



DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

www.historicdesoto.org

August 2026

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

MEMBER MEETINGS – AUGUST & SEPTEMBER

Due to the DeSoto Memorial Hospital McSwain Room not being available on August 17, 2026, the August membership and board meeting has been rescheduled for **Monday, August 24, 2026**. See Letter from the President on page 2.

At least once a year we schedule an evening meeting:
FLORIDA CRACKER MEAL
Saturday, October 3, 2026 ... See page 6

PIONEER DAY
Saturday, March 20, 2027 ... See page 2.

JULY WRAP UP

Arcadia Was A Train Town

On July 8, the Society presented the history of DeSoto County railroads at the request of the Children's Librarian Ama Burns as part of the Summer Reading Program at the DeSoto County Library. We appreciate Carol Mahler for giving a brief overview of the Atlantic Coast Line, Charlotte Harbor and Northern Railway, East and West Coast Railway, Florida Southern Railway, Seaboard Air Line, and Tampa Southern Railway. She shared a map as well as historic photographs of the train stations and trains.



At the Summer Reading Program, Nayeli Vargas and her mother Citlali Vargas colored a pink train.

Thanks to Karen Smoke for designing and distributing train stickers that stated, "I traveled to the past with the DeSoto County Historical Society." Then, with directions from Ama, everyone decorated a wooden locomotive cutout and added a light to it using a paper circuit.

—Photographs courtesy of Carol Mahler.



Left—After he finished coloring his locomotive at the DeSoto County Library, Hunter Fuller held his brother Gavin Fuller.



Natalia Gonzalez waited to install the light on her decorated wooden locomotive during the "Arcadia Was A Train Town" program.



From left, Preston Lee, Tracey Richardson, Ericka Lee, and Jhourni Mele enjoyed the train craft during the Summer Reading Program at the DeSoto County Library.

Letter From The President

Dear Members:

The **DeSoto County Historical Society** membership meeting originally scheduled for August 17, 2026, has been **rescheduled to Monday, August 24, 2026.**

Time: 12:00 p.m.

Location: McSwain Meeting Room, DeSoto Memorial Hospital

Members who wish to enjoy lunch may purchase it in the hospital dining room beginning at **11:30 a.m.** before the meeting.

Our guest speaker will be **Judy Wertz Strickland**, who will present a program on the early life of **Betty Albritton Grady**. This promises to be an informative and engaging presentation highlighting an important part of our local history.

We encourage all members to attend and invite friends who are interested in the history of DeSoto County. Your participation and support help keep our community's history alive, and we look forward to seeing you on **August 24.**

Sincerely,

Adrian H. Cline

President
DeSoto County Historical Society

JULY WRAP UP —Cont.

Supervisor of Elections Debbie Wertz gave an informative presentation at the Society's July meeting, including some history and how voting has changed over the years. President Adrian Cline presented a certificate of appreciation to her. Photograph courtesy of Carol Mahler.



Supervisor of Elections Debbie Wertz and Ana Magana brought a historic voting register to the July meeting, and René Collins found her grandparents listed in the book. Photograph courtesy of Carol Mahler.



Save the date!

23rd Annual



PIONEER DAY
MARCH 20, 2027

with the Arcadia American Legion sponsored Antique Tractor and Hit & Miss Engine Show and Peace River Car Club Car Show

Turner Agri-Civic Center, 2250 NE Roan St., Arcadia

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

In Memoriam George Lempenau

George and Johnny Lempenau are members of the DeSoto County Historical Society. It is with great sadness that we share this Facebook post of George's passing. Whenever we asked for help, George was there. Our thoughts and prayers are with Johnny and her family. May their memories give them comfort in the days ahead.

"It is with heavy hearts that we announce the passing of the patriarch of our family, George Leonard Lempenau.

"George lived a full and meaningful life, always knowing how to balance hard work with making memories. In 1992, he packed up his family and moved from Buffalo, New York, to Florida. Alongside his wife, Jonica ("Johnny"), he purchased Peace River Campground, where they built not only a successful family business but also a place where countless families have made cherished memories for generations.



"When he wasn't working, George had a passion for travel. He was an active member of several organizations that took him to many incredible places throughout the years. Some of his happiest moments, however, were spent with his family—loading up the RV, bringing along the dogs, and taking cross-country road trips with his wife and sons, creating memories that will last a lifetime. Later, he found great joy in taking his oldest granddaughters on camping trips to Disney, passing along his love of adventure to the next generation.

"In recent years, George courageously battled Dementia/Alzheimer's disease, which ultimately took both his mind and body. While we take comfort in knowing he is now at peace, his absence leaves an immeasurable void in the hearts of all who knew and loved him.

"George is deeply missed by his devoted wife of 51 years, Jonica ("Johnny") Lempenau; his sons, Lenny (Summer) Lempenau and Andrew (Debbie) Lempenau; and his four beloved granddaughters, Soleil, Linleigh, Layla, and Alice Lempenau.

"We ask that you keep our family in your thoughts and prayers as we navigate this difficult loss. Details regarding a celebration of George's life will be shared in the coming days. Until then, we kindly ask for privacy and time to grieve as a family."

Historical Society Newsletter Sponsors

Jan. - **Adrian and Jane Cline** in loving memory of **Howard and Celia Sorrells.**

Feb. - **René Collins** in memory of **Terry and Evelyn Collins.**

March - **Dale & Patty** in loving memory of our parents, **Howard & Velma Melton**, and our sister **Sue Melton Rich.**

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. - **Adrian and Jane Cline** in loving memory of **Ada Carlton Cline, Adrian B. Cline, Hazel G. Cline**, and **Donna Faye Cline.**

Dec. - **The McLeod children** in memory of their **Dad, Harold McLeod.**

John Morgan Ingraham House Museum
300 N Monroe Avenue

MUSEUM OPEN:

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

and on the second and fourth Saturday of the month.

CLOSED May-June-July-August.

**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

JULY WRAP UP —Cont.

Arcadia Main Street received an America 250 Initiative Grant that included money for speakers, so Linda Williams worked on a series of local history luncheon programs from noon to 1:00 p.m.: “Florida Songs” by Mac Martin on June 8; “History of G. Pierce Wood Hospital” by Luke Wilson on June 9; “Early Education in DeSoto” by Adrian Cline on June 10; “Old Days of Arcadia” by Judy Wertz-Strickland on June 11, and “Beginning of the Tax Appraiser’s Office” by Dave Williams on June 15 for the Society’s monthly meeting. Linda prepared delicious “down home” meals for each luncheon.

For her efforts, Arcadia Main Street asked her to choose an organization to receive a \$1,000.00 donation, and she chose the Society. We are so grateful for her work on this project and for the donation which she presented to President Adrian Cline at the July meeting. Photograph courtesy of Carol Mahler.



Fence Repair

Two boards were broken on the fence on the north side of the Ingraham House Museum, and we thank Jeff Griffis, Amber Jones, Ron Jones, Sr., and Carol Mahler for the repair. Carol measured and purchased the pressure-treated, rough-cut board. Jeff picked up the board and cut it to size. Amber and Ron installed the boards.

Contact Information

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VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Become A Museum Guide

If you like to meet new people or talk with local residents, then you will enjoy giving tours of the Museum. Thanks to Carol Mahler, every item in the Museum has a card on display that identifies it, so the answers to many questions are easily found. In addition, notes on how to highlight a few items each room are available for you to use as you give tours and to keep with you. In-person training will be provided if desired. Please contact Carol Mahler now to help give tours when the Museum opens in September.

Museum Committee

When someone wants to donate an artifact or historic object to the Society, the Museum Committee decides whether or not to accept the donation. The Committee usually considers donations through an email message. Photographs and historic information about the potential donation are sent out to the members, and they reply with their vote. Committee members include Cindy Ely, Linda Keen, Vernon Keen, and Carol Mahler, and they welcome new members: please contact Carol at 863-445-0789 or desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com.



CLICK THE BUTTON TO SEND AN EMAIL TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT VOLUNTEERING.

The Society’s Museum Gift Shop

The Society’s publications include the following: Howard Melton’s volumes—*Footprints and Landmarks: Arcadia and DeSoto County, Florida*, and *More Footprints and Landmarks: Arcadia and DeSoto County, Florida*—plus the books the Society has produced and/or reprinted: *Cracker Cures: A Compendium of Cures, Concoctions, Potions, Remedies, Magic, Old Wives’ Tales, Omens, Luck Signs, and Talismans*, *History of the Smith-Brown School 1892-1950*, and *Recollections I-IV: A Collection of Historical Photographs, Documents, Letters, Diaries, Stories, Recipes, Sayings, and Other Memorabilia about Arcadia and DeSoto County, Florida*. Our reprints of historic postcards include the ACL Train Depot, IOOF/WOW Building, Plaza Hotel, and Rosin Arcade (aka “Pink Building”). These items plus our Pioneer Day T-shirts, Society ball caps, and three lithographs by the late local resident Guy LaBree, known as “The Barefoot Artist of the Florida Seminoles” may be viewed online at <https://historicdesoto.org/museum-shop>

Downtown Museum Exhibit

Ron Jones, Sr., negotiated with James Lee who owns Biggar and Biggar Antique Mall, 133 W. Oak St., about having some space for a museum exhibit. Lee offered three of his front windows, 28 feet long by six feet wide, plus the use of three glass display cases. At the end of May, a two-year agreement was signed between the Society and Lee. The Society agreed to “keep the displayed items clean, dusted, and some items changed from time to time to keep a fresh look. The Society will pay him \$200.00 twice a year to help with utilities.” We are grateful to Ron and James for this opportunity to share our history in downtown Arcadia.



We appreciate Ron, Amber Jones, and Jeff Griffiths for moving the following artifacts to the new space on July 23: pump organ, dentist chair, barber chair, permanent wave machine, American Shoe Shop sign, yoke associated with Oscar the Ox, cowboy bathtub, desk with typewriter and chair that belonged to Arcadian Editor Nate Reece, artist press, seeder, wooden crutches that belonged to John James Russ, old DeSoto County license plate, two books of property tax receipts, two butter churns, wagon wheel jack, horse hames, Nocatee Crate Company bell, and more. We are grateful to Ron, Oscar Pedroza, Sr., and Oscar Pedroza, Jr. for cleaning and arranging all the artifacts in the space on July 24.

Thanks to Carol Mahler for setting up items from “Fruitful: An Exhibit of DeSoto County Citrus History” in the glass cases, designing the museum exhibit signs, continuing to work on signage for all the artifacts, and for filling out the Certificate of Appropriateness and Signage Certificate applications for a sign that will hang under the awning and above the sidewalk in front of the windows.

Photographs courtesy of Carol Mahler.



Help The Society And Enjoy Downtown

If you like to visit the shops downtown, then you will enjoy being the volunteer who makes sure that our brochures and publications are in our local boutiques, stores, and restaurants. Most downtown businesses already have brochure holders, so refilling the supply every few months is easy. Please contact Carol Mahler to keep the Society’s brochures available downtown.

CLICK THE BUTTON TO SEND AN EMAIL TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT VOLUNTEERING.





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

Fall is right around the corner...
Save the Date for our Sixth Annual
Florida Cracker Meal
Saturday, October 3
Pine Level Church
Fellowship Hall
9695 NW Pine Level Street

The Florida Cracker Meal is also a member meeting. Ticket sales locations will be announced in the September newsletter and on Facebook as soon as the information is available.



Date: August 18, 2026
Time: 05:30 PM to 07:00 PM
Location: VIRTUAL MEETING (Meeting Time is EST)
DNA SIG
Sig Leader: Peggy Jude

Join us for a dialogue on the use of DNA in your genealogical research. News, sharing and help! The DNA SIG is led by Peggy Jude. Peggy is a member of the board of the Manatee Genealogical Society and is a professional genealogist with a specialty in genetic genealogy. Details for joining the Virtual Meeting will be provided prior to the meeting to MGS members via email. Non-members can request attendance information by emailing us at info@mgsfl.org. Put in the Subject line: Request DNA SIG Link.

For more about MGS see: <https://mgsfl.org/>



Date: September 01, 2026
Time: 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Location: Virtual - Zoom Only
Monthly Membership Meeting Topic:
"Separating Multiple Generations of Men
with the Same Name"
Speaker: Diana Elder

When many descendants of the original settler inherit his name, diagramming and careful analysis of land, tax, and probate records can reconstruct families.

About the Speaker: Diana Elder AG®, AGLTM is a professional genealogist accredited in the Gulf South region and serves on the advisory board for The International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists (ICAPGen). She is the author of *Research Like a Pro: A Genealogist's Guide* and co-author of *Research Like a Pro with DNA*. With her daughter Nicole, Diana has built a comprehensive educational platform teaching through study groups, an interactive eCourse, and the *Research Like a Pro* Genealogy Podcast. She shares research strategies on Family Locket (familyloket.com), making professional-level techniques accessible to genealogists worldwide.

Open to the Public – Advance Registration Required To attend, non-members must register at least one day in advance by emailing: info@mgsfl.org

The Zoom meeting will begin promptly at 10:00 AM EST.