



DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

www.historicdesoto.org

October 2024

This issue sponsored by - **People for Protecting Peace River.**

Florida Cracker Meal: Outstanding Success

Thanks to everyone who attended the 4th Annual Florida Cracker Meal in the Pine Level Church Fellowship Hall on Sept. 28! We had a wonderful time visiting with each other before and during the meal and then enjoyed a program full of history!

First, we appreciate Connie Bateman for sharing some “tidbits” of the history of Pine Level Church, including that the church was “turned around” so it would have direct access to the Fellowship Hall, and that it had a men’s outhouse and a women’s outhouse as late as 1984!

We are grateful to Adrian Cline, our president, for his introductory remarks that included some history of the town of Pine Level—established as county seat of Manatee in 1866 and designated as the governmental center of DeSoto County when it was formed from the eastern half of Manatee County in 1887. His closing comments were perfect—

”The term ‘Florida Cracker’ carries with it a legacy of resilience, hard work, and a deep connection to the land. It’s a heritage we are proud to honor and keep alive. We hope to see you at the 5th Annual Florida Cracker Meal!”

Member Meeting:

Due to the rising water level in Peace River, the membership meeting scheduled at the Arcadia American Legion Hall is cancelled.

The regular membership meeting will take place on
Monday, October 21, 2024

12:00 p.m.*

DeSoto Memorial Hospital
McSwain Conference Room.

*Please arrive at 11:30 a.m. if you are purchasing lunch.

The American Legion program will be scheduled for another date.



An enjoyable evening was had by all at our 4th Annual Florida Cracker Meal

—Event Photos by Karen Smoke and Luke Wilson

—More photos and text on next and last pages



Florida Cracker Meal —Con't from previous page

Thanks to Carol Mahler for the historical research she did to introduce the silent movie of Arcadia in 1926. She was able to identify many locations and some people in the film, and she shared her findings in a power point presentation and then narrating the scenes as the movie was shown. She hopes to identify more of the people in the film in time for the movie's centennial anniversary in 2026.

However, the film would not exist except for the unflinching efforts of Howard Melton (1920-2016) to save the history of Arcadia and DeSoto County! We appreciate Howard for fishing the movie reel out of the trash when some historic building was being cleaned out—Carol thinks she remembers him saying that it was the Plaza Hotel. In exchange for "stills," he donated the reel to the Lynn and Louis Wolfson II Florida Moving Image Archive at Miami-Dade College. Although the nitrite film was in terrible shape, it was able to be digitized, and someday may be restored.

Thanks to Pastor Ed Horne for his warm hospitality, assistance with set-up and clean up, audio-visual skill, and for giving the invocation and benediction; his wife Jamie Horne for helping to slice and plate the cakes plus helping with clean-up; Larelle Reynard, leader of the Pine Level Church Youth Group, and Youth Volunteers Daniela Arellano, Mailie Bonville, Jackson Dubay, Daniel Mandieta, Jadalyn Reynard, Maggie Reynard, and Teagan Welch.

We appreciate Jimmy Fussell for donating the savory pork steaks and to Steve Fussell for grilling them—please patronize Fussell Meats, LLC, 2039 S.E. Carlstrom Field Rd., and Fussell Realty, Inc, 4 E. Oak St. in Arcadia.

We are also grateful for food donations from the following members: Norma Banas, Kathy Bryce, Adrian Cline, Jane Cline, Ruth Dunn, Cindy McLeod Ely, Jeff Griffis, Linda Keen, Vernon Keen, Marsha Kransdorf, Carol Mahler, Pam Miller, Stella Parker, Diane Wilson, and Luke Wilson. Thanks to René Collins for donating the paper products.



We appreciate everyone who volunteered at the event, especially Stella Parker, who served as chairperson of the event, and Luke Wilson who took photos (as did Karen Smoke) and led the singalong of "Amazing Grace," Norma Banas, Adrian Cline, Ruth Dunn, Linda Keen, Vernon Keen, Marsha Kransdorf, Carol Mahler, Pam Miller, and Karen Smoke.



Thank you to the best bakers for participating in the Arcadia Albritton Coker Cake Contest: from left, Pam Miller, Linda Waters, Kathy Bryce, Michelle Potter, Linda Reesor, and Chelsea Palmer. Sue Catalano was inadvertently not included in the photograph.

Congratulations to Kathy Bryce for winning the prize for the most traditional cake—Grandma's Spice-Raisin Church Cake that she prepared as "gluten free"—and Chelsea Palmer for the most creative cake—a cookie-butter confection. They each received a \$25.00 Publix gift card. We are grateful to Charity Reesor—of Florida Farmhouse Coffee, 103 W. Oak St. (in the Rosin Arcade aka "the pink building") for serving as the judge for the Arcadia Albritton Coker Cake Contest!

Congratulations to the winners of the Door Prizes: Tim Coker won the \$100.00 gift card to Magnolia Seafood Grill; Ted Roberts the \$50.00 gift card to Martin's Country Store; and Jeff Griffis the *My Family Register* book.

Thanks to Kathy Bryce and Elizabeth Kenney who were recognized for 12 years of volunteer service at the John Morgan Ingraham House Museum and the Howard and Velma Melton Historical Research Library with a certificate and \$100.00 worth of gift cards to our local restaurants.

For selling tickets, we appreciate Connie Bateman; Melissa Black at Crews Bank and Trust, Member FDIC; René Collins; Jeff Griffis; Carol Mahler; and Charity Reesor at Florida Farmhouse Coffee Shop; and for printing and keeping track of the tickets, we thank Carol.

—More photos on pg 6

A Message From The President

The DeSoto County Historical Society Nominating Committee submits the following individuals as the slate of officers and board members for consideration by the membership for 2025:

President.....Adrian H. Cline
Vice President.....Vernon Keen
Recording Secretary.....*Pending Nomination*
(Rene Collins will serve on short term interim basis)
Corresponding Secretary.....Nancy Humphrey
Treasurer.....Nancy Erickson
Museum Coordinator.....Carol Mahler
Board Member.....Norma Banas
Board Member.....Ellen Hutson
Board Member.....Jeffery Griffis
Board Member.....Luke Wilson
Board Member.....Stella Parker
Board Member.....Ruth Dunn

Additional nominations from the floor will be taken at the October 21, 2024, membership meeting at DeSoto Memorial Hospital McSwain Room at 12:00 pm.

Adrian H. Cline

President, DeSoto County Historical Society

Maintaining Our Museum

Thanks to Jeff Griffis for keeping the yard mowed at the Museum and Research Library. We also appreciate Carol Mahler for cleaning up the trash every week, and for picking up all the branches and palm fronds blown down when Hurricane Helene bypassed DeSoto County. Other maintenance is also needed—to help, please contact Carol at 863-445-0789.

Contact Information

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Historian: Carol Mahler, 863-445-0789
desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

President: President: Adrian Cline, 863-494-5758
adriancline@outlook.com

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

Call or text: 863-266-5774

John Morgan Ingraham House Museum

300 N Monroe Avenue

MUSEUM OPEN:

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

Genealogy @ The Research Library

Did you know that the Society does genealogy research? Of course, we start in the Howard and Velma Melton Historical Research Library and find what is archived about the family. Sometimes we have photographs; obituaries, engagement and birth announcements, and other articles from our local newspapers; plus interesting ephemera—such as letterhead for local businesses, campaign literature, and personal recollections—often written by Howard. If those don't provide enough information, Volunteer Kathy Bryce may do other research using [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) and/or [newspapers.com](https://www.newspapers.com) --data bases to which Kathy subscribes.

Those requesting genealogical information almost always make donations to the Society in recognition of the time and effort our volunteers give to their research. Thank you to Ed Johnson for his recent donation for all the research that Kathy did to find Mary Whidden Johnson and Frank Marion Johnson who moved from the area that is now DeSoto County to Mound Key where they lived for about 30 years!

Today, the island is Mound Key Archaeological State Park—"believed to have been the cultural center for the Calusa Indians . . . as the native population grew, the remains of their food were collected and heaped into middens." Spain's first governor of the Spanish colony of Florida was appointed in 1566 at Mound Key—also the location of the first Jesuit mission to the New World—San Antonio de Carlos, <https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/mound-key-archaeological-state-park>.

The Spanish brought diseases to which the Calusa had no immunity, so their population was decimated. Later, the island was used by fishermen until it was homesteaded by Frank and Mary Johnson in 1891. Other families joined them in farming until they sold the property to the Koreshan community in 1905. Their mainland home is now the Koreshan State Park.

In 1894, Dr. Cyrus R. Teed—who called himself "Koresh,"—the Hebrew word "Cyrus" meaning "shepherd,"—brought his utopian community of 200 followers from Chicago to Estero. After his death in 1908, membership in this religious group declined, and in 1961, the last four members donated 305 acres for a State park. "What remains of their once vibrant community are 11 beautifully maintained historic structures that date from 1882 to 1920, and landscaped grounds that include unique ornamental exotic vegetation from throughout the world." More information is available online at <https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/koreshan-state-park>.



Photo courtesy of [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com).

Tours of the Museum: By Appointment

Except for the months of June, July, and August, the John Morgan Ingraham House Museum is open to the public on Thursday mornings as well as 2nd and 4th Saturday mornings. However, these hours may not fit everyone's schedule, so we appreciate Carol Mahler for offering tours of the museum by appointment.

She gave a tour of the Museum to Maro and Mike Lorimer of Anna Maria Island—in celebration of Maro's birthday. Maro had always wanted to visit Arcadia because in 1894, her great uncle—Charles Terrell Crawford (1871-1910)—had moved to Arcadia and started a law firm with a partner named Patterson. After witnessing the "Great Freeze" of 1894-1895, he returned home in April, 1895, to Milledgeville, Georgia, because his father was in poor health. Carol shared the few late-nineteenth century photographs of Arcadia in the Research Library, so that Maro could get an idea of how Arcadia might have looked when her uncle lived there.

Maro wrote to Carol the following note: "We are grateful to you for making our visit to Arcadia so meaningful. You brought Arcadia to life for us, and your approach honors all who lived there before. I particularly loved the ingeniousness of the early house designs. I was aware of the architectural designs before, but to walk through the house with you and experience first-hand what it might have been like to live there, was extremely interesting."



Above—To celebrate Maro's birthday, Mike Lorimer and Maro Lorimer enjoyed a tour "by appointment" of the John Morgan Ingraham House Museum courtesy of Carol Mahler.

Left—In the late nineteenth century, Mary Whidden Johnson (1851-1934) and her husband Frank Marion Johnson (1851-1925) moved from the area that is now DeSoto County to farm on Mound Key. One of the mounds is clearly seen behind her as she stands with harvested vegetables and her rake resting in the foreground.



11th Annual Arcadia Fall Rodeo

"Get ready for the Louis and Gloria Flanzer Philanthropic Trust 11th Annual Arcadia Fall Rodeo at Mosaic Arena. Sponsored in part by Visit DeSoto, Florida Power & Light, Land South, and Everglades Farm Equipment, this event promises two days of action-packed rodeo fun on October 19-20, 2024." However, the tradition began as an Armistice Day Rodeo held on Nov. 11 and 12, 1929, by American Legion K-Post 11.

Starting with a "sunrise" dance from 12:01 a.m. to 4:00 a.m. at the Legion Hall, the "rodeo" moved downtown with a parade and then to the Municipal Ball Park, adjacent to the Arcadia Tourist Camp—now the City Mobile Home Park—for the grand entry and rodeo events including wild-cow milking and horse races. A high school football game was played at 3:00 p.m., followed by boxing bouts at 7:00 p.m. and a street dance at 9:00 p.m. to complete Monday's slate. Another parade initiated Tuesday's impressive list of events.

In 1973, the Arcadia Rodeo joined the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA). Currently, contestants need a certain number of points to enter the National Finals Rodeo held in Dec. in Las Vegas, so, a Nov. 11 rodeo is too late. For details and tickets about the October and March rodeos, visit www.arcadiarodeo.com or call 1-800-749-7633.

Pioneer Daze in Sebring

Inspired after attending the Society's 19th Annual Pioneer Day, Jim Pollard, president of the Sebring Historical Society, and Board Member Elaine Haines, started Pioneer Daze last October in Sebring. The goal of the event is to educate the public about the history of Sebring and its founder George Sebring. A producer of fine pottery and dishes in Ohio, Sebring visited eastern DeSoto County on a fishing and hunting trip in 1911. Impressed by the beauty of the land, he purchased 10,000 acres in what is today Highlands County and founded his namesake city.

He was very devout and gave property to any church that wanted to establish a congregation, so many churches attended the 2023 Pioneer Daze event that hosted a total of 80 vendors plus many demonstrators of historic skills and crafts.

Everyone is invited to this year's event from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Sat., Oct. 19, at the Alan Jay Arena at the Highlands County Fairgrounds in Sebring. We are grateful to Karen Smoke and Carol Mahler for volunteering to set up and host a booth for the DeSoto County Historical Society.

If you would like to help, please contact Carol at desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com or call 863-445-0789.



In Memoriam: Freddie Keene Conner

Born in 1939 to Fred S. Keene and Catherine Hazel Keene, Freddie Keene had two brothers—Charles F. Keene and James Keene—and a sister Carole Keene Livingston. Conner graduated from DeSoto High School in 1957. She married James H. Coker, and they divorced in 1965. In 1973, she married James K. Conner. He died in 2002.

Ruth Reynolds Dunn wrote, "My best friend Freddie was so well loved by everyone she ever met. She was so friendly and fun, and we shared so many great memories and stories from high school and years since. There were several sets of girlfriends to travel, eat, and share stories with--she is missed by all of us! . . . She loved to get home to Arcadia every chance she had and really enjoyed our Historical Society and to see her friends."



Freddie Virginia Keene Conner as pictured in the DeSoto High School 1957 annual *The Growl*. Her quotation is "the only way to have a friend is to be one."

Major Hurricanes in Florida

We extend our sympathy to all those who suffered damage or lost loved ones during Hurricane Helene that hit Florida on Sept. 26 almost two years after Hurricane Ian (Sept. 28, 2022)—and Hurricane Milton—that struck Florida on Oct. 9 nearly six years after Hurricane Michael (Oct. 10, 2018).

The strongest hurricanes to make landfall in the State of Florida are the following: "Labor Day" 1935, Andrew 1992, Michael 2018m "Florida Keys" 1919, Charley 2004, Ian 2922m "Miami" 1926, "Okeechobee" 1928, Donna 1960, and Helen 2024. All were Sept. storms except Andrew and Charley in Aug., and Michael in Oct.. More major hurricanes have impacted Florida in Sept. (20) than in Oct. (10) and Aug. (6).

Our prayers that everyone came through Hurricanes Helene and Milton safely with minimal damage.



Photos on left, from top—

Winners of the Arcadia Albritton Coker Cake Contest are Kathy Bryce for “most traditional” and Chelsea Palmer for “most creative” cakes.



Museum Coordinator Carol Mahler, right, thanks Charity Reesor of Florida Farmhouse Coffee Shop for serving as judge for the Arcadia Albritton Coker Cake Contest. Charity worked as a professional baker before she opened her coffee shop.



President Adrian Cline congratulates Tim Coker for winning the door prize of a \$100.00 gift card for Magnolia St. Seafood and Grill.



Photos on right, from top—

Ted Roberts won the door prize of a \$50.00 gift card for Martin's Country Market presented to him by President Adrian Cline.



Jeff Griffis won the door prize of the book *My Family Register* as presented by President Adrian Cline.

Norma Banas and Marsha Kransdorf greeted diners as they arrived.



SAVE THESE DATES!

Mon., Nov 11—10 a.m.—Veterans Day Parade—line up 9:30—Oak Street & Orange Ave.*
 Mon., Nov. 18—11:30 a.m.—Member Meeting—Election of Officers & Board Members—DMH
 Tues., Dec 3—6 p.m.—City Council—Recognition of City of Arcadia Birthday*
 Sat., Dec. 7—10 a.m. Pearl Harbor Day Commemoration—1924 Peace River Bridge*
 —11 a.m. to 1 p.m.—Museum Property clean up and decorating*
 —5:30 p.m.—Christmas Parade line up*
 Sat., Dec 14—4 to 8 p.m.—Holiday Tour of Homes*
 Mon., Dec 16—11:30 a.m.—Member Meeting—Installation of Officers & Board Members—DMH

***Volunteer Opportunities**

*Save the date! **



21ST ANNUAL
 DeSoto County Historical Society
PIONEER DAY
MARCH 29, 2025

with the Arcadia American Legion sponsored Antique
 Tractor, Vintage Car, and Hit & Miss Engine Show
 Turner Agri-Civic Center, 2250 NE Roan St., Arcadia
historicsdesoto.org • desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com



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