



DeSoto County Historical Society News

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

www.historicdesoto.org

September 2023

This issue sponsored by - Marguerite & Tom Hankins in memory of
Mr. & Mrs. T.J. Pipkin
(Pip & Alison Pickard Pipkin.)

Savor Some Local History: 3rd Annual Florida Cracker Meal

(A version of this article, written by Carol Mahler, was published in the Sept. 7 *Arcadia Community Local*)

Enjoy some food and fun at the DeSoto County Historical Society's 3rd Annual Florida Cracker Meal at 5:30 p.m. on Sat., Sept. 30, in the Fellowship Hall of Pine Level



Held in the Fellowship Hall of Pine Level Church, the Florida Cracker Meal will also commemorate the congregation's centennial purchase of the Pine Level School to use as their sanctuary.
—Photograph courtesy of Carol Mahler.

Church, 9596 NW Pine Level St. The event is open to the public, and seating is limited. Tickets for the Florida Cracker Meal are \$15.00 for adults, \$8.00 for children 6-12 years, and are available at Crews Bank and Trust, Member FDIC, 2747 S.W. State Road 70; Batter-Up Bakery/Rosé Cafe, 12-14 N. DeSoto Ave.; or online at historicdesoto.org.

The Society first began the Florida Cracker Meal as an evening meeting for those unable to attend the regular monthly meetings held at noon on the third Monday of each month in the McSwain Room in DeSoto Memorial Hospital. The buffet will include traditional Florida Cracker foods such as pork steaks, collards, black-eyed peas, tomato gravy and rice, sweet potatoes, cornmeal muffins with freshly churned butter, guava or peach cobbler, and more.

Can you bake a cake for us?

Please enter the Arcadia Albritton Coker Cake Contest!



Help make our Florida Cracker Meal a success! Please make your favorite cake "from scratch" and use your most traditional recipe or make up something fun. The judge will sample the cakes, and they will be judged on taste and texture. Two winning cakes will be chosen, "best traditional cake" and one that is "most creative cake."

Cakes must be delivered to Pine Level Church - Fellowship Hall, 9695 NW Pine Level Street, by 5 p.m. on Saturday, September 30.

Email or call to let us know you will bake a cake!
To sign up please call: 863-266-5774 or 863-445-0789 or email Carol at desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Related to—but distinct from—Southern cooking, Florida Cracker cuisine dates from when Florida was a frontier and home to the cowman or cowhunter. To drive the herd, he cracked a cow whip over the animals. (The whip was not used on an animal or person.) The "crack" or "pop" of the whip could be heard a mile or more away. Folks started saying, "Listen. Here come the Crackers." That's one of the stories that explains how native-born Floridians were named "Florida Crackers."

Another story relates how Arcadia became the name of a settlement on the eastern shore of Peace River. In 1883, the Rev. James Madison Hendry moved his sawmill to this area. When the settlers applied for a post office, he suggested the name "Arcadia" in gratitude to Arcadia Albritton Coker, who had baked him a birthday cake when he stayed overnight with her family on his journey. In 1886, when the town was incorporated, and in 1901, when the city was incorporated, it was called Arcadia.

In honor of that tradition, those attending the event are invited to enter the Arcadia Albritton Coker Cake Contest by baking their most traditional or most creative "from scratch" cake recipes. Winners will be announced, prizes awarded, and all cakes will be plated and served. To enter the cake contest, please register by calling 863-266-5774 or email at desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

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Amateur Historian Carol Mahler—also a professional storyteller and published author—will present the history and traditions of Florida Cracker foods. Luke Wilson—an



expert on local history—plus a talented musician, writer, and artist—will entertain with food-themed music.

In addition, the Society will commemorate the centennial purchase of the Pine Level School by the Pine Level Church. The school was part of the original Town of Pine Level, established in 1866 as the county seat of Manatee County that comprised the present-day counties of Charlotte, DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Highlands, Manatee, and Sarasota.

Florida Cracker Luke Wilson—a talented artist, writer, musician, and historian—will perform food-themed music at the Historical Society's 3rd Annual Florida Cracker Meal.

Photograph courtesy of Carol Mahler.



Courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society

After a hurricane damaged the second story, the Pine Level School was re-roofed as a one-story sanctuary for Pine Level Church.

Photograph courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society.

In May 1887, DeSoto County was formed from the eastern half of Manatee County—encompassing today's counties of Charlotte, DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, and Highlands. About ten miles inside the new county's boundaries, Pine Level served as county seat until voters selected Arcadia in November 1888.

In 1914, the East and West Coast Railway (E&WCR) was built between Bradenton and Arcadia, roughly paralleling the route of State Road 70. A town platted as New Pine Level was built near the depot and tracks about two miles north of the original Town of Pine Level, so the DeSoto County Board of Public Instruction (today's "School Board") built a new school on N. Florida Ave.—now a private residence. The original school on Pine Level St. was sold to the church. After a hurricane damaged the second story, it was re-roofed as a one-story sanctuary. The history of the church will be on display before and after the meal in the "archives room" in the Fellowship Hall.

Florida Cracker Meal attendees are also invited to donate to the Society's scholarship for a DeSoto County resident graduating from high school. Thank-you gifts and gift cards will be available according to the amount of the donation.



From 1866 until 1887, the 40-acre site of the Town of Pine Level was the county seat of Manatee County, and from 1887 until 1888, of DeSoto County. In 2014, it was listed as one of Florida's seven Reconstruction-era sites in the National Register of Historic Places.

Photograph courtesy of Carol Mahler.

Although cooked collards are a staple of Southern—and Florida Cracker—cuisine, they were grown and eaten by the ancient Greeks and Romans. This and other fun facts about Florida Cracker Foods will be presented by Carol Mahler.



Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

A Message From The President

This newsletter says it all.... We are having a wonderfully productive year including clean up inside and outside plus making the Seed House more user friendly. This work took a lot of volunteer hours and you stepped up. Thank you each and every volunteer.

The need for volunteers isn't over... we have our Florida Cracker Dinner, another clean up day, then Tour of Homes coming up. All will take a lot of helper hours so please do call and come help. It isn't work when we do it together and see such good results.

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New Shelving For Library

We are grateful to Carol Mahler for buying and transporting the new shelving units to the Library, and to her and Nancy "Eric" Erickson for assembling them. We appreciate Carol for painting two 1" x 4" x 8' boards, and to her and Dave Hutchinson for using those boards to anchor the shelving to the wall. We thank Carol for moving half of all the items stacked on the floor of the Library to the new shelves.

Hurricane Shutters Installed For Idalia

We appreciate Jeff Griffis, Dave Hutchinson, and Carol Mahler for installing hurricane shutters on Monday, Aug. 28, in preparation for Hurricane Idalia. They also tied down the panels for the moveable outhouse used at Pioneer Day, took down the rodeo mural sign from the shed and the identification tags from outside the Museum, and made sure all was prepared for a storm.

The Museum and Research Library suffered no damage from the storm, but Jeff and Dave recommended that the shutters be left in place for the month of September, and the Board voted to do so. Thanks to Karen Smoke for making an attractive "post" for Facebook and our Website announcing the closure of the Museum and Library through the end of September.

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.**

History On The Radio

Thanks to Carol Mahler for talking about local history with Mark Anderson, host of "Mark in the Morning" show on Classic Country 104.5 FM, on Thurs. Aug. 17. They are scheduled to talk again at 8:00 a.m. on Thurs., Sept. 14, so tune-in to enjoy the fun.



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Our Sister Society: Lake Wales Historical Society

We are grateful to Carol Mahler and her granddaughter Samantha Yost for delivering three Polk City Directories for Lake Wales (1975, 1976, 1981) to the Historical Lake Wales Society at their History Museum—the old Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Depot, 325 South Scenic Highway in Lake Wales. Although the Museum was closed for renovations, Curator of Collections and Exhibits Anderson “Andy” Hanna accepted the donation. After welcoming Carol and Samantha, he gave them a quick tour of the facility.



Above—The Lake Wales History Museum chronicles the area’s history from Native American occupation through the 20th century, and one exhibit that was completed at the beginning of August featured a historic photograph of the depot—now the home of the Museum.

Photograph courtesy of Carol Mahler.

Left—Although the Lake Wales History Museum is still closed for renovations, Carol Mahler had a sneak preview and suggests that our Society consider visiting The Lake Wales History Museum, 325 South Scenic Highway.

Photograph provided.

Bottom left—The Lake Wales History Museum is located in the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad depot built in Lake Wales in 1928, and the station master’s office offers a display of railroad artifacts.

Photograph courtesy of Carol Mahler.



In 1974, the Lake Wales Bicentennial Commission established the Historical Lake Wales Society, and in 1987, the Society became the governing authority of the Museum with a mission of collecting and preserving local history. The organization evolved from a repository of



collections donated by community members into a community resource center for the public. The Society established an annual heritage festival (“Pioneer Days”) and saved three more historic structures plus three train cars. The Society continued to care for and celebrate the history of Lake Wales.

In 2015, the City of Lake Wales took over the Museum. More than

half of the collection has been inventoried and is stored in off-site facilities. The Museum hosts about 7,500 visitors annually. Curator Hanna looks forward to reopening the Museum, and perhaps members of our Society will enjoy a visit when the Lakes Wales History Museum is open. For more information, lakewaleshistory.org.

MUSEUM AND RESEARCH LIBRARY

CLOSED through SEPTEMBER

The Museum and Research Library are closed for the months of June, July, and August, every summer so that our volunteers may clean and update the exhibits and research space. Since we have our hurricane shutters up, we felt it prudent to remain closed through September. Research assistance and tours will be available by appointment only: please call Carol Mahler at 863-445-0789.

John Morgan Ingraham House Museum
300 N. Monroe Avenue
The Howard and Velma Melton Historical
Research Library in the Ingraham Seed House
120 W. Whidden Street

Successful Work Day on August 26

Thanks to LTC Ron Baynes (U.S. Army retired) for arranging for the JROTC cadets to participate in a work day from 9:00 a.m. to noon on Sat., Aug. 26, at the Museum and Library. We appreciate Sgt. Robert Newell for supervising the following cadets: Alyrika Bailey, Joel Camacho, Nicholas Casteel, Isabella Jablon, Natalye Martinez, Immanuel McKnight, Selina Montes, River Rhodes, and Joy Zhang. We are grateful to the following supervisors and workers: Amber Collins, Nancy "Eric" Erickson, Jeff Griffis, Susan Kuczenska, Carol Mahler, Pam Miller, Chelsea Palmer, Stella Parker, and Linda Reesor—plus Kathy Bryce for being the "home base" in the Library. We thank Jeff, Carol, and Pam for bringing tools from home, and to Kathy, Jeff, Elizabeth Kenney, and Carol for preparing the Museum and grounds on Thursday and Friday.



The cadets and supervisors cleaned the Museum from top to bottom, whisking away spiders and webs, dusting and cleaning surfaces and artifacts, and vacuuming the floors under the supervision of Amber, Eric, Pam, Stella, and Linda. Chelsea and Susan—with plenty of shovel work from Sgt. Newell—



helped to weed the flowers beds, and the cadets carried all the weeds to the curb.

Jeff trimmed the mango, ear pod, and oak trees, and the cadets carried all the branches to the curb and made sure they were stacked in four-foot lengths for pick up. Jeff also supervised the pressure



washing of the north side of the Museum and the chemical cleaning of north and west walls of the Research Library. Eric fetched chains and s-hooks from the hardware store so that the rodeo mural could be rehung. Carol kept everyone on task and helped out when she wasn't finding the tools or supplies as needed.



CLICK THE BUTTON

Not all of the work was finished, so we have a scheduled another work day for **Sat., Sept. 16.** If you are able to supervise, please call or email Carol at 863-445-0789 or desotocountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

Photo captions—counterclockwise from above left—

Thanks to Sgt. Robert Newell, at left, for working with and supervising the JROTC cadets: seated, from left, Natalye Martinez, Selina Montes, Joel Camacho, Alyrika Bailey and Isabella Jablon; standing, from left, River Rhodes, Nick Casteel, Immanuel McKnight, and Joy Zhang.

Alyrika Bailey, River Rhodes, and Chelsea Palmer weed the flower bed between the Museum and Library while Chelsea's son Auren watches from the stroller.

Thanks to Jeff Griffis for keeping the lawn at the Museum and Library mowed!

City Council Member Amber Collins helped with cleaning the Museum.

—Photos by Carol Mahler.





**Holiday Tour of
Historic Homes and Buildings**
Saturday, December 9, 2023
4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Please join us for this tour of local Historic Homes and Buildings decorated for the holidays! The locations are kept secret until the night of the tour; you are sure to enjoy this wonderful and festive exploration of some of Arcadia's historic treasures, with knowledgeable docents at each stop. This year the tour will begin and end at the Family Service Center, 310 W Whidden Street. You will board a bus and be able to get on and off at the various stops, as the buses will circulate around the tour loop.

Tour tickets are \$15.00 each, and will go on sale at our member meeting on Monday, November 20, at noon in the McSwain Room of DeSoto Memorial Hospital. Tickets will also be available through our website, at the museum, and several locations about town, TBA.

For more information see: www.historicdesoto.org
Or call: 863-266-5774 or 863-445-0789

Thank you to our wonderful volunteers!

Clockwise from top left—

Part of the crew who cleaned the Museum, Natalye Martinez, left, and Selina Montes worked to clean items on the south porch.

At left, Joel Camacho, Nancy “Eric” Erickson, and Joy Zhang stand with the rodeo mural sign they re-hung—with help from Carol Mahler—on the side of the shed.

The JROTC cadets stand in front of the extensive pile of vegetative debris that they neatly stacked at the curb for pick-up: from left, Immanuel McKnight, River Rhodes, Nick Casteel, Natalye Martinez, Alyrika Bailey, Selina Montes, Joy Zhang, and Isabella Jablon.

From left, River Rhodes, Susan Kuczenska, Sgt. Robert Newel, and Joe Camacho weed the garden in front of the Library.

—Photos provided by Carol Mahler.