



DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

www.historicdesoto.org

November 2023

This issue sponsored by - **Betty Hall Wood** in memory of her late husband, **G. Pierce Wood, Jr.**

Kellyn Ursin Will Speak About Prescribed Burns

Originally scheduled to speak at our August 21 meeting, Kellyn Ursin was deployed to fight wildfires in Texas and could not make her presentation. She returned for 24 hours, and then was deployed to help with clean up after Hurricane Idalia plowed through North Florida. At her request, we have rescheduled her presentation about prescribed burns and how they work to protect and preserve our state's unique ecosystems for noon on Mon., Nov. 20, at the McSwain Room of DeSoto Memorial Hospital.

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.



Member Meeting:

NOW ON THIRD MONDAY

Monday, November 20

DeSoto Memorial Hospital -

McSwain Room

Room open at 11:30 a.m.

Meeting 12 noon

In addition to Kellyn's talk, November is also election time for board members and officers. Please see the slate on pg. 4.

Also, tickets will go on sale for our Holiday Tour of Historic Homes & Buildings. The tour is a not-to-be-missed opportunity to see inside some of Arcadia's structures that are part of the Arcadia Historic District and in the National Register of Historic Places since 1984.

If you are planning on having lunch, please arrive early so you can go through the line ahead of the hospital employees.

West Elementary School First Grade Field Trips

Thanks to West Elementary School Teacher Lucretia Gilmore and Carol Mahler for scheduling field trips for all of the first graders. On Tues., Oct. 17, three classes arrived and rotated through eight hands-on activities: lighting a match, pumping water, stuffing a mattress, using a rotary and push button telephones, washing clothes with a scrub board, writing in Morse code as well as with dip pen and typewriter. On Fri., Oct. 20, two classes arrived at 9:00 a.m., and then two more at 12:15 p.m. The students had fun and learned some history, too. Many were able to talk about how our hands-on activities matched with what they had learned at school.



—Con't next page

Tuesday Group

—Photo by Carol Mahler

—Con't from first page

West Elementary School First Grade Field Trips

We are grateful to the following volunteers: Stella Parker (who helped with set-up on Monday afternoon), Norma Banas, Kathy Bryce, Arlene Conley, Linda Keen, Vernon Keen, Elizabeth Kenney, Pam Miller, Spring Pace, Karen Smoke, and Keith Wallace!

We appreciate the West Elementary School teachers—Kalyn Browning, Deshay Burbidge, Julie Colding, Lucretia Gilmore, Amanda Randolph, Jenny Rivera, and Lindsay Sager—chaperones, and teachers who visited the Museum, and for their donations of \$151.

Lucretia wrote, “Thank you and your volunteers for having us! Our kids thoroughly enjoyed the hands-on activities that helped them better understand what life was like “back in the olden days.” . . . Throughout the following weeks, they made lots of connections as we continued our studies of past and present! They are still making references to the field trip!”



Friday AM Group



Friday PM Group

Clockwise from Left—Elizabeth Kenney explains the operation of a typewriter.

Vernon Keen shows students the replica outhouse.

First graders from West Elementary enjoyed trying out the rotary dial and push-button telephones.

Keith Wallace explained how a telegraph worked while students tried to write their name in Morse code.

—Photos by Carol Mahler



DeSoto Sharing Library at Research Library!

County Employee Jordan Hester installed the sixth DeSoto Sharing Library on the edge of the cement drive to the east of the Howard and Velma Melton Historical Research Library. Thanks to Kathy Bryce, Nancy “Eric” Erickson, Elizabeth Kenney, Carol Mahler, and Karen Smoke for donating the funds to pay for the wooden box and post, and thanks to Jahna Leonard and Carol for donating the first books, and to all who have donated additional materials to the collection!

Similar in concept to the “Little Free Library,” a DeSoto Sharing Library is a weather-proof box full of reading materials of all kinds primarily for people who live in the neighborhood where it is located. Other DeSoto Sharing Libraries are available at the Arcadia Housing Authority office, Arcadia Peace River Campground, Nocatee Church of God, Storybook Park, Town & Country Properties, and Walt Brewer Sports Complex.

In our community struggling with literacy, DeSoto Sharing Libraries promote a community of readers by providing unrestricted access to a variety of books for everyone. More sharing libraries will connect more families to literacy. If you would like to adopt (aka serve as caretaker) or sponsor a sharing library and/or donate books or funds, a registration form and more information is available at desotobocc.com or contact Library Director Linda Waters at 863-993-4851 or online at lindaw@myhlc.org.



County Employee Jordan Hester stands next to the newly installed DeSoto Sharing Library.

Jordan levels and installs the support post.

Jordan Hester builds and installs the weatherproof book boxes for the DeSoto Sharing Libraries.

The DeSoto Sharing Library is stocked with a variety of books. Anyone may “take a book, leave a book.” This effort is a way to provide easy access to a variety of books for everyone.

—Photos by Carol Mahler



Annual dues in the DeSoto County Historical Society are due January 1.
Payment may be made online, by mail, or in person at one of our gatherings.

Thank you for your support!

Slate of Directors and Officers

Adrian Cline, President - adriancline@outlook.com
Vernon Keen, Vice President - vlkeenacres@gmail.com
Nancy "Eric" Erickson, Treasurer - eric34269@gmail.com
Karen Smoczynski, Secretary - aandksmoke@gmail.com
Carol Mahler, Coordinator of Library & Museum - desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com
Past President, Norma Banas - sanctuaryofarcadia@gmail.com
Ruth Dunn - rrdunn29@gmail.com
Jeffery Griffis - jefferygriffis@yahoo.com
Marsha Kransdorf - nevertomany@gmail.com
Ellen Hutson - hutson.ellen@yahoo.com
Stella Parker - stella52parker@gmail.com
Luke Wilson - troubador55@embarqmail.com

Newly elected Officers and Directors will be installed in December. Details to follow.

John Morgan Ingraham House Museum
300 N Monroe Avenue

MUSEUM OPEN:

9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Thursdays
9 a.m. to 1 p.m. 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

Contact Information

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President: Norma Banas, 863-558-6115
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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.**

City Donates Antique Fire Hydrant

Terry Stewart started his career in government as a firefighter, so as City Administrator in Arcadia, one of the tasks he assigned to staff was to make sure that every fire hydrant in the City was working. When the City recently declared as surplus and approved for the disposal the hydrants that were replaced, Council Member Amber Collins suggested that the Society might like one as a historic artifact. Thanks to her for the great idea; Carol Mahler for writing and submitting the formal request to the City Council; to Terry for graciously including the request in his report at the Sept. 19 Council meeting; and to the Council for kindly donating the fire hydrant. We are also grateful to City Utilities Director Lee Snyder for finding a well-preserved fire hydrant dating from 1918 in the motley assortment, and—after the Council made the donation—for delivering it to the Museum where it will be a focal point in the south garden.

—Photo by Carol Mahler



Display Case Moved

Thanks to Joan Raulerson for agreeing to host one of our community display cases at the Arcadia branch of Truist Bank, Member FDIC, 10 S. DeSoto Ave., and for patiently waiting for an exhibit to be installed. We appreciate City Administrator Terry Stewart for allowing the City employees to move the case, Public Works Director Steve Underwood



for arranging for the work, and Allen Reesor for his assistance. We are grateful to James Arndts, Romill Blandin, Chris Camargo, Derrick Muse, and Javonn Tice for doing the heavy lifting.



Unshuttering The Museum And Hanging The Rodeo Mural Sign

Thanks to Jeff Griffis and Dave Hutchinson for removing the hurricane shutters from the Museum and for rehanging the rodeo mural reproduction on the side of shed.

Historical Artifact Guessing Game at Aspirations-To-Actions Meeting

Thanks to Carol Mahler for setting up the Society's booth at the Aspirations-To-Actions Meeting on Oct. 10 at the Turner Agri-Civic Center, and to Carol and Nancy "Eric" Erickson for sharing the historical artifact guessing game with those visiting the booth and for cleaning it up at the event's end.

We appreciate Norma and Marsha for visiting all the other organizations to figure out how we can work together. We met Connie Martin with the Girl Scouts, and she wants to arrange for the Girl Scouts to do some volunteer work with us!



Tune In Local History

Thanks to Mark Anderson for talking about local history with Carol Mahler on Oct. 12 during his "Mark in the Morning" show on Classic County 104.5 FM, Arcadia's only radio station. Listen to them discuss the past—as well as future events—at 8:00 a.m. on Thurs., Nov. 16.

Please Volunteer To Participate In The Christmas Parade

Thanks to Cindy McLeod Ely for organizing our entry for the Chamber of Commerce's Christmas Parade at 6:00 p.m. on Sat., Dec. 2, in downtown Arcadia. The theme of this year's parade is "Gingerbread Kisses And Christmas Wishes." If you would like to volunteer, please contact Carol Mahler at 863-445-0789 or online at desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

The opening of Christmas Card Lane in DeSoto Veterans Memorial Park will be at 6:00 p.m. on Fri., Dec. 1. For more information, contact the Chamber at 863-494-4033 or online at chamber@desotochamberfl.com. These events are free and open to the public.

Happy 137th Birthday, Arcadia!

At 6:00 p.m. on Dec. 5, 2023, the Society will conduct a brief celebration of Arcadia's 137th birthday—when the Town of Arcadia was incorporated on Dec. 6., 1886. The commemoration will take place at the City Council meeting in the Council Chambers, 23 N. Polk Ave. The story of how Arcadia received its name will be recounted and appropriate refreshments will be served. The event is free and open to the public.

Mary Pete Martin tries to guess the artifact in the hands of Carol Mahler with Nancy "Eric" Erickson at the Historical Society's booth.



Susan Malone with MedSol Clinical Research Center of Port Charlotte stands with Norma Banas, Marsha Kransdorf, and Maria Vasconcelos, founder of MedSol.

—Photographs courtesy of Dale Smith

Please Help Save Local History: Don't Throw Away "Unknown" Photographs by Carol Mahler

In a donation of material for the Society, I found a photograph of a large group of men in what appeared to be a sanctuary. The back of the photograph had many signatures and—I assumed—residences, and the most represented city was Lansing, Michigan. I contacted the State Archives of Michigan, but they declined our donation of the photograph. However, the State Archives suggested that I contact the Capitol Area District Libraries as they have a special Local History Collection, so I did.

Local History Specialist Heidi J. Butler, MSLS, CA, and I corresponded, and she graciously accepted the photograph for the local history collection. She wrote, "I posted this [photograph] on our Facebook page in the "Unidentified" album and asked the community to help. We found out so much useful information!!

"Now this photo has been scanned and cataloged in our Local History photograph collection. You can see the record online here: <https://cadl.catalogaccess.com/archives/34684>. The description is full of all the details we learned from our Facebook followers and verified with sources in the library....

"Thank you so much for giving us this photograph, which is a little slice of Lansing history we don't have much on in the library. That church has been gone since 1966, and I had not seen an interior [view] before."

SO, please don't throw away those old unidentified photographs that you may find. Instead, try to find a home for them and preserve local history somewhere else. As Luke Wilson says, "Everyone has a piece of the puzzle of history."

Vendor and Sponsor forms are now available:
<https://historicdesoto.org/pioneer-day/>

Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 30, 1905, Fire by Carol Mahler

This year, Nov. 30th is a Thurs., the same as it was in 1905. Until the U.S. Congress changed the date of Thanksgiving to the fourth Thurs. of Nov., it was held on the last Thurs. in the month. Thus, on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 30, 1905, fire destroyed downtown Arcadia.

Nearly a year after the tragedy, the Nov. 22, 1906 Champion newspaper reported the following: "On November 30th, 1905, the long prophesied fire of Arcadia occurred, through the careless lighting of a pipe or cigar. In a few hours the business part of the town consisting mainly of wooden structures was in ashes, except the First National Bank [34 W. Oak St.], D. T. Carlton's brick block [Oak Park Inn, 2 W. Oak St.] and W. H. Seward's brick store [12 W. Oak]." All of which were damaged by the fire and nothing saved them but the heroic efforts of volunteer firefighters. Indeed we might say the balance of the town was thus saved, for by cool headed, wise men, prompt to act, who ought to have received the gratitude of the parties benefited forever did heroic work.

"Among the foremost of the firefighters was A. M. Smith, agent for the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad (ACLRR) who immediately upon the alarm of fire, saw at once the danger of the part of the town in which was the depot, at once wired for all the engines north and south to come to Arcadia's relief and to bring all section masters and hands along the route. This prompt and wise act of Mr. Smith saved the town on the south side of the railroad and J. J. Heard's and Steven Carlton's packing houses on the north and all the railroad property, to say nothing of many [railroad] carloads of oranges ready for shipment. . . .

"The enterprise of our merchants was readily seen for in a few days they had built commodious wooden and sheet iron stores, shops etc. and business resumed, in a week its normal conditions, which has increased every day and week the past year."

The Dec. 15, 1906, DeSoto County News reported that "Arcadia is now one of the most progressive towns in the state. Already twelve new buildings have been completed since the fire, and yet more material is arriving daily. There will be no let up until every building destroyed by the fire has been replaced by a handsome stone or brick one."

We need volunteers for the Holiday Tour of Historic Homes and Buildings—see flyer on p. 8. Please contact Carol Mahler at 863-445-0789 or desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com.



Save the date!

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

Pioneer Day
March 23, 2024

with the Arcadia American Legion sponsored Antique Tractor, Vintage Car, and Hot & Miss Engine Show

Turner Agri-Civic Center, 2250 NE Roan St.

P.O. Box 1824, Arcadia, FL 34265 * 863-266-5776
desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com
www.historicdesoto.org * Like us on Facebook!

**VOLUNTEER
OPPORTUNITIES**

In Memoriam: Jacqueline Carol Thompson

Born on May 18, 1939, in Rochester, New York, to the late Gennaro Thomas Stark and Jeannette Helen Maule Stark, Jacki Thompson lived for 50 years in Arcadia and taught school. She and her husband Hal have been loyal members of the Society for decades.

She was a member of—and taught Sunday school at—the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She volunteered for adult literacy and “enjoyed teaching, music, baseball, quilting, antiques, sewing, animals, and children.” She died on April 26, 2023. We extend our deepest sympathy to the Thompson Family (www.pongerkeysgrady.com/obituary/jacqueline-thompson).

In Memoriam: Terry Welles, Sr.

Born in Arcadia on Oct. 28, 1942, to the late W. G. “Billie” and Barbara “Bobbie” Welles, Terrence “Terry” L. Welles, Sr., served in the U.S. Air Force for four years. He returned home and worked first as a businessman and then as a cattleman until his retirement. For eight years, he served as a member of the DeSoto County Commission.

A member of many veteran and fraternal organizations, he volunteered for the most years for the Arcadia All-Florida Championship Rodeo Association working as a grounds keeper and in many other capacities, including as president. He only missed three rodeos in his life, and he helped found the iconic “shoot-out” prelude to the rodeo. “He loved to hunt, fish, boat, airboat, and fly (wings or blades)—and to be airborne” www.pongerkeysgrady.com/obituary/terrence-terry-welles.

The Society sends our most sincere condolences to the Welles family, and we are grateful for Terry’s donation of memorabilia from his kin William “Bill” Seward, who operated his airport in Arcadia and started his own airlines. Some of that material is in an exhibit at the Arcadia Municipal Airport terminal.

Make a Memorial Donation

The Society welcomes and appreciates memorial donations in memory of those we have lost this year, or any other Society member. Funds are used for the maintenance of the Museum and Society property. 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.

In Memoriam: Jesse D’Aurora

Born on Sept. 14, 1950, in Ohio, Robert Nicholas “Jesse” D’Aurora died on May 23, 2023. For the past 18 years, he lived on Welles Ave. in Nocatee. The Society appreciates his loyal membership and extends our sympathy to his family and friends.

Gene Melton’s Burial Flag Participated In The Honor Flight

Thanks to City Council Member and 82nd Airborne Veteran Amber Collins for taking Gene Melton’s burial flag on the Southwest Florida Honor Flight (SFHF) to Washington, D.C., on Oct. 10! When the group visited the World War II Memorial, the flag was photographed. The World War II Memorial is located on 17th Street NW between Independence



and Constitution avenues, at the east end of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool.

We appreciate Carol Mahler and Nancy “Eric” Erickson for driving to the Punta Gorda Airport to welcome the flight home and receive the flag from Collins.

SFHF serves the counties of Charlotte, DeSoto, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, Sarasota, and

surrounding areas. About 49,000 veterans live in those six counties. Since 2007, SFHF has transported about 2100 veterans who were flown to D.C. to visit the World War II Memorial, Korean War Veterans Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, Military Women’s Memorial, and Arlington National Cemetery where they witnessed the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Besides transportation and meals, the veterans also enjoyed surprises throughout the day—plus a huge “welcome home” when the aircraft lands at the Punta Gorda Airport. The one-day trip is free for all veterans. For details, check online at www.swflhonorflight.org.

HOLIDAY TOUR OF HISTORIC HOMES & BUILDINGS

Saturday, December 9, 2023

Tours start 4 to 6 p.m.

Parking & Start - **Family Service Center**
310 W. Whidden St., Arcadia, FL

TICKETS
on sale
after Noon,
Nov 20,
2023

All structures are part of the Arcadia Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places since 1984.

Board a bus to visit all the historic treasures. Docents will share the history and guide you on each tour. Please allow two hours to complete the tour.

**Tour Tickets:
\$15.00 each.**

Tours are limited-
purchase tickets
early!
Tickets may be
purchased with
Paypal on
historicdesoto.org.

Tickets are also available at the following locations:

Ingraham House Museum, 120 W. Whidden St. (9 to 1 on Thurs.)
Crews Bank & Trust, Member FDIC, 2747 S.E. State Road 70
Glass, Antique or Not, 111 W. Oak St. (11 to 4, Tues.-Sat.)
Team Arcadia, McSwain Center, 16 S. Volusia Ave. (9 to 3 Mon.-Fri.)



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