



DeSoto County Historical Society

PAST • PRESENT • FUTURE
ARCADIA, FLORIDA

DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

www.historicdesoto.org

March 2023

This issue sponsored by - Dale, Patty & Sue in loving memory of
our parents, Howard & Velma Melton

Please be a part of our signature event!

Volunteer, Sponsor, or come out to enjoy the day and bring
your friends!

In centennial commemoration of Memorial Grammar School

DeSoto County Historical Society's 19th Annual

Pioneer Day & BBQ!



9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

March 25, 2023

*with the Arcadia
American Legion sponsored Antique
Tractor and
Hot & Miss Engine Show*

Turner

Agri-Civic Center
2250 NE Roan St., Arcadia

- Bodacious BBQ, Luscious Strawberry Shortcake & Traditional Florida Foods
- Classic Firetruck and Fire Hose Demo
- Demonstrations of Old-time Skills
- Florida Authors and Artists
- Florida Cracker Cow Camp & Whip Crackers
- Hands-On History Area with Fossil Dig and Old-fashioned Games
- Legendary characters
- Musical entertainment & Much More!

James Mitchell "Yerfoot" Johnson
(1850-1922)

Nearly seven feet tall & 250 lbs.,
Yerfoot was named for his size—
shown on for walking 130 miles
round-trip to deliver the mail from
Fort Ogden to Fort Meade.

Parking \$5.00 per vehicle

www.historicdesoto.org — 863-266-5774
desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Like us on Facebook!

Member Meeting:

*****NOW ON THIRD MONDAY*****

Monday, March 20

**DeSoto Memorial Hospital -
McSwain Room**

Room open at 11:30 a.m.

Meeting 12 noon

Artifact Road Show — Bring something of
historical significance to share at the meeting!

Please arrive early so you can go through the
line ahead of the hospital employees.

Parking is currently tight due to
construction—please park where you find
space available away from the hospital entrance
if you are able to walk the distance.

Lots of hands-on help is needed for Pioneer
Day! Contact Carol Mahler, 863-445-0789
desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com



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

Thank you to our Sponsors!

—See list on page 3

Consider being "Friend Sponsor"—\$25.

Pioneer Day Commemorates The Centennial of Memorial Grammar School

At noon at Pioneer Day on March 25, the Society will present a certificate of congratulations to Dr. Bobby Bennett, Superintendent of DeSoto County Schools, on the Centennial of Memorial Grammar School.

Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, DeSoto County built many schools—often large brick structures to replace smaller wood frame buildings. New schools were also constructed for the growing population, and one such school was Memorial Grammar School, now known as Memorial Elementary School.

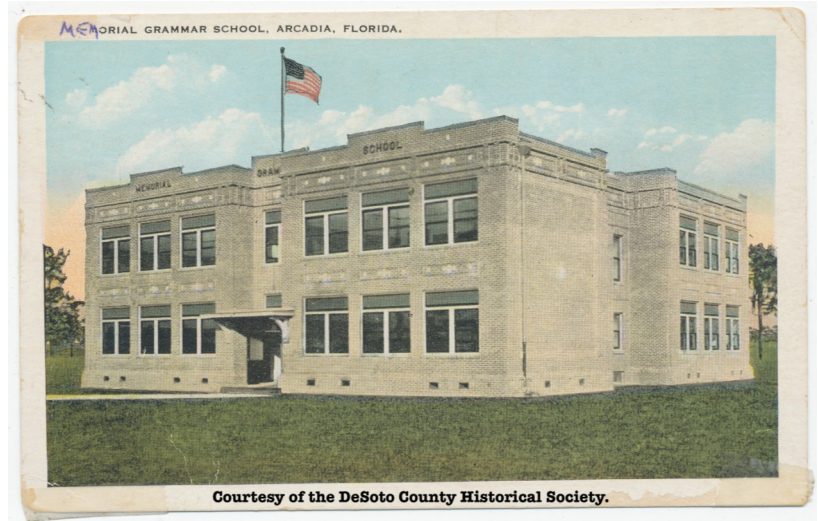
Born in 1918, Frances Pooser remembered walking with her mother to see the construction underway for the new school that Frances would attend in 1924. Her mother was very pleased with the school because until it was opened, students living on east side of Arcadia had to walk to West Elementary School, and her mother thought that was too far for a six-year-old to travel from home.

The March 8, 1923, *Arcadia Enterprise* newspaper announced that Memorial Grammar School—costing \$30,000.00 to construct—will “open next Monday, with dedication services being conducted by the local American Legion.” It was named in memory of all those from DeSoto County who had died serving their country during World War I.

The school originally faced Mills Ave., and Frances’ brother Jack remembered that his third-grade teacher asked each student to bring in a dime to pay for the palm trees that were planted along the sidewalk. After Hurricane Charley in 2004 toppled some of the trees planted 75 years previously, Jack enlisted his nephew John Conroy to replant with palms from his Fish Branch Tree Farm.

In 1936, Frances graduated from DeSoto High School, and in 1940, she started teaching at Memorial Grammar School and taught there for 40 years. In 2020, the library at Memorial Elementary School was named for Frances E. Pooser and her fellow teacher Margaret Hays.

Increased enrollment required the construction, in 1964, of the classrooms along Cypress St., and the present-day main campus—including cafetorium, administrative offices, and classrooms—was built in 1985. In 2000, the H-building was constructed, and after Hurricane Charley, the portable classrooms were installed on Robert and Mills avenues.



Memorial Grammar School opened in March of 1923. It was named in memory of all those from DeSoto County who had died serving their country during World War I. The building pictured was demolished in 1983.

Society Wins Third Place at Fair!

Thanks to Carol Mahler for designing, setting up, and taking down our booth at the DeSoto County Fair that featured the covers of Fair Programs from 1954 through 2022. (We are still missing some years, so if you have the following programs, please consider

donating them or allowing the Society to scan them: 1974, 1981-1983, 1984-1990, 1991-1995, 2000-2001, and 2003.) Her efforts won a third prize ribbon for the Society! We also appreciate that she donated the cost of printing a poster celebrating the Fair on their 70th anniversary.



Thank you to our 19th Annual Pioneer Day Sponsors!

Please thank our sponsors for supporting The DeSoto County Historical Society when you do business with them.

Bronze Sponsor: \$500

Peace River Electric Cooperative
(PRECO)

Event Sponsors: \$250

A+ Environmental Restoration
Arcadia Stockyard
David Abraham - \$200.00
Paul Bennett Seusy
People for Protecting Peace River
(3PR)
Performance Automotive
Rotary Club of Arcadia
Wellpath Recovery Solutions

Entertainment Sponsor: \$100

Allen and Linda Reesor
Arcadia Abstract and Title, Inc.
Crews Bank and Trust
Cox Pest Control
E and I Family, LLC
Fender Auto Parts
Florida State Auctions
Glass, Antique or Not
Judy Wertz-Strickland
Keith and Cindy Keene
Maassen Oil Company
Mid-Florida Credit Union / Kelli Ali
Oaks of Devonaire, LLC
Peace River Campground
Peace River Tax Services
Rene Collins
Robert W. Heine, Jr.
Sheriff Jim and Michelle Potter
Smith's Ranch and Garden
United Country / Gulfand Real Estate
Victory Baptist Church
White Sands Construction
William and Susan Pooley
Williamson Group Realty - \$150

Friends of the Society: \$25

Ann and Hans Bursa
Arcadia Garden Club
Arlene Conley
Asena Mott
Dr. Sharon Goodman
Ellen Hutson
In Memory of Charles J. Mahler
James D. Brewer
Jenny and Charlie Tanner
Jim Dooley
John Olin
Karen Smoke
Kathy Carlton
Les Reiselt
Lou Towne
Marilyn McConnell
Mark and Penny Pringle - \$50.00
Marshal Quinn Jones
Morgan Stanley
Norma and Marsha
Tim and Cathy Carpenter
Valerie Sciarretta
The Valley Florist
Vernon and Linda Keen

In Kind Donations

A+ Environmental Restoration
Arcadia Printing
Arcadia Computer
Bryan Farm Store
Dakin Dairy
DeSoto Signs
Fussell Meats
Joshua Citrus
Victory Baptist Church

Featured "Sister" Society



The Venice Area Historical Society

(VAHS) was founded in 1991 as the Venice Historic Preservation League, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, in order to celebrate and preserve the history of Venice, Florida and surrounding areas.

<https://veniceareahistoricalsociety.org/>

Upcoming Lecture Series
Events—held at Unitarian
Universalist Congregation
of Venice, 1971 Pinebrook
Rd Venice, FL 34292

March 21 — 7:00 p.m.

"Marie Selby" Portrayal by
Kate Holmes

April 18 — 7:00 p.m.

"John Nolen: Olmsted
Disciple" Presented by
Professor Bruce
Stephenson

For more info:

941-412-0151

information@veniceareahistoricalsociety.org

VISIT OUR MUSEUM! — 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

Guided Walking Tour of Historic Downtown Arcadia

Thanks to Jim Club of Discover Sarasota for organizing a group from Sarasota and thanks to Carol Mahler for giving the group a guided tour of historic downtown Arcadia on Sat., Feb. 11. We also appreciate Kathy Bryce for guiding the group through the Museum and Jahna Leonard for helping with set up and clean up. The following were comments sent to Jim about the tour.

Each member of the group donated \$5.00 for the tour plus someone gave an additional \$6.00 donation bringing the total donation to \$116.00. Another member bought one of the antique Arcadia CocaCola Bottling company bottles, patented in 1922, an artifact Carol used to tell some of our local history.

"Jim, thank you for hosting this fascinating tour. The insight shared by the DeSoto County Historical Society, was very interesting, really enjoyed it."

—Sally S.

"Jim, Thank you for planning this wonderful event! The tour guide was knowledgeable and very interesting. . . . Beautiful weather and a fun day!! Thanks again for . . . making this event a great memorable experience!"

—Sherri

"Thank you Jim for a wonderful and well organized event. Always a pleasure experiencing our great Florida history!!"

—Renee F.

"Thanks Jim! Perfect day and interesting tour."

—Trish

"The Arcadia Tour was as well done as one of your own, thanks for organizing us, Jim."

—Diane

Gratitude for Gifts

Irrigation Restored!

Thanks to Dave Hutchinson for replacing the leaky valve on the irrigation pipes for the citrus trees at the John Morgan Ingraham House Museum. We also appreciate Jeff Griffis for troubleshooting the well pump and figuring out that the circuit needed to be reset.

Commemorative Key Given

Thanks to General James "Jimmy" Dozier, U. S. Army retired, for donating to the Society—among other artifacts and documents—the key to the City of Arcadia that Mayor Eugene Hickson, Sr., presented to him at his "welcome home" ceremony on Jan. 29, 1982, after he was rescued from being kidnapped by terrorists in Italy in 1981.

See a reprint of the front page of a Special Edition of *The Arcadian*, January 28, 1982 on next page.



The Arcadian

Special Edition
Thursday, Jan. 28, 1982

Vol. 57 No. 17a

Arcadia, DeSoto County, Fla. 33821

(813) 494-2131

Free

Gen. Dozier rescued

Courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society

Community praise and thanksgiving

In Celebration for the Rescue of Gen. James L. Dozier

Arcadia, Fla. 10 a.m. Friday, Jan. 29, 1982

"Let every that hath breath praise the Lord" Psalm 150, verse 6

Prelude
DeSoto High School Band
Kerry Fitzgerald, Director

Calling Together
Mayor Eugene Hickson

Flag Pledge of Allegiance
Hymn "My Country 'tis of Thee" (America)
Psalm 98:1-4; 95:2

Call to Worship
Rev. Norman Edwards DD

Invocation
Pastor, Pleasant Hill United Methodist Church

Hymns of Praise
"Come Christians Join to Sing"
"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" Psalms 150

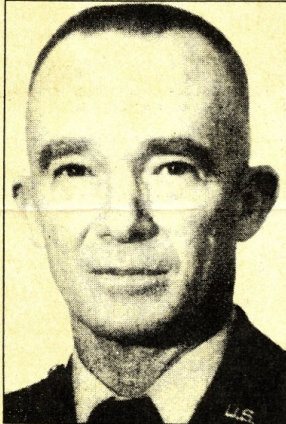
Scripture Readings
A Meditation of Praise and Thanksgiving
Rev. H. Fred Spencer
Pastor Trinity United Methodist Church

A Hymn of Thanks
"Now Thank we all our God"
Rev. H. Fred Spencer
In unison

The Lord's Prayer
The Doxology
Expression of Appreciation
Mr. Sullivan Dozier

Gen. Dozier's Uncle
Benediction
The Rev. Robert Kendall
Pastor, First Presbyterian Church

Postlude
DeSoto High School Band



BRIG. GEN. JAMES L. DOZIER
... key NATO officer

"In good condition"

Compiled from Associated Press
U.S. Army General James L. "Jimmy" Dozier was rescued today from his Red Brigades terrorists, exactly six weeks after his capture Dec. 17.

Dozier, a native son of Arcadia and a graduate of DeSoto High School, was rescued about 5:30 a.m. U.S. Eastern Time in Padua, Italy, by Italian police acting on information received Wednesday. Police burst into an apartment where the terrorist group was holding the high-ranking NATO official, and pounced upon a terrorist who was pointing a pistol with a silencer at Dozier's head.

Dozier, 50, was rescued from five terrorists who were placed under arrest. The general was taken to a hospital at the NATO base at Vicenza for a check-up and declared by

Continued on page 2

Historical Society Newsletter Sponsors

Jan. - **Alvie Davidson** in memory of his parents, **Ollie & Mary Lee Davidson**

Feb. - **Rene 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**

A Message From The President

Hello Members:

You have asked to be part of decision making and we are happy that you care. The most recent question was what you felt about lunches at our monthly meetings.

Resoundingly, paying for a good meal was the choice.

After checking several possible local caterers, we found DeSoto Memorial Hospital not only the best prices (meals under \$10.) but great quality and choices of fresh chef prepared meals. We have reserved a lovely quiet room with great acoustics for the **3rd Monday of every month** at our usual 11:30 for lunch and noon for our program. **Please note the day of our meeting has changed.** Check the front page for details of the upcoming meeting and check out our new location.

In the works will be another Cracker Dinner Meeting. Keep watching your newsletter for so many things we are doing, and keep in touch with suggestions or even critiques.

Norma

Mark Your Calendars for Suncoast Remake Learning Days



April 22: How Florida Pioneers Used Native Plants

11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Richard Schminke
Conference Room, DeSoto County Library, 125 N.
Hillsborough Ave.

Celebrate Earth Day Using Your Senses!

We will celebrate Earth Day by learning about Florida native plants and how the pioneers used them for food, medicine, and materials. Families will sample—through smell, taste, and touch—some native plants, plus make rubbings of leaves and a simple seed-starting pot to plant a Florida native plant they can take home and nurture! In addition, families will use their senses to engage in hands-on activities and view an exhibit in the library's conference room curated by the DeSoto County Historical Society and a third-grade class at West Elementary School. Join us for a fun Earth Day!

April 29: Discover History In Downtown Arcadia

11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Grass south of old City Hall,
121 W. Hickory St.

Let's Go On a Scavenger Hunt!

Families will go on a scavenger hunt for the history of Arcadia. By learning about how Arcadia developed, they will be better able to make choices about how Arcadia develops in the future. We will start at Old City Hall by learning about the fire that devastated downtown Arcadia in 1905 and try out a bucket brigade—one of the methods used to extinguish the fire. Next, we will go on a scavenger hunt using a virtual or paper list of details to discover on and in the buildings on Oak St., Monroe Ave., and Polk Ave. We will end the scavenger hunt at the Tree of Knowledge Park, where there will be a "Selfie Station" with pre-printed signs for families to record and remember the fun they had!



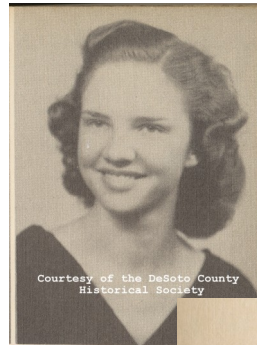
In Memoriam: Betty Allgood Keen

Born in 1932, Betty Allgood Keen is the daughter of Willie C. Allgood, Sr. and Martha Allgood, who celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1990. Born in Georgia, they moved to Arcadia in the early 1930s with their sons W. C. Jr. "Bucky" and Bobby and their daughters Betty Keen and Frances Browning.

Betty graduated from DeSoto High School in the Class of 1950 and was voted "Most Talkative" with Seward Van Petten, "Best Dancer" with Paul Simmons, and "Wittiest" with Sherman Harding.

Betty was the caretaker of Morgan Park for 40 years: first with her husband David Keen, and after he died in 1987, on her own. Their mobile home was originally near the picnic area, but she recalled a bad storm that "flooded everything." So the county built a hill for the trailer and the pump house. In 2003, the mobile home was moved to its present location.

After her 90th birthday, she retired, and her daughter Jencie Griffis—who had helped Betty for many years—became the caretaker of Morgan Park. Betty loved local history, and although she could never attend meetings, she was a Society member for many years. She will be missed.



Courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society

Betty enjoyed her role as caretaker of Morgan Park, and shared her love of nature with park visitors.

Left & below—Photo and activities list from DeSoto High School in the Class of 1950 Yearbook.

BETTY ALGOOD

Courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society

"Many a joke she had."

Band, F.H.A. 1; Band, Softball 2; Assistant Manager Basketball, Band Banquet 3; Girls' Football, Bark Staff 4.