



DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

www.historicdesoto.org

July 2024

This issue sponsored by - Ruth Dunn in loving memory of her late husband, Rudolph Dunn.

July Program - Monday, July 15

As a "follow-up" to Peggy Jude's excellent program, "Creating a Family History Legacy," Christopher Parent, Community Partnership Specialist with Empath Health/Tidewell Hospice serving DeSoto and Charlotte Counties, will conduct a Personal Legacy Writing Workshop. He will give a free workbook to each attendee plus tips on how to get started with writing your own personal legacy or to help you encourage others to write theirs. A proud graduate of Indiana University with a BA in Fine Arts, he recently became certified as a Laughter Yoga Leader and is happy to be a part of Empath Health/Tidewell Hospice.



Member Meeting – Open to the Public

Guest speaker Christopher Parent, Community Partnership Specialist, Tidewell Hospice / Empath Health will discuss methods of preserving family stories and history for future generations.

Learn various techniques for capturing stories.

Please arrive at 11:30 if you plan on purchasing lunch.



Society Helps To Celebrate the 57th Anniversary of the Florida Cracker Trail Museum

René Collins, Roseann Collins, Jeff Griffis, Linda Keen, Vernon Keen, Carol Mahler, and Karen Smoke carpooled to Wauchula for a meal at Paul's Restaurant before they returned to Pioneer Park, where Nancy "Eric" Erickson and Elizabeth Kenney joined them for the celebration of the 57th Anniversary Commemoration of the Florida Cracker Trail Museum (FCTM).

County Manager Terry Atchley welcomed everyone before Museum Director Joyce Tullis explained how she had found "her niche in life" in her

job at the Museum. She introduced Former Museum Director and County Commissioner

Judith George who said that serving as the museum director was "one of my favorite jobs of all time."

Hardee County Commissioners, from left: Sandy Meeks, Chairperson Renee Wyatt, Vice-Chairperson Russell Melendy, and Judith George, who served as Museum director 2013-2015.



A Message From The President

Dear Members:

Preserving family stories and history is a vital aspect of understanding our identity and heritage. It connects us to our past, provides a sense of belonging, and can even offer insights into our future. The DeSoto County Historical Society recognizes this significance and has organized a meeting on July 15, 2024, at 12:00 p.m. in the McSwain Room at DeSoto Memorial Hospital with Christopher Parent from Tidewell Hospice to discuss methods of safeguarding these precious narratives. Such gatherings are crucial for communities, as they offer a platform to share knowledge and strategies on how to document and maintain the legacy of family lore. The process of preservation can involve various techniques, from oral histories to written memoirs, and even digital recordings, ensuring that the essence of these stories is captured authentically for future generations.

The benefits of preserving family history are manifold. It fosters a stronger sense of self, as individuals discover their roots and the narratives that have shaped their family's journey. This understanding can lead to a deeper appreciation for one's ancestors, recognizing the trials they endured and the triumphs they achieved. Moreover, it can instill resilience, as stories of overcoming adversity inspire current and future generations to face their own challenges with courage. The act of preservation also serves as a bridge between the past and the present, allowing descendants to form connections with their forebears, creating a continuous thread through time.

In today's fast-paced world, where the focus is often on the new and the immediate, taking the time to look back and honor our history is a powerful counterbalance. It reminds us that we are part of a larger narrative, one that spans generations and is rich with experience and wisdom. The DeSoto County Historical Society, through events like the upcoming meeting with Christopher Parent, plays an essential role in promoting this awareness and providing the tools necessary to keep our stories alive. As we move forward, it is these stories that will ground us, guide us, and give us strength, making the preservation of family history not just an act of remembrance, but a gift to the future.

Adrian H. Cline

President, DeSoto County Historical Society

57th Anniversary - Con't from pg 1

Kayton Nezda, Hardee County's "Outdoor Classroom" teacher, regaled the audience with a tall tale and how he worked on the crew to restore the "pool house" under the Federal CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973) program, and when "Old #3"—the Baldwin locomotive—was moved to Pioneer Park.



Mike Harrison of the Florida Cracker Trail Association (FCTA) spoke about his organization as well as the warm reception given to FTCA members by Hardee County—and some history of the Florida cowman.



Thanks to Carol Mahler for preparing

and presenting a certificate of congratulations from the Society to the Museum. She also reminded everyone of the history of the Museum—that was organized and staffed by members of the Peace River Valley Historical Society for the first 20 years.



Above—Morgan Corbridge and Lydia's Lady at Hart Cabin.

—Photos by Carol Mahler and Karen Smoke



The Museum, Hart Cabin built in 1879, post office, and other Pioneer Village buildings were open for those attending the festivities—plus Mike McIntyre was working in the blacksmith shop.

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

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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.**



Hurricane Charley Exhibit

The Society needs your help in documenting and preserving the history of Hurricane Charley that roared through DeSoto County twenty years ago on August 13, 2004.

Come to the DeSoto County Library on Saturday, August 3. Bring your photos, documents, testimonies, etc. This information will be scanned/recorded at the library - you do not need to leave your personal items, but you may donate them if you like.

The exhibit will be on view at the library August 10-31 during regular hours.

The Ingraham House was knocked off its foundation and tilted after Hurricane Charley. Members had started restoration before the storm, after shoring up the building the Board decided to seek funding for a full restoration.

We need your photographs and memories!

DeSoto County Historical Society is putting together an exhibit for the **20th anniversary of Hurricane Charley - August 13, 2004.**

Come to the Library - Bring your photos, documents, testimonies, etc. This information will be scanned/recorded at the library - you do not need to leave your personal items, but you may donate them if you like. The exhibit will be on view at the library August 10-31.

Saturday
August 3, 2024
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
DeSoto County Library
125 N Hillsborough Ave

We Adventured Into the Past At The DeSoto County Library

Thanks to Carol Mahler for organizing and preparing three programs for the Summer Reading Program—with the theme of “Adventure Begins At Your Library” on June 18, 19, and 20, at the DeSoto County Library, and for preparing hands-on activities for the Museum when the Library-On-The-Go visited on Sat., June 22, staffed by Library Manager Liz Coronado and Children’s Wing Manager James Heard. We are grateful for the help of Karen Smoke in planning and preparing our programs about our county’s railroads and quilting, and for presenting the program on quilt patterns. We also appreciate Society volunteers Kathy Bryce, Nancy “Eric” Erickson, and Tonya Wallace.



On June 18, Carol read *All Aboard: A True Train Story* by Susan Kuklin about the steam locomotives of Colorado’s Silverton and Durango Railroad. Then she told about DeSoto County’s four major railroads and showed historic photographs of their depots: the Florida Southern Railway later acquired by the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad (ACL); the Charlotte Harbor and Northern Railway later acquired by the Seaboard Airline Railway (SAR); the East and West Coast Railway, a SAR subsidiary; and the “Fort Ogden Extension” of the Tampa Southern Railroad, owned by ACL.

As these railroads no longer operate, Karen Smoke designed a worksheet to plan a trip using the DeSoto Area Regional Transit (DART) bus map and schedule as the closest modern equivalent to a train route and schedule.



On June 19, in honor of the Juneteenth holiday, Carol read *Show Way* by Jacqueline Woodson that

tells a family’s genealogy through the quilters who sewed pictures that slaves could use to find their way north to escape from slavery. Then Karen showed quilts she has made and how to make quilts—even allowing the children to make a stitch in a work-in-progress. She also led an activity in designing a quilt pattern out of paper geometrical shapes.

On June 20, Carol read *John Henry* by Julius Lester and then “ad libbed” conversations with two amazing DeSoto County Legends: Acrefoot Johnson and Arcadia Coker. We thank Milo Moreno for portraying his great-great-great grandfather James Mitchell “Acrefoot” Johnson and Spring Pace for acting as Arcadia Matilda Albritton Coker—the woman who had a town named for her because she baked a cake.

On June 22, Liz Coronado and James Heard parked the Library-On-The-Go van at the



Museum and offered children a chance to make, decorate, and fly paper airplanes. In the Museum, Kathy talked about old-time mattresses and let the families help stuff the mattress in the front room; Eric demonstrated the Victrola in the living room; Tonya helped the children make rubbings of an Arcadia Coca Cola Bottling Co. bottle from 1922 in the master



bedroom, and in the dining room, Karen offered a guessing game with historic artifacts. Carol greeted families and filled in the history of the front and back porches, bathroom, and kitchen.

—Captions for above photos and more photos next page

More photos from **We Adventured Into the Past**



Children enjoyed posing with our amazing DeSoto County Legends: Acrefoot Johnson and Arcadia Coker. We thank Milo Moreno for portraying his great-great-great grandfather James Mitchell “Acrefoot” Johnson and Spring Pace for acting as Arcadia Matilda Albritton Coker.

Counter clockwise from right—Lucia Hall, Jaxson Knowles, and Lily Hicks pose with our teens portraying legends.

Karen Smoke, Angela and Jaxson Knowles examine the artifacts in the Museum dining room.

—Photos by Carol Mahler



Right—The DeSoto County Library-On-The-Go visited on Sat., June 22, staffed by Library Manager Liz Coronado and Children’s Wing Manager James Heard.

—Photo by Karen Smoke

Captions for photos on page 4—

Carol Mahler read to children at the DeSoto County Library.

Eric Erickson helped out with Summer Reading Program activities.

Spring Pace and Milo Moreno with Denzel Faison, Terri Faison, and Kameron Faison.

James Heard shows Benjamin Beard how to make a paper airplane.

—Photos by Carol Mahler



The July 4, 1938 Rodeo

by Carol Mahler

Although the first Arcadia July 4th rodeo was held by American Legion K Post 11 in 1929, Wyatt Blassingame*, in his article "Deep In The Heart of—Florida!" published in the August 1942 *Coronet* magazine, wrote the following: "One night in 1938, Bill Welles, the son of one of DeSoto County's largest cattle owners," told his friend Gerald Taylor, "We ought to put on a rodeo of our own. Twenty-one days later, they put on their rodeo. In those 21 days, they had built a half-mile [race] track, an arena with chutes, catch pens, and corrals for the stock, and a few bleachers."

In a talk about the July 4 rodeo to the Arcadia Kiwanis Club summarized in the July 14, 1938, *Arcadian*, Capt.



Bernice Dean, the trick rider from Ringling Circus, from the 1938 newspaper.

Stanhope Chesterfield Smith, commander of the Arcadia National Guard, praised Ed C. Welles for his "courage and foresight" in his "revival of the rodeo idea, for his belief in the drawing power of this type of entertainment and his backing of this belief with his money and time."

The July 7, *Arcadian*, had reported: "Festivities

started early on the morning of the fourth. Fans began pouring into Arcadia shortly after dawn and the streets were swarming over from the courthouse to Orange Avenue at 10:00 when

the gigantic rodeo parade swept through town on its two-way course. . . . hundreds of fans were turned away from the gates at the rodeo grounds after thousands of others had packed the grandstand to its capacity and occupied every other vantage point in the arena. The stands were jammed almost an hour before the show was scheduled to get under way."

The rodeo included some circus performers as the Ringling Brothers Circus "had folded up at Scranton, Pennsylvania, last week because of labor troubles and returned to winter quarters at Sarasota." Bernice Dean and her husband Frank Dean performed as trick riders and ropers. The third member of their team was Marco Borello: "His best stunt is to pass through between the hind legs of a galloping horse. He claims to be the only man in the show business who does this trick."

Jack Duncan won the championship as recorded in the headline: "Thousands Cheer as Jack Duncan Wins 4th of July Rodeo Championship Here: Youthful State Cowboy Champion Rolls Up 1015 Points to Outclass Tough Field of Competitors / Hub Boney, Lykes Bros.' Ace, Finishes Second with Phil Markey, of Arcadia, Third."

This Independence Day rodeo did not replace the Annual Armistice Day Rodeo sponsored by the Arcadia American Legion. The article noted that "during the two-day rodeo performance, announcement was made that the All-Florida championship rodeo, twin sister to the July 4th event, will be held in the arena here November 11-12, this year."

A version of this article was published in the July 2021 *Arcadia Community Local*.

*Myhlc.org has eight titles by Florida author **Wyatt Blassingame**, (1909-1985), including juvenile books on armadillos, presidents, porcupines, skunks and more. Check them out!

Society members walk in the July 4th Parade with our banner and a 38 star American flag, which was the flag in use in the years when DeSoto County and Arcadia were formed.

—Photo courtesy Mike Manwarren

SAVE THE DATE
Our Annual Florida Cracker Meal
Evening Meeting
will be on
Saturday, Sept 28.

