



The Historical Quarterly of The St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.

Vol. 38 No. 1

Winter 2020

Pete Peterson and Jack Favorite served historical society through decades of growth and change

The St. Lucie Historical Society has lost two of our longest-serving and most admired members. **Jack Walter Favorite** died Sept. 17, less than three weeks short of his 77th birthday. **Osmond C. "Pete" Peterson** died Oct. 26, at age 100. Their passing brings an end to decades of loyal service by both of them.

Pete Peterson, a Wisconsin native, arrived in Fort Pierce in the mid-1940s, fresh from wartime service in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Jack Favorite arrived at roughly the same time, as a child brought here by his parents from their former home in Maryland. Thus they lived through a time of massive changes for St. Lucie County, the Treasure Coast and the entire state. Both were productive residents of our communities,



O.C. Peterson

Destructive blaze in old Fort Pierce displaced settlers

During his career with the St. Lucie County Fire District, our late friend Jack Favorite did research on historic local fires. He found a newspaper article published in February 1844 from a correspondent named simply "Mr. Grouard" who apparently saw the fire that devastated the original Fort Pierce in December 1843. By that time, the Army no longer occupied the fort. Its buildings evidently became temporary shelters for newly arrived settlers, supervised by a man named Weedon. Here, in condensed form, is the result of Jack's research.

active in civic life, and loyal friends of many who now mourn their passing.

Jack Favorite spent his career as a St. Lucie County firefighter and department chaplain, often facing danger to protect local residents' lives and property. Pete Peterson was a construction man, and his business was to create many local homes and commercial structures.

Both men were indeed fortunate to have devoted wives whose own accomplishments are well known, and reflected their own keen interest in local history. The late **Olive Dame Forkner Peterson** was, with her husband, among the founders of the St. Lucie Historical Society, served as a board member and president, was



J.W. Favorite

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By Jack Favorite

It was unusually cool on that 12th day of December [and] the winter felt as if it might set in a bit early. ... The wind steadily increased from the northwest, making the early cold spell feel even colder. ... No clouds in the sky meant another day without rain to add to the drought that seemed to have lasted so long. ... Buildings and homes in the settlement at the time were constructed of very flimsy materials [and] the roofs and sides were made from heavily overlapping palmetto fronds which were tinder dry. ...

The following article is from *The East Florida*

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Welcome - New Members

Sue Favorite, Membership Chairman

Vicki & Joseph Redman, Debra Farmer, Justin Beard,
Ken & Judy Roberts, Ginger Shoun,
Lindsey & Scott Crippen, Tyler Modlen and Kristi Cardona,
Ryan & Olga Murray, William & Fran Slat

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Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of The St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc., P O Box 578, Fort Pierce, Fl. 34954, Telephone (772) 461-8020, stluciehistoricalsociety.net

The President's Message

by Nancy Bennett

The year just ended has been a very productive year for our historical society. We continued to make gains in membership, our financial position is stable and secure, and our dinner meeting speakers have been consistently interesting and informative.

As always, we appreciate the dedication of our volunteers – those who help at the museum and those who staff our special-event participation. Special thanks go to the ones who seem always to be “on call” when school classes and other tour groups visit the museum and we need extra help. They include **John Honea, Fred Ebner and Richard Coffman**. Also at the museum, **Sophia Ebner** has done wonderful work organizing our collection of books and other historical materials. She is now training **Marianne Coffman** for this vital activity. **Ernie Merrill and Rick Modine** have done a great job selling our surplus books.

In mid-January, look for us on Second Street in downtown Fort Pierce for the annual history festival organized by Indian River Magazine. Our historical society will be a co-sponsor and active participant again this year.

Despite recent rumors, county officials assure us there is no plan to suddenly relocate the Regional History Center from its site on Seaway Drive. Several of us met recently with County Administrator **Howard Tipton**, who said any plans for the museum's future must await a decision on moving the waste treatment plant (see elsewhere in this issue for more details).

We look forward to another fine year. Thanks in advance to all of you for your help in 2020. Δ

Bulletin Boosters

Help support production of a lively and useful SLHS Historical Quarterly. A \$10 donation will add your name to the Bulletin Boosters roster for a full year of Quarterly editions. Give your \$10 donations to Treasurer **Bob Burdge**. Many thanks! Names of current Bulletin Boosters are listed below (with expiration month).

Harold & Mae Holtsberg	10/20	Charlene & Rupert Koblegard III	7/20	J. Michael Brennan	4/21
Cynthia Putnam	10/22	Sally Frey	1/21	Jim Turner, Apple Machine	4/20
Ed & Jackie Fischer	10/20	Lelaine B. Rice	1/21	Buck & Mary Ann Bryan	4/20
Lynn Williams Novel	10/20	Robert W. Summerhays	7/20	Grace Ann Scott	1/21
Betty Hutchinson	10/20	Mr. & Mrs. Robert Essay	7/30	William & Fran Slat	1/21
Bonnie Reynolds	10/20	Deborah & Stephen Billis	4/21	Ernie & Judy Merrill	1/21
Jan Zahrly	10/20	Joyce Moody-McGraw	4/21	Bob Burdge	1/21
Paul & Joann Berg	10/20	Jack & Sue Favorite	4/21	Robyn Hutchinson	1/21
Ella & Jonathan Pruitt	10/20	Margaret Lloyd	4/20	Richard & Marianne Coffman	1/21
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James Hatfield	7/20	Simone D'Addario	4/20		
Michelle Franklin	7/21	Ron & Maggie Waites	4/20		

DESTRUCTIVE BLAZE... continued from page 1



Old Fort Pierce, as depicted in museum diorama

Newspaper in St. Augustine, Feb. 10, 1844. The headline read in large print, "DESTRUCTION OF FORT PIERCE."

A melancholy event has lately prostrated the bright hopes and beautiful prospects of many of the settlers... . A fire has destroyed the buildings at Fort Pierce, and with them the supplies of every description laid in by the settlers sufficient for the consumption of several years.

On the 12th December about 12 o'clock we were awakened by the appalling cry of "Fire!" It was first discovered in a kitchen on the premises and before anything could be done ... two buildings were completely ablaze. The buildings were roofed with cabbage palmetto leaves as dry as it was possible for them to be, and the wind blowing from the northwest swept the blaze from building to building...

Dr. Weedon, the aged proprietor of the place ... might have saved more than the others. He occupied rooms north of the kitchen, which did not catch as soon as the others. But his noble and generous solicitude for the safety of those who were unable to help themselves lost to him all his house contained. He discovered that ... everyone had escaped from the buildings except an infant child... .The venerable

doctor rushed into the burning house in search of the infant, but some other hand had snatched the slumbering babe from the impending danger... .

He was next seen bearing a keg of powder from one of the buildings ... and running til out of danger, and then hastening back to snatch away some articles of clothing, etc. of **Mr. Walker's**, a sick gentleman who was then absent and very low with consumption. ...

The sufferers are **Dr. Weedon**; **Dr. Wightman**, his son-in-law; **M. Walker**, the sick gentleman; **William H. Farrar, Esq.**; and **Ossian B. Hart** [a future Florida governor] who had just arrived at Fort Pierce with their families from Jacksonville. **Capt. Campfield** is doubly a sufferer. He lost everything he had at Fort Pierce and subsequently lost what provisions and other articles he had ... by the upsetting of his boat.

Fort Pierce ever since its abandonment by the U.S. troops has been a general stopping place for everyone who traveled through that region of country, and as a favorite resort for all who had relocated on St. Lucie and Indian River. Its hospitable proprietor Dr. Weedon always extended the welcome hand to the wayworn and the needy, whoever found a welcome to his table and a shelter from the howling storm." Δ

Society continues its surplus book clearance

The historical society will continue to sell "A Portrait of St. Lucie County" by **Lucille Rights** to members for only \$5! We also have for sale "A Pictorial History of St. Lucie County" by **Kyle Van Landingham** for only

\$2! These books are available at the dinner meetings on a limited basis, and at the history center Tuesday through Saturday. We appreciate your help in moving these books! Δ

Existing museum could be in place for another decade

A St. Lucie Historical Society delegation met with St. Lucie County Administrator Howard Tipton on Nov. 18, at his request, in light of recent rumors about the county museum's future. Tipton assured the SLHS group the county does not plan to move the Regional History Center any time soon. He said the museum could operate at its present location on Seaway Drive, "potentially for another ten years."

The SLHS was represented at the meeting by President **Nancy Bennett**, plus **Ben "Buck" Bryan**, **Bob Lloyd**, **Mose Sanders**, **Bob Davis** and **Ted Burrows**. Tipton was joined by County Facilities Director **Daniel P. Retherford** and several other staff members.

Rumors had begun spreading after memos circulated among county and Fort Pierce officials, indicating a willingness to discuss eventual relocation of the museum and the county aquarium. However Tipton explained that everything depends, first, on relocation of the city's waste treatment plant off the island to an inland site.

He stated, "There have been no decisions or recommendations made ... regarding the relocation of anything."

An engineering study due for completion by April should help determine whether, and where, a new waste treatment plant could be built. After that, Tipton said county and city officials would hold public discussions. If the existing plant is moved elsewhere, the island site could become available for tourism-related uses such as a resort hotel. He estimated all this could take five to eight years. Only after that, he indicated, might there be consideration of moving the museum and aquarium.

There is no plan to sell the strip of county-owned land along the inlet where the museum, aquarium and public parks are located, Tipton added, and there are restrictions barring such future uses as private homes or condominium units. Δ

Stock of donated books available at bargain prices

Recently our historical society acquired a quantity of books, donated for our use or resale. They include high-quality books of photographs (in hard-cover, coffee-table display size) by award-winning photojournalist **Jon Kral**, whose work for many years appeared regularly in the *Miami Herald* and other publications.

FAVORITE/PETERSON... continued from page 1

a published author, and also was president of the Florida Historical Society. **Carolyn Sue Osborne Favorite** has been a longtime member of the SLHS board of directors, and continues to serve as the society's membership chairperson.

Pete Peterson has given much to the society and until very recently remained an active presence as a museum volunteer and at the monthly dinner meetings. Jack Favorite served diligently on the board of directors and as the society's chaplain until declining health curtailed his activities. Both men published their own autobiographies. Peterson's is *"My Dipper is Full"*. Favorite's is *"Random Thoughts of a Rambling Mind."*

The total value of their contributions to our historical society over many years cannot be fully calculated. Both men gave unstintingly of their time, energy, expertise and guidance. We all are grateful for their service. Δ

Adams photo exhibit sets winter season schedule

The Bud Adams Gallery of Vintage Photographs, upstairs in the historic P.P. Cobb building in downtown Fort Pierce, again welcomes visitors during the winter season. On display are numerous photos, maps and other depictions of life along the Indian River Lagoon through the centuries.

The gallery is open on Fridays and Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Admission is free. Knowledgeable volunteers, including **Jean Ellen Wilson**, **Jim Moses** and others, are available to show visitors around and answer questions.

The gallery is named for the late **Alto "Bud" Adams Jr.**, whose family generously provided the exhibit space and other resources. Δ

"Cracker: Florida's Enduring Cowboys" and *"Hotbloods"* (on thoroughbred horses) are two of the Kral titles available at the museum for \$5 each.

Also donated were various works of fiction, in hard cover or quality paperback. They too are available at the museum for modest prices. Δ

Florida governor's son was gunslinger and lawman in Old West

By Ted Burrow

A little-known aspect of Florida's history involves the state's fifth governor, John Milton and his restless and daring son, Jeff Davis Milton, who roamed the American west as a gunslinging cowboy and lawman in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Gov. Milton's family took a roundabout path to Florida. Their most prominent ancestor was the great English poet John Milton, who lived in the 1600s. His epic poem "Paradise Lost" remains a classic. One of his descendants left England for America around 1730 and settled in North Carolina. The future governor was born in Georgia, and lived in Alabama and Louisiana practicing law before settling in northern Florida, near Marianna. He became active in politics and was elected governor in 1860 on the eve of the Civil War. As an ardent states' rights devotee, Gov. Milton strongly backed the Confederate cause and, distraught at the South's defeat, fatally shot himself in April 1865.

The son, Jeff Davis Milton, was born Nov. 7, 1861, the youngest of the governor's 10 children. The boy was named, of course, after Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Young Jeff's life story was recounted colorfully by a Texas historical researcher, J. Evetts Haley, in his book "Jeff Milton: A Good Man With a Gun," published in 1948 by the University of Oklahoma Press.

Jeff Davis Milton reportedly was a smart, restless boy, at home in the outdoors and an expert marksman. At age 16 he left Florida seeking adventures in Texas. He found work as a cowboy at \$15 a month. In 1880,



Jeff Davis Milton, age 26

just 18 but claiming to be 21, he went to Austin and joined the Texas Rangers. Milton and his comrades patrolled the wild Big Bend country along the Rio Grande. In 1881, after fatally shooting a man who was trying to kill him, Milton and two other Rangers escaped an angry mob and were later tried for murder but acquitted.

After leaving the Rangers, Jeff Davis Milton roamed the Southwest as a cattleman and lawman. He was well-known for his marksmanship with pistol or rifle. While police chief of El Paso in 1894, Milton faced down notorious outlaw John Wesley Hardin and several of his men, disarming them according to a town ordinance against

wearing firearms on the street.

Eventually, Milton became a customs enforcement agent, chasing smugglers along the border in southern Arizona. In 1919 he married schoolteacher Mildred Tait and they settled in Tucson. Then came Milton's strangest adventure. Summoned to Washington, D.C., he was assigned to escort communist radical Emma Goldman and some companions being deported to Russia. He bought a new pistol and 200 rounds of ammunition, expecting trouble. On returning home, Milton expressed disappointment, saying, "I hoped to kill some [Russian communists] and never got a chance."

Milton retired and remained in Tucson, his tempestuous ways gradually tamed by his gentle wife. He died there on May 7, 1947 at age 85. Δ

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Please join us in preserving our local heritage for future generations.

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Names and ages of minor children:

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Home Telephone _____

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Email _____

I/We wish to join the Society at the level indicated below.
Membership is from September through August.

New Renewal Individual (\$20.00)

Family (\$25.00) Business (\$50.00)

Please make checks payable to:

St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc
P O Box 578

Fort Pierce, Florida 34954-0578

For Information telephone: (772) 461-8020

General Meeting are held at:

The Elks Lodge

635 South 5th Street

Fort Pierce, Florida 34950

Society General Meetings are held on the 3rd Thursday of the month, from September through May. A meal is provided before the meeting at the price of \$12.00 per person. Reservations must be made for these meals no later than two days in advance of the meeting. To make reservations telephone (772) 461-8020 and leave a message. Reservations and your RSVP information by e-mail to: dinner@stluciehistoricalsociety.net. Dinner begins at 5:30 P.M. and the General Meeting Starts at 6:00 P.M.

Volunteers are Needed

If you have 3 1/2 hours that you can give once a week either in the morning or afternoon, please consider volunteering at the Museum.

Admission, to the museum, for St. Lucie Historical Society members is FREE. So come and take a tour.

The latest exhibit is St Lucie Families-Crafters of Local History.

The Pineapple Patch Gift Shop has a large selection of books of Florida historical value, cards, handmade Seminole Indian dolls, and baubles made by volunteers.

Museum Hours:

Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.