guessing game, and we thank Linda and Vernon Keen for fetching it from—and Carol Mahler and Dave Hutchinson for toting it back to—the Museum.

We also appreciate Eric Hamilton and Robby Walker for their kindnesses in helping with set-up and take-down as well as Robert Hamrick who coached many children in how to play marbles on July 22.

We are grateful to Karen Smoke for figuring out how to make a Quick Response (QR) code so that folks attending our events may sign up to receive notices about future events and for designing an attractive sign that we debuted at Terrific Tuesdays.



Above left: Jaxson Knowles and Linda Keen play checkers. Above: Nevaeh Silos and Emmanuel Mar try their hand at jacks.

Below clockwise from left: Nancy Erickson shows Benjamin Rangel, right, how to play marbles while Michelina Ruiz, holding Ana Camille Rangel, watches. Kellyn Ursin of the Florida Forestry Department (our speaker this month) talks with Skylar Berini. Natalie Gonzalez tries her hand at jacks. Volunteers René Collins, Nancy Erickson, and Karen

Smoke. Leland Darnell and Randy Tiedman watch Rene Collins demonstrate pickup sticks.



Tribute to Louis Allen Towne, Jr. (1927-2023) by Carol Mahler

(A version of this article was published in the Aug. 10
Arcadia Community Local.)

Lou Towne joined the DeSoto County Historical Society after he participated in our program to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. Many shared their experiences, but his story was unusual. With his short stature and weighing 98 pounds, he was trained as a frogman who swam out of a torpedo tube to clear obstacles before U.S. forces landed at a beach.

He had joined the U.S. Navy in 1944 and trained in Sampson, New York, and then learned underwater demolition in Newport, Rhode Island, in preparation for the invasion of Japan planned for Nov. 1945 and canceled by the war's end.

In July 1945, he trained in Philadelphia as an aircraft mechanic for seaplanes that were catapulted from cruisers. Then he joined the crew of the "USS Fargo" (CL-106) namesake of the North Dakota city. He received the Navy Occupation Service Medal.

Son of Louis Allen Towne, Sr., and Helen Livermore Towne, Lou grew up in a "school for boys" on Thompson Island in Boston Harbor, now the Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center, "a nonprofit education organization offering programs in leadership, environmental education, and youth empowerment" (thompsonisland.org).

After his discharge from the navy in 1946, he learned the printing trade and moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and met Lois J. Brader (1927-2016). They married in 1948 and raised a son and a daughter. He worked in sales and marketing.

After they moved to Arcadia in 2001, Lou and Lois were both involved in Arcadia Tidewell Hospice, and Ron Jones, Sr., commander of the American Legion K-Post 11, said that at every meeting, Towne gave "a briefing about hospice—and other veterans' issues that he knew about."



He also served the past three years as Third Vice-Commander.

A member of Calvary Baptist Church, Towne arranged in Nov. 2003 for 36 youngsters to travel to Avon Park to experience a free flight as part of the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA)'s "Young Eagles" Program. His efforts helped to achieve EAA's goal of one million youngsters enjoying a free flight before the centennial anniversary of the Wright Brothers' first powered flight on Dec. 17, 1903. Towne was looking forward to the 120th anniversary of that historic milestone at the end of this year.

When Trudeau Warbird Enterprises was located at the Arcadia Municipal Airport, Towne worked with the crew to restore a Grumman FM-2 Wildcat U.S. Navy fighter. That year, 2008, he also started working to get the T-33 aircraft displayed near Lake Katherine repaired. (It was damaged by Hurricane Charley in 2004.) He talked with many people and convinced Jones that K-Post 11 should take on the project. In the end, the City of Arcadia paid for the aircraft's restoration that was finished in 2022. Vernon Keen said, "If he got on to something, he was going to stay with it."

After participating in the Historical Society's World War II commemoration, Towne was elected to the Board of Directors. Without fail, he attended every event, work day, and meeting until he moved to the Ardie R. Copas State Veterans' Nursing Home in Port St. Lucie in May. He died on July 25.

Towne was also an active member of the Arcadia Rotary Club and Arcadia-DeSoto County Habitat for Humanity—serving on the Board of Directors.

"If Lou volunteered for something, and if you didn't give him something to do, he would be gone. He wanted to be doing something worthwhile," Keen said. He recalled that while he was sheriff, Towne participated in the "Volunteers in Patrol" (VIP) program. He also drove veterans back and forth to medical appointments in St. Petersburg and Tampa. Keen said, "We were blessed to have known Lou, and I'm sure there's a lot of good things he did that we don't know about."

"[Towne] was very faithful," Jones said. "His heart was in everything he did. He was just really a good guy."

A Service for Lou will be held at the **Sarasota National Cemetery**, 9810 State Road 72, Sarasota FL 34241 on Thursday, August 17, 2023 at 2 p.m.

—More photos of Lou and a thank you from the family next page.



Lou helping at cleanup after Hurricane Ian, and at Pearl Harbor Day commemoration last December.



—Photos by Carol Mahler

A note from Lou's Family in response to the card we signed at the July member meeting and sent to Lou.—

Dear All,

Thank you all so much for thinking of Dad. He was happy and surprised to receive your card. He is not doing well, in hospice care at the Port S. Lucie V.A. home, resting and comfortable. I'm his daughter-in-law, Kelly, and Tod (his son). We have been with him and will continue to be. He is so thankful to everyone and everything that has happened in his life and has no regrets.

Please keep him in your thoughts and prayers,

Tod and Kelly Towne



If you would like to volunteer to help with the Florida Cracker Meal, or anything else, click the orange button to send an email to Carol.

Punta Gorda Historical Society

see poster at right—

<http://puntagordahistory.com/events>

Music at the Woman's Club

[118 Sullivan Street, Punta Gorda 33950](#)

Wednesday August 23, 2023 - 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Open Format for You or Your Favorite Musician

"A New Music Experience for the Community and Musicians"

Musicians – Contact Paul Cottrell to be a part of this experience.

hoguitar@icloud.com

News from our Sister Societies—

The Blanchard House Museum

Amy Shumaker, Associate General Manager of Content for WGCU Public Media, PBS and NPR for Southwest Florida, invited the Society to participate in a project for which WGCU is applying for a grant from the Florida Humanities Council. The project will produce six to eight short films illustrating Dr. Martha Bireda's essay series, *Reflections of a Colored Girl*, that illustrate her life experiences using mixed media. The Board of Directors voted to send a letter of support for the project. If it is funded, then the films will be screened in Arcadia followed by discussion by a panel and the audience.

Dr. Martha Bireda is an author, historian, and executive director of the Blanchard House Museum for African American History and Culture in Punta Gorda. Punta Gorda was part of DeSoto County from its formation in 1887 until 1921 when it was divided into the five counties that are Charlotte, DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, and Highlands. Even after county division, Arcadia and Punta Gorda maintained strong ties, and—in some regards—have a parallel history. Dr. Bireda has spoken about the Blanchard House Museum at one of our previous monthly meetings.

"Kickback"
Music at the Woman's Club
live music -
Open format by you or your favorite musician.
Byob- (Beverage)
Wednesday, August 23, 2023
5:00 to 7:00 p.m.
Doors Open at 4:30 p.m.
Musicians Showcase Your Talent
Contact Paul!
Professional Sound & Lights Provided



Musicians - Contact Paul Cottrell to be part of this experience!
hoguitar@icloud.com
For Music Lovers:
In lieu of admission fees, the Punta Gorda Historical Society requests your donations for the ongoing maintenance of our buildings. Thank you

Located at:
Woman's Club, 118 Sullivan Street, Punta Gorda FL 33950
www.puntagordahistory.com
Hosted by the Punta Gorda Historical Society