



DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

www.historicdesoto.org

November 2024

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

VETERANS DAY



Please Participate In The Veterans Day and Christmas Parades

We appreciate Carol Mahler and Karen Smoke for volunteering to carry the banner in front of the truck, and we thank Norma Banas for volunteering to drive her truck in the Veterans Day Parade starting at 10:00 a.m. on Nov. 11 on Oak St. in downtown Arcadia. We will display photographs of DeSoto County's veterans from the past on the truck.

We are grateful to Cindy McLeod Ely for volunteering to coordinate our entry for the "lighted" Christmas parade at 6:00 p.m. on Sat., Dec. 7, on Oak St. in downtown.



If you want to participate in either or both parades, please call or text Carol Mahler at 863-445-0789.

CANCELLED

The Society regrets the cancellation of our Annual Holiday Tour of Historic Homes and Buildings on Dec. 14 because of damages by Hurricane Milton. Please join us next year for this wonderful and festive exploration of some of Arcadia's historic treasures.

A Message From The President

Dear Members:

As Veterans Day approaches, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on the significance of this important holiday and share my thoughts with fellow members of the DeSoto County Historical Society.

Veterans Day is a time to honor and recognize the brave men and women who have served in the United States Armed Forces. Their dedication, courage, and sacrifices have been instrumental in preserving the freedoms and values we hold dear. This day provides us with an opportunity to express our gratitude and pay tribute to those who have selflessly defended our nation.

The historical context of Veterans Day adds a profound layer of meaning to our commemorations. Originally known as Armistice Day, it marked the end of World War I on November 11, 1918. The armistice took effect on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, symbolizing a moment of peace after a period of intense conflict. In 1954, the holiday was renamed Veterans Day to honor all American veterans, not just those who served in World War I.

As members of the DeSoto County Historical Society, we have a unique role in preserving and promoting the rich history of our community, including the stories of our local veterans. By documenting their experiences and contributions, we ensure that future generations understand the sacrifices made for their freedom. Our efforts in historical preservation help keep the legacy of our veterans alive and foster a deeper appreciation for their service.

I encourage all members to participate in the upcoming Veterans Day events and ceremonies. The parade starts down Oak Street at 10:00 a.m. and the ceremony begins at 11:00 a.m. at the DeSoto County Courthouse. These gatherings provide a meaningful way to show our respect and support for veterans in our community. Additionally, sharing stories and memories of veterans within our society can help educate and inspire others about the importance of this day.

Thank you for your continued dedication to preserving the history of DeSoto County. Together, we can honor our veterans and ensure their sacrifices are never forgotten.

Sincerely,

Adrian H. Cline

President, DeSoto County Historical Society

See more about
Veterans Day
on next page

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monthly Meeting—Monday, Nov. 18—12 noon—DMH—McSwain Room

Elect The Society's Officers and Board of Directors

Annual elections for the Society's officers and directors will take place during the November meeting, Mon., Nov. 18, and they will be "installed" at the Dec. meeting: President - Adrian Cline; Vice-President - Vernon Keen; Recording Secretary - René Collins (interim); Corresponding Secretary - Nancy Humphrey; Treasurer - Nancy "Eric" Erickson; Museum Coordinator - Carol Mahler; and Directors - Norma Banas, Ruth Dunn, Jeff Griffis, Ellen Hutson, Stella Parker, and Luke Wilson.

Carol Mahler will present a program on the posters Society members created in 2015 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II and introduce a project to gather memories of Vietnam War veterans.

March 29, 2023 the nation recognized National Vietnam War Veterans Day on the 50th anniversary of the date the last combat troops left South Vietnam. It was not until April 30, 1975, that NVA tanks rolled through the gate of the Presidential Palace in Saigon, effectively ending the war. The 50th anniversary of that end of the Vietnam War is coming up on April 30, 2025. We invite the community to record stories of our local veterans from that war for a future public display. More details and help in creating your memory poster will be available.

Tues. & Wed., Nov 19 & 20—8:30-10:30 a.m.—John Morgan Ingraham House Museum

300 N Monroe Avenue & 120 W Whidden Street

Please Volunteer To Help When WES First Graders Visit The Museum



Children love to learn local history by doing hands-on activities, so Society members and friends will offer activities, such as writing with a dip pen or using a rotary telephone on Nov. 19 and 20 for the first graders from West Elementary School. Eight hands-on activities are planned, so please call or email Carol Mahler if you are able to help on one or both days. And if you're unavailable in Nov., don't worry—the third grade classes from Memorial Elementary School will visit the Museum in Jan. 2025, and you may volunteer to help then.

Sat., Dec 7—10 a.m.—Pearl Harbor Day Ceremony—1924 Peace River Bridge

Sat., Dec 7—6 p.m.—Christmas Parade—Oak Street

The History of Veterans Day

The National Archives has a weekly blog entitled "Pieces of History," and you may sign up to have it delivered to your inbox every week. As the DCHS newsletter was being assembled on Oct. 30, the following article, "The Origins of Veterans Days" was delivered.

"On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in the year 1918, World War I came to an end. In honor of this significant moment in history, we in the U.S. celebrate and remember all of the brave men and women who have served in the armed forces on November 11 as Veterans Day. This public holiday coincides with Armistice Day, which is a national holiday in many of the other countries, and once was one in the United States."



Last year the JROTC participated with us in the Veterans Day Parade. The cadets displayed the 38-star flag that was current when Arcadia incorporated as a town in 1886 and when DeSoto County was established in 1887.

The full article is available at <https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2024/10/30/the-origins-of-veterans-day>.



Gratitude For Volunteers, Members, Sponsors, and Donors

by Carol Mahler

November is traditionally the month to give thanks, and I am grateful this month as well as every day of the year for the volunteers who donate their time and energy to preserve and promote the history of DeSoto County! We don't have any paid staff members: we all serve as volunteers. Sometimes we have to hire those with special skills—such as an electrician or carpenter—and other times one of our members or friends has the talents or the tools to accomplish the work. The lists of tasks necessary to run an organization like the Society—with a museum and research library—is very long and complex, and we are very grateful to those who donate one to thousands of hours to ensure that the Society functions as well as it does.

I also appreciate our members! Whether or not they are able to volunteer their time, they donate their dues to help preserve our local history. Their contributions are a reliable annual revenue for the Society, and their unfailing interest and enthusiasm for the our mission is the Society's foundation.

I treasure the support of our members as well as donations from our sponsors! I am thankful for businesses, families, individuals, and organizations who donate funds in varying amounts from \$1.00 to \$1,000.00—and sometimes more! I am also thankful for gifts of artifacts: historic photographs and materials of all kinds as well as digital copies of historic documents and images. No matter who you are or what you have given to the Society, I am forever and always grateful.

Contact Information

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President: President: Adrian Cline, 863-494-5758
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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.**

Lots of hands-on help is needed for Pioneer Day!
March 29, 2025

Contact Carol Mahler, 863-445-0789

desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Text or leave a message on the Society phone:
863-266-5774

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

Historical Society Participates In Pioneer Daze

Thanks to Carol Mahler for preparing and packing up a display about “county division,” historic Sebring postcards, and antique citrus juicers for the Sebring Historical Society’s Pioneer Daze on Oct. 19 at the Alan Jay Arena at the Highlands County Fairgrounds in Sebring. DeSoto County’s history includes the first nine years of Sebring’s history because present-day Highlands County was part of DeSoto County until 1921.

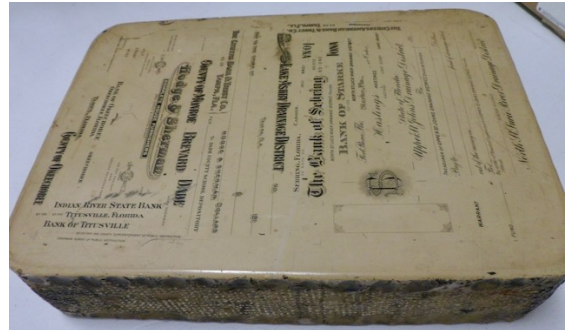


We appreciate Carol and Karen Smoke for traveling to and from the event, setting up and taking down the display,

talking with people, and giving them Pioneer Day “Save-The-Date” cards. We are grateful that Karen Smoke also prepared, packed, and set up a quilt display, including her reproduction of a “friendship” quilt inspired by an account of an historical quilt that was made for a young couple moving from New Jersey to the frontier in Illinois. Such quilts were a way of keeping in touch with friends and family back home.

Thanks to Garrett Lee, a member of the Sebring Historical Society who has visited and assisted our Society many times over the years, for his help in setting up and taking down the display. We also appreciate his dad—President Bob Lee—for accepting on behalf of the Sebring Historical Society a lithography stone donated by Charles Martin that includes an

image for “The Bank of Sebring, DeSoto County, Florida,” dating it between 1912 and 1921. It will be “on permanent loan” in the archives or museum.



Lithography was invented in the late 18th century by Alois Senefelder, a musician seeking a way to reproduce musical scores. The limestone used for lithography comes from a quarry in Bavaria, Germany. Derived from the Greek ‘lithos’ for stone and ‘graphis’ for ‘that which is written’, stone lithography relies upon the antipathy of grease and water. It is a “planographic” printing process in which the image and non-image areas are on the same surface. An image is drawn on the surface of the stone with greasy materials (lithographic pencils, crayons, touche). In the printing process, the surface of the stone is wiped with water and a roller charged with ink is rolled over the stone. Where there is no image (no grease), the water repels the ink. The image area (greasy) attracts the printing ink.



Photos—Clockwise from top left—

Carol Mahler and Karen Smoke at the Society’s booth during the Sebring Historical Society’s Pioneer Daze on Oct. 19 in the Alan Jay arena of the Highlands County Fair Grounds. —Photograph courtesy of Garrett Lee.

The Society placed on “permanent loan” a lithography stone used for printing the logo of “The Bank of Sebring, DeSoto County, Florida” to the Sebring Historical Society. —Photograph courtesy of Carol Mahler.

A close-up of the image for “The Bank of Sebring, DeSoto County, Florida,” on the lithography stone that will be on display in the archives or museum of the Sebring Historical Society. —Photograph courtesy of Carol Mahler.

Carol Mahler and Karen Smoke in front of the display of antique citrus juicers at the Society’s booth at Pioneer Daze. —Photograph courtesy of Garrett Lee.



Welcome, New Members!

Thanks to Dylan Tindall for joining as a new member and visiting the Museum on Oct. 24: after enjoying a tour, he helped Carol Mahler sweep the Museum ramp and clean up sand thrown on the driveway and into the gutter by the Whidden St. paving project.

We also appreciate Jim and Louisa Weber for attending the Florida Cracker Meal and signing up as members at that event.

Jeff Griffis picks up branches that Dave Hutchinson cut up after the passing of Hurricane Milton.

Thanks to two anonymous donors, the Society was able to give \$100.00 worth of gift cards each to Elizabeth Kenney and Kathy Bryce in recognition of their dedication to working every week (and sometimes taking projects home) for more than ten years at the Museum and Research Library. At the Oct. meeting, Elizabeth presented the following note:

*Dear DCHS Board Members,
Thank you very much for the three certificates to local eating places. Boy, was I surprised! Working with Carol and Kathy has been great fun—never a dull moment—and very educational. I have learned so much about Arcadia and DeSoto County. We are blessed to have this Society which cares so much for preserving local history. Thanks, again.
Sincerely, E.M. Kenney*

Ajax Paving's machines parked on the Society's property during the weeks that they worked to rehabilitate and resurface city streets including W. Whidden St. where the Museum is located.

—Photographs this page courtesy of Carol Mahler.



Hurricane Milton Damage

Neither the Research Library nor the Museum suffered much damage during Hurricane Milton. Less than a dozen wooden shingles were blown off the roof of the Museum, and a huge piece of fiberglass insulation blew loose from beneath the Museum. Thanks to Carol Mahler for bagging up the insulation for the trash, sweeping the accumulated sand from the front porch and walkway, and gathering the shingles.

We also appreciate Carol for picking up and raking up the bulk of the fallen twigs and branches at the Museum and Research Library with some help from her niece Marie Niklas. We are grateful to Jeff Griffis for “mulching” some of the smaller debris with his lawn mower.

Thanks to Jeff and Dave Hutchinson for taking down the Museum's hurricane shutters, and to Dave for bringing his chainsaw to cut up a fallen palm trunk and to cut down and cut up another dead trunk. We appreciate Carol for taking down the signs outside the Museum before the storm, and for re-installing them as well as remaking several that were damaged.

The City Paved Whidden Street!

Ajax Paving Industries of Florida, Inc., did the milling and paving of the city streets including Whidden St. in front of the Museum—plus Monroe Ave. south of the Museum. The City budgets money every year for paving, and the work for 2024 did not start until the end of the fiscal year, so Ajax honored the 2024 pricing and did the 2025 work at the same rate. The Council had also allocated some American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds adding up to almost \$2 million for rehabilitating and resurfacing City streets—what a difference!

Thanks to Carol Mahler and Jahna Leonard for clearing the vegetation growing between the gutters and Whidden St., and to Bonnie Molloy who “convinced” Juan and Gravy of J.G. Lawn and Landscaping, LLC, to help finish the job.

Steve Underwood, the City's director of Public Works, asked for permission from the Society for Ajax to park their machines on the Polk Ave. side of the Society's property. So throughout the week, various pieces of equipment waited their turn for use in this welcomed improvement project.



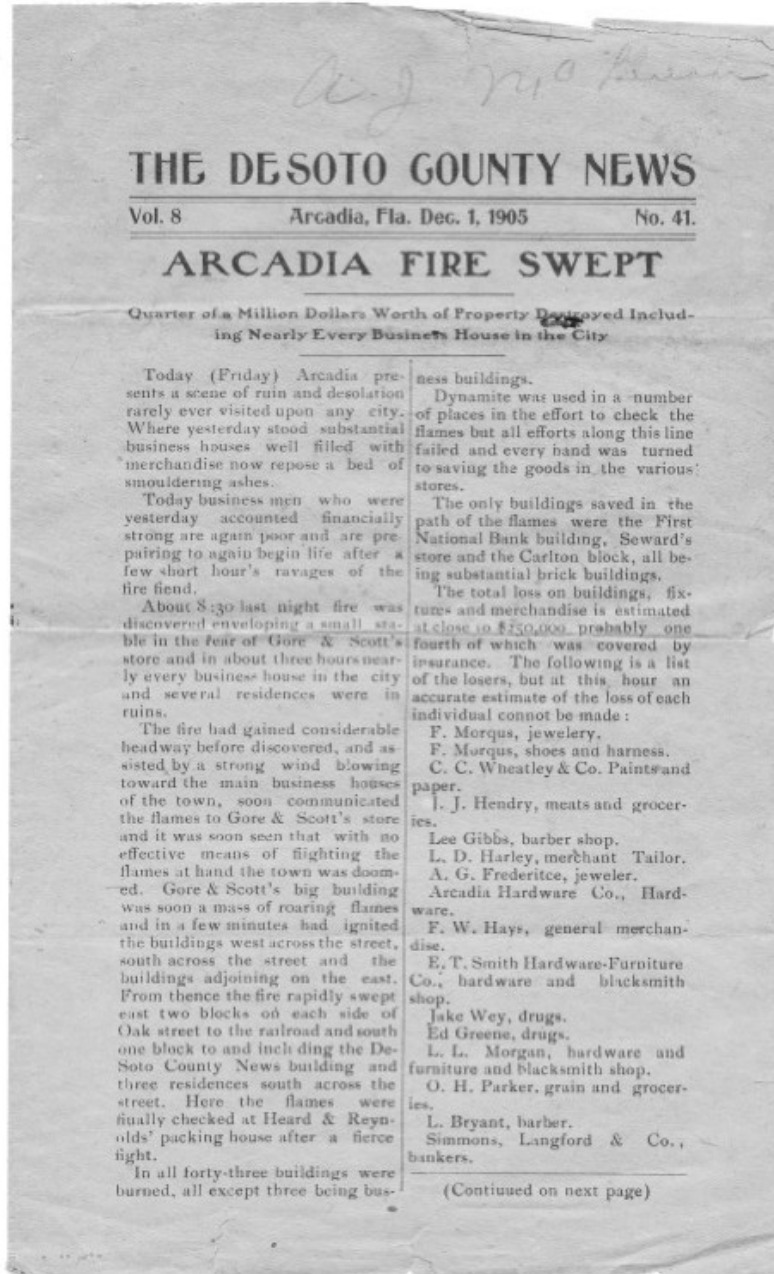
Thanksgiving Day 1905 Fire Destroyed Downtown Arcadia

Many Society members and deep-rooted county residents know this story: how on Nov. 30, 1905, Thanksgiving Day, a fire mysteriously began in the stable behind the Gore and Scott Store, now 132 W. Oak St., and a strong west wind drove the flames east until the trainmen—using water from the tank car—extinguished the blaze at the Atlantic Coast Line tracks. However, few know that the fire burned so fast and hot that the smoke and flames could be seen as far away as Fort Ogden—more than 10 miles distant.

Born in Fort Ogden, Frances E. Pooser (1918-2019) recalled her maternal grandfather—Andrew Jackson McLenon—who had resided in Fort Ogden since 1892—telling her that he saw the smoke and worried that Arcadia was on fire. His fears were confirmed when the train arrived with the news that 43 buildings constructed of cypress and pine had burned to the ground.

McLenon bought a copy of the *DeSoto County News* that reported the fire and was published on Dec. 1, 1905. He wrote his name on the front page and saved the issue telling his children and grandchildren how important it was to keep. Pooser donated his newspaper to the Society.

The front page announces: “Arcadia Fire Swept: Quarter of a Million Dollars Worth of Property Destroyed Including Nearly Every Business House in the City . . . About 8:30 last night fire was discovered enveloping a small stable at the rear of Gore & Scott’s store and in about three hours, nearly every



business house in the city and several residences were in ruins . . . From thence the fire rapidly swept east two blocks on each side of Oak Street to the railroad and south one block.

“Dynamite was used in a number of places in the effort to check the flames, but all efforts along this line failed and every hand was turned to saving the goods in the various stores. The only buildings saved in the path of the flames were the First National Bank building, Seward’s store, and the Carlton block, all being substantial brick buildings.”

These masonry structures inspired a new beginning for Arcadia as reported in the article: “This afternoon a meeting of the businessmen of Arcadia was held and a resolution was adopted recommending that in the future only brick or concrete buildings be allowed in the burnt district; this insures that Arcadia will be rebuilt more substantial than ever.”



Above center—Front page of the Dec. 1, 1905, issue of the *DeSoto County News*, with McLenon’s signature on it that Frances Pooser donated to the Society.

Left—Born in 1855, Andrew Jackson McLenon died in 1936, the year his granddaughter—Frances E. Pooser—graduated from DeSoto County High School.