



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

May 2024

This issue sponsored by - **Marshall and Hazel Whidden** in memory of
our parents, **Marshall and Barbara Whidden**, and
our beloved son, **Douglas Marshall Whidden**.



DeSoto County Historical Society

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Dr. Martha Bireda, Director of the Blanchard House Museum of African American History and Culture of Charlotte County in Punta Gorda, will speak about Florida Emancipation Day at our meeting at **noon**, on **Mon., May 20**, in the McSwain Room of DeSoto Memorial Hospital. The presentation is free and open to the public. Lunch available for purchase in the cafeteria at 11:30 a.m.

Member Meeting:

Monday, May 20

DeSoto Memorial Hospital -

McSwain Room

Room open at 11:30 a.m.

Meeting 12 noon

May 20 Is Florida's Emancipation Day

On Sept. 22, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued "The Emancipation Proclamation," and on Jan. 1, 1863, he signed it into law. However, no one in Florida knew about it. On May 10, 1865, Brigadier General Edward M. McCook accepted Tallahassee—the only state capital east of the Mississippi not captured by Union forces—from the Confederate States of America forces. On May 20, he announced that the Emancipation Proclamation was in effect, and that day's train from Jacksonville also delivered Major General Quincy A. Gillmore's Special Order #63 stating that "the people of the black race are free citizens of the United States."

—Con't next page

Memorial Day Observations

You're invited to the remembrance at 10:00 a.m., on Memorial Day, Mon., May 27, at the British Plot in Oak Ridge Cemetery, and then to the DeSoto County Memorial Day Service at 11:00 a.m. on the south lawn of the DeSoto County Courthouse.

British Cadets Remembered At Rotary Club Meeting

We are grateful to Sondra Guffey, president of the Arcadia Rotary Club, for inviting Carol Mahler to speak about the British cadets who trained at Carlstrom Field before the U.S. entered World War II. Carol gave an overview of their aviation training and shared many old newspaper clippings detailing the circumstances of death for some of the 23 cadets buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery.

—Con't next page



MEMORIAL DAY

Monday, May 27

The British Plot in Oak Ridge Cemetery

601 N. Johnson Ave.

10:00 a.m.

The Memorial Day Ceremony will include an invocation, raising the flags of Britain and the Royal Air Force, with traditional songs—some played on the bagpipes.

DeSoto County Memorial Day Service

11:00 a.m.

South lawn of the DeSoto County Courthouse

115 East Oak St.

REMEMBER AND HONOR
WE WILL NEVER FORGET

Con't from front page—

May 20 Is Florida's Emancipation Day

Dr. Martha R. Bireda will discuss the commemorations and celebrations of Florida's Emancipation Day at our May 20th membership meeting.

Martha R. Bireda, Ph.D., is a writer, lecturer, and living history performer. With over 30 years of experience as a lecturer, consultant, and trainer for issues related to race, class, and gender, she has worked with educators, law enforcement, business, and civic leaders. She is the founder and director of the Blanchard House Museum of African American History and Culture of Charlotte County in Punta Gorda, Florida.

She has written 12 non-fiction books, including her two latest works: "A Time for Change: How White Supremacy Ideology Harms All Americans" and "The Promise of Whiteness: Its Past and Its Future." Additionally, she has written two books for youth readers: "Obi: African Seminole Freedom Fighter" and "The Trabue Woods Book of Values." Dr. Bireda is also the author of historical fiction books for adults: "The Womb Rebellion," which tells the story of enslaved women who refused to engage in the process of slave-breeding, and "My Brother's Keeper," which tells the story of the numbers racket and its positive influence on the African American community during the Jim Crow Era.

Con't from front page—

British Cadets Remembered At Rotary Club Meeting

Every year since 1956 (except 2020 when canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic), the Arcadia Rotary Club has honored and remembered the 23 British cadets buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery. Two died—one of disease and one drowned—at Carlstrom Field in Arcadia. British cadets who died while training elsewhere in southwest Florida—many at Riddle Field in Clewiston—are buried in "The British Plot," in Oak Ridge Cemetery as commemorated on the historical marker installed there by the Rotary Club in 1968.

The Memorial Day Ceremony will include an invocation, raising the flags of Britain and the Royal Air Force, with traditional songs—some played on the bagpipes. In the past, the British Car Clubs have also brought their antique vehicles as part of the ceremony.



The Tradition Continues

By William. Dalgarno. Ex RAF. WW2

More than 80 years ago hundreds of British young men arrived in Florida. Not on vacation, they came to learn how to become pilots for the sorely depleted Royal Air Force. These boys were accepted by the citizens of Arcadia as their own. They were invited into homes and lifelong friendships were made. Alas, while the majority went on to glory and victory, 23 did not and are interred at the Oak Ridge Cemetery. But even there they were not forgotten. The graves were cared for by Arcadians, their flag was raised and lowered daily, and a sacred tradition began.

The annual Memorial Day Ceremony is sponsored by the Arcadia Rotary Club. Each year, an influx of British and Irish visitors, many in kilts, faithfully give thanks, not only to those lads who never went home but also to the citizens of Arcadia who—even after all these years—never forgot these boys who gave everything for our freedom. During the Rotary Club Ceremony, including the traditional lone bagpiper, people will present wreaths of remembrance and attend every grave. These boys will never be forgotten.

This year, there may be a fly-over by a veteran plane, and the guest speaker will be the son of one of the original flight instructors. Please attend this ceremony to show solidarity and faithfulness to those who will never leave these shores.



Dressed in his family's traditional clothing, Society Member Bill Dalgarno stands ready to place a flag at one R.A.F. cadet's grave.

—Photos by Carol Mahler

A Message From The President

Memorial Day is a significant occasion in the United States, dedicated to honoring and remembering the men and women who died while serving in the country's armed forces. Attending a Memorial Day service holds several important meanings:

- **Honoring Sacrifice:** By attending the service, you pay tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. It's an opportunity to express gratitude and respect for their bravery and commitment.
- **Community Unity:** Memorial Day services bring together community members, veterans, and their families. It's a chance to connect with others who share a common appreciation for the sacrifices made by military personnel.
- **Reflection and Remembrance:** The service provides a solemn moment for reflection. It allows attendees to remember not only those who died in battle but also the impact their loss had on families and communities.

Please plan to attend the Oak Ridge Ceremony at 10:00 a.m. and/or the DeSoto County Courthouse Ceremony at 11:00 a.m.

Adrian H. Cline

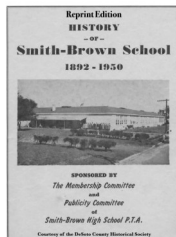
President, DeSoto County Historical Society

—Con't from pg. 6

Books About Local History

The books shown on pg. 6 are available from the Society or from select downtown merchants: Antiques and More, 23 W. Oak St.; Biggar and Biggar Antique Mall, 133 W. Oak St.; Dragon's Den Books, 122 W. Oak St., and Glass, Antique or Not, 127 W. Oak St.

For more than 70 years, the segregated Smith-Brown School educated African-American students in Arcadia. In 1950, the Smith-Brown Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) published the "History of Smith-Brown High School: 1892-1950." In 2021, the HCW (Helen C. Washington) Foundation joined with the DeSoto County Historical Society to reprint the book. It is available from the Foundation or Society (historiclesoto.org).



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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.**

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. **Closed Sat. May 25.**

We will be closed during the summer months of June, July and August. Tours will be available by appointment only: please call Carol Mahler at 863-445-0789.

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

Magic School Bus Rides To Success

Thanks to Carol Mahler, Tonya Wallace, and Ashley Coone for dreaming up the Magic School Bus activity: as families traveled from one free, family event to the next on Sat. Apr. 20, they also learned about the important people and places of DeSoto County on the first day of Suncoast Remake Learning Days (SRLD).

Presented by the Suncoast Campaign for Grade Level Reading with support from the Patterson Foundation, SRLD was a 15-day, free learning festival for children and families. From April 20 through May 4, more than 240 organizations participated in SRLD as event hosts and partners, and they presented more than 270 activities in Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties.

We are grateful to Carol for planning the bus route and for writing the historical facts to match the route. We appreciate Karen Smoke for designing the map and Carol for the other side. Thanks to Kathy Bryce, Elizabeth Kenny, and Carol for assembling stickers and crayons in the envelopes, and we appreciate Carol for preparing all the other supplies for the bus.



Thanks to Carol and Tonya for making a flyer—and to Carol for distributing it—and a fun video to advertise the bus. We also appreciate Carol for designing and installing bus stop signs at all the event locations plus recording a radio commercial and then re-recording it when it disappeared in the radio station's computer

system. Thanks to Mark Anderson for hosting Carol twice on his “Mark In The Morning” show on Classic Country 104.5 FM to talk about the Magic School Bus, SRLD, and more!



—Photos by Karen Smoke

We are grateful to Jahna Leonard and Carol Mahler for being the docents on the bus and to Nancy “Eric” Erickson and Karen for helping on the buses. The Society met our goal of 100 riders—and more!

Small Towns In Florida Filmed In Arcadia

Thanks to Economic Development Director Sondra Guffey for inviting a PBS film crew from Miami to meet with Carol Mahler at the Ingraham House Museum on April 18. The crew decided a downtown location would work better for an interview, so thanks to Carol for joining them there and talking about the history of Arcadia and DeSoto County. The crew doesn't expect to finish the film until next year, and Sondra promised to notify the Society when local audiences may view it on television.



—Photo courtesy of Daniel Sutphin

Middle School Students Learn Local History

Thanks to DeSoto Middle School Teacher Sheri Ross for inviting Carol Mahler to share some local history with two eighth grade classes. We appreciate Carol Mahler for making a slide presentation for the students—plus a scavenger hunt worksheet to help them learn some facts—and remember them, we hope! We are also grateful to Carol for presenting the slide show, plus choosing, carrying, and showing off a box full of historic artifacts as the students tried to guess each one during first and second period on Friday, April 5, at the school.



JROTC Cadet Natalye Martinez Honored

Thanks to the Society's President Adrian H. Cline for presenting a certificate of appreciation, framed copy of a historic photo, and a \$25.00 gift card to Martin's Country Market to JROTC Cadet Natalye Martinez at the JROTC Awards Ceremony on April 26 at DeSoto Middle School cafeteria. We also appreciate Carol Mahler for preparing the award items.

We are grateful for all the cadets who volunteered at the Museum and for Pioneer Day, but LTC Ron Baynes (U.S. Army, ret'd) asked that we especially honor Natalye for her outstanding volunteer work with the Society.

He wrote, "We would like to convey our sincere appreciation for the DeSoto County Historical Society's support of our JROTC Awards Ceremony on Friday, Apr. 26. Thanks to Mr. Cline for attending to present the award. Thanks also to the Society for sponsoring the award provided to Cadet Martinez.

Recognition of our outstanding youth for their service to others is of the utmost importance to their growth and development. Please pass along our gratitude to your membership."



Society President Adrian H. Cline presents award to JROTC Cadet Natalye Martinez. —Photo courtesy LTC Ron Baynes

"Red To Honor, White to Remember" Mothers

by Carol Mahler

Ann Maria Reeves Jarvis (1832-1905) organized Mothers' Day Work Clubs to raise money for medicine, to hire inspectors for bottled milk and food, and to pay for help for mothers suffering from tuberculosis. During the U.S. Civil War, she encouraged the Club to aid both Union and Confederate soldiers. Seeking to unite her community after the war, she founded an annual event called Mothers' Friendship Day.

In 1907, her daughter Anna Jarvis (1864-1948) organized a tribute to her mother at their church—Andrews Methodist Episcopal Church, now the International Mother's Day Shrine, in Grafton, West Virginia.

The next year, the first official Mother's Day ceremonies were held in Philadelphia's Wanamaker Store Auditorium and in the Grafton church. Anna sent 500 white carnations—her mother's favorite flower—to the ceremony in Grafton (<http://www.wvculture.org/history/archives/women/jarvis.html>).

On May 10, 1913, Alabama Representative James Heflin introduced House Resolution 103, urging President Woodrow Wilson, plus members of his Cabinet, the U.S. House and Senate, as well as other federal officials to wear white carnations or any white flower to honor mothers as "the greatest source of our country's strength and inspiration."

No mention of flowers was included when Heflin introduced legislation designating Mother's Day as the second Sunday of May. Instead, U.S. flags were to be flown from buildings and homes to honor mothers. It quickly passed both the House and Senate and was signed into law by the president that day—May 8, 1914 (<https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1901-1950/The-first-national-celebration-of-Mother-s-Day>). The custom became to wear a red flower to honor and a white flower to remember a mother.

The Thurs., May 18, 1916, *DeSoto County News* reported "Mother's Day Exercises: Were A Beautiful Feature In All the Churches Sunday (from Monday's Daily) . . . Mother's Day exercises were held yesterday in all the churches of the city, and both at the churches or on the street few were seen who did not wear either a white or a red flower, each a silent reminder that the dear mother is still living to bless the home, or has departed to be held in sacred memory as long as life shall last. . . ."



Historical Adventure Begins at Your Library

The Society will present three programs during the Summer Reading Program at DeSoto County Library. All weekday programs will begin at 1 p.m. at the

Library. June 18 will be a program on trains and railroads. June 19 will be quilts and patterns. June 20 will be local legends. June 22, the mobile library will be parked at the Museum and the Society will provide some hands-on activities during that time. To volunteer, Contact Carol Mahler, 863-445-0789, or email desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com Text or leave a message on the Society phone: 863-266-5774

Celebrate May As National Historic Preservation Month!

By Carol Mahler

The DeSoto County Historical Society invites everyone to celebrate May as National Historic Preservation Month! In 1949, President Harry Truman signed into law the legislation to form The National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP), and in 1973, NTHP began National Historic Preservation Week to recognize the importance and significance of historic resources to local communities. In 2005, the Trust changed the observance to a month-long celebration.

This year's theme of "People Saving Places" is a "national high-five to everyone doing the great work of saving places—in ways big and small—and inspiring others to do the same." Many of those who work to save historic places use their time, energy, and resources to protect the "places they care about, often without recognition" (savingplaces.org).

Historic preservation enhances the quality of life and helps residents to understand each other as well as the diverse heritage of Florida. The local economy also gains from preserving historic sites and properties because they attract those living nearby as well as visitors. With its handsome brick and block buildings, downtown Arcadia draws residents and those from out of town for banking, business, dining, shopping, and more.

John Morgan Ingraham House Museum

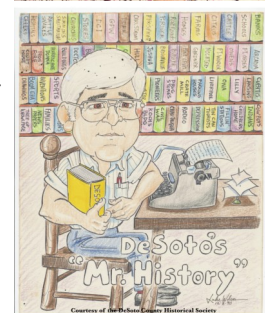
The Society preserved the John Morgan Ingraham House Museum, an example of Florida Cracker vernacular architecture at 300 N. Monroe Ave. in Arcadia. Built in the late 1890s by Robert Early Whidden, the home is designed to be as cool as possible before the advent of air conditioning. The steeply pitched roof allows heat to rise and leave the building through the gable vents, and piers supporting the house promote air circulation beneath it. Doors and windows are built opposite of each other to provide cross-ventilation, and the south porch serves as a hallway plus additional living space.

Donated to the Society in 2002 in honor of Alison Rosemary Pickard Pipkin, the house sustained major damage when the eye of Hurricane Charley, a Category 4 storm, tore through Arcadia in 2004. With the assistance of four grants in four years from the State's Division of Historic Resources and a small grant from the Mosaic Company Foundation, the house was restored. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Arcadia Historic District in 1984.

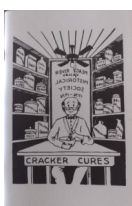
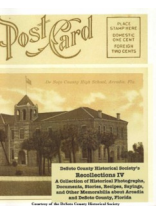
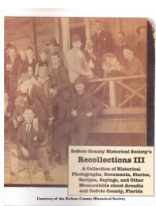
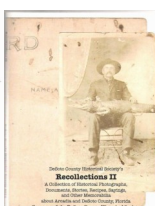
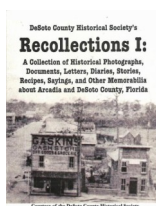
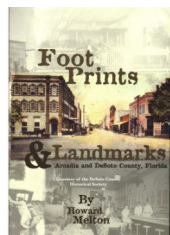
In 2014, the Society opened the Museum as a memorial to all early pioneer families with displays of period furniture and furnishings—some of which belonged to the Ingraham family—as well as information about the history of Arcadia and DeSoto County. The Museum is open from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Thursdays plus the second and fourth Saturdays of the month. The Museum will be closed on Sat., May 25 and during the months of June, July, and August.

The Society also maintains the Howard and Velma Melton Historical Research Library in the Ingraham Seed House at 120 W. Whidden St., a replica of the seed store that Ingraham built in the 1920s adjacent to his home. The library began with the extensive collection of Howard Melton, an amateur historian, and has grown with other donations and acquisitions. Although the Research Library is currently closed to the public, research assistance is available. Please call 863-266-5774 or email desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

During the centennial celebrations for Arcadia and DeSoto County in 1987, the Society was established to preserve and promote the history of DeSoto County for future generations. Annual membership is \$25.00 for an individual and \$40.00 for a family. Donations are always appreciated and welcome. More information is available online at historicdesoto.org.



Charter Member of the Society Luke Wilson pictured Howard Melton as "Mr. History" for his work to preserve the history of Arcadia and DeSoto County.



A version of this article was published in the May 4, 2023, Arcadia Community Local.

For more about how to purchase the publications shown and others see **Books About Local History** on pg. 3.