

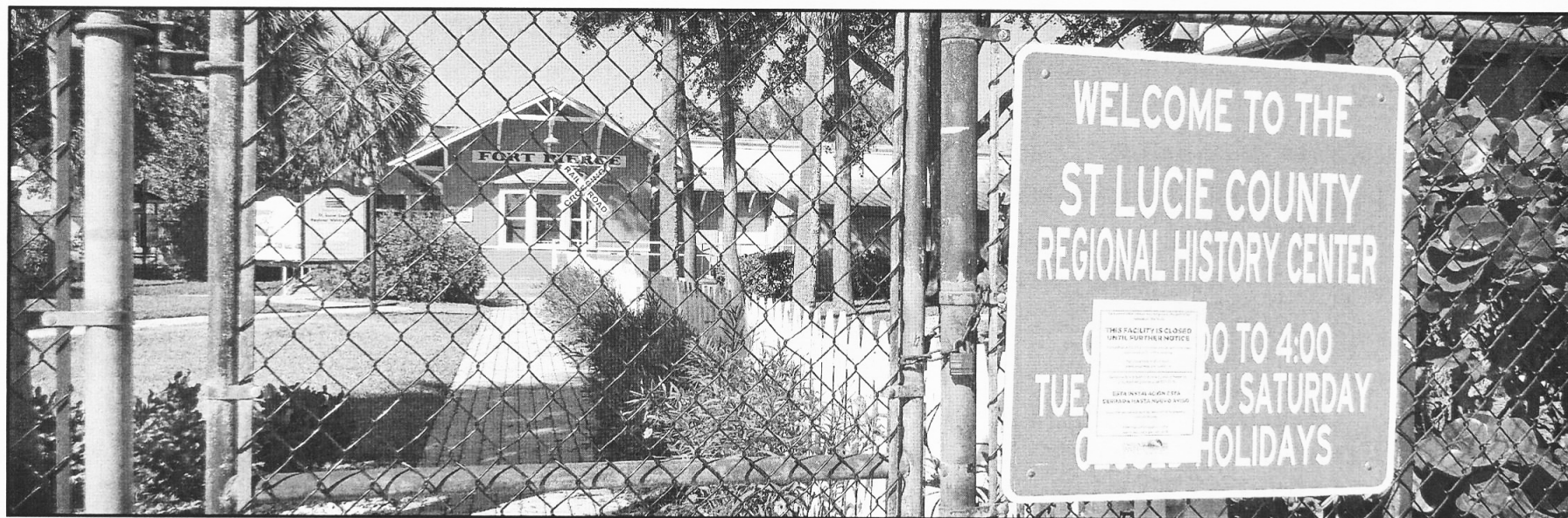


# The Historical Quarterly

of The St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.

Vol. 38 No. 3

Summer 2020



*The St. Lucie County Regional History Center stands empty and padlocked during three months of local quarantine.*

## COVID-19: a disaster of historic scope for this area

*Pandemic: A widespread outbreak of disease affecting people in a regional, national or international setting.*

In the future, 2020 surely will be known as the year of the great coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. Historians, medical experts, social scientists, economists and political thinkers will measure this year's phenomenon against such calamities as the worldwide 1918-19 influenza outbreak, and even the bubonic plague of the 14th Century.

COVID-19 originated in China and thus far has killed hundreds of thousands worldwide, with more to come. Here along Florida's Treasure Coast daily life remained more or less normal until the disease began taking an alarming toll of severe sickness and death in early March. Because the virus is highly contagious and easily passed from person to person, health officials warned against all kinds of public gatherings.

Such terms as "social distancing," "self-quarantine" and "safer at home" were added to our vocabularies. Protective face masks became standard attire. We were advised to stay at least six feet apart from others -- no more handshakes, hugs, high-fives, fist-bumps or other close-up gestures of greeting.

This soon put an end to most of our tourist season activities. By mid-March most restaurants, bars and retail stores were closed. So were museums, movie houses and public beaches. Banks and government offices curtailed lobby services. Fort

Pierce's popular downtown Saturday farmers' market was discontinued, as well as the monthly Fridayfest. The famed Sunrise Theatre sat empty. Baseball spring training was curtailed and the main season postponed. Streets, including main traffic arteries, were almost deserted.

Public and private schools, plus Indian River State College, all were closed. Faculty and students continued their studies by computer for the rest of the spring term. Even most houses of worship discontinued in-person gatherings (hindering such significant observances as Easter, Passover and Ramadan). Some conducted "virtual" worship events via computer instead.

For our St. Lucie Historical Society it meant an end to a busy season of activities. Dinner meetings in March, April and May were canceled. With the county's museum closed there was no need for SLHS volunteers.



## Welcome - New Members

Sue Favorite, Membership Chairman

Tasha Lewis

The Society is a Florida Corporation exempt from federal income tax under section 501(a) of the Internal Revenue Code as an organization described in Section 501(c)(3). The Society is also classified as a public charity under 509(a)(2).

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**Editor:** Ted Burrows  
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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 past four-month period has been a time of great distress and disruption for all of us in the St. Lucie Historical Society. We hope all of you and your families are healthy and safe as we continue to cope with this year's coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic.

SLHS activities were discontinued in March, as were most other local activities on the Treasure Coast. Our remaining dinner meetings for the season were cancelled. The last meeting of the SLHS board of directors was March 9. Since then any necessary business has been done by computer and telephone. We hope to resume in-person board meetings by August.

The St. Lucie County Regional History Center reopened for visitors on June 4, with additional health precautions in effect. We're grateful to all volunteers who have come back to the museum and their help is much appreciated. At the same time we understand the reluctance of those members who prefer to stay away a bit longer due to health concerns.

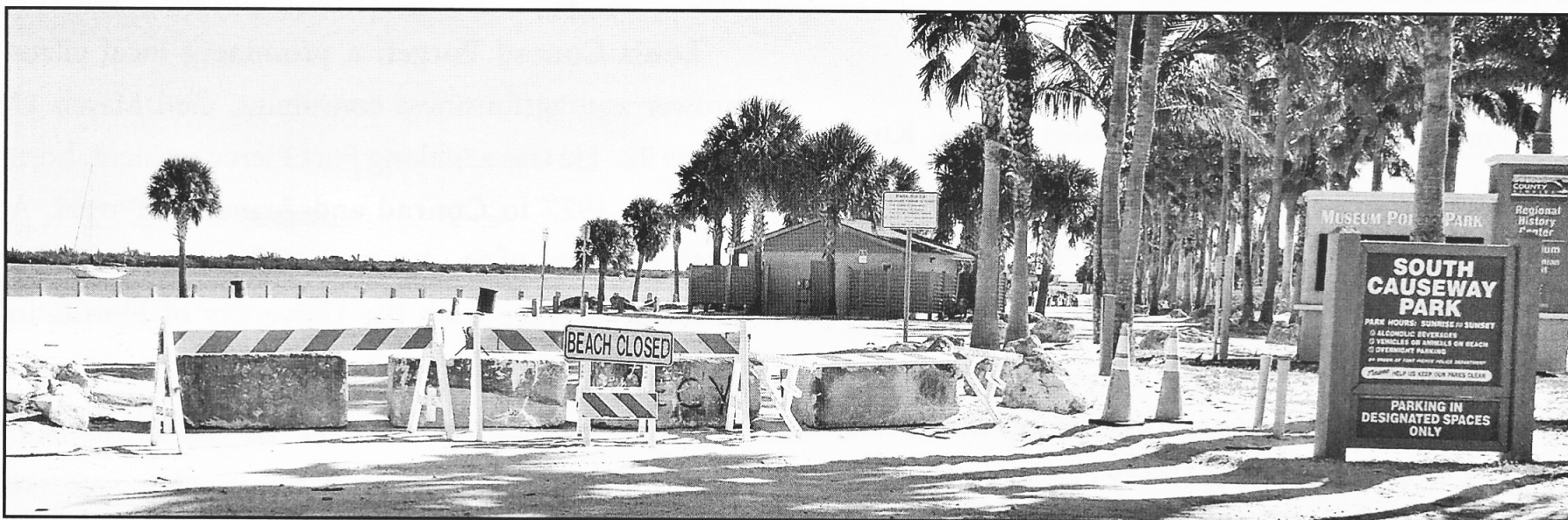
We hope to resume our dinner meetings in September, with guest speakers as usual, but nothing is certain. So much depends on local conditions at that time. Until then, please stay healthy and safe.

## Bulletin Boosters

Help support 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. Please give your \$10 donation to Treasurer Bob Burdge. Many thanks. Names of current bulletin Boosters are listed below (with expiration month and year).

Harold & Mae Holtsberg	10/20	Sally Frey	1/21	Richard & Marianne Coffman	1/21
Cynthia Putnam	10/22	Lelaine B. Rice	1/21	Bob Davis	1/21
Ed & Jackie Fischer	10/20	Robert W. Summerhays	7/20	Ted Burrows	1/21
Lynn Williams Novel	10/20	Mr. & Mrs. Robert J. Essay	7/31	Richard & Nancy Sheets	4/21
Betty Hutchinson	10/20	Deborah & Stephen Billis	4/21	Linda Chastain	4/21
Bonnie Reynolds	10/20	Joyce Moody-McGraw	4/21	Pommie Hardie	4/21
Jan Zahrly	10/20	Jack & Sue Favorite	4/21	Craig & Pat Brewer	4/21
Paul & Joann Berg	10/20	Jerry & Carolyn McNeil	4/21	Holly Theuns	4/21
Ella & Jonathan Pruitt	10/20	Beverly L. Traub	4/21	James Midelis	4/21
Gail Hope-Henchel	7/20	J. Michael Brennan	4/21	Noah & Bonnie Ludlum	4/21
Tish Taylor Chapman	7/20	Grace Ann Scott	1/21	Victoria Bush	4/21
James Hatfield	7/20	William & Fran Slat	1/21	Ann Procino Healy	4/21
Michelle Franklin	7/21	Ernie & Judy Merrill	1/21	Terri Sisson	7/21
Charlene & Rupert		Bob Burdge	1/21	Elizabeth Trachtman	7/21
Koblegard III	7/20	Robyn Hutchinson	1/21	Beth Stafford	7/21

COVID-19... continued from page 1



Public beach along the Fort Pierce Inlet was closed due to COVID-19 virus concerns, but reopened in June.

Along the Treasure Coast, as elsewhere, there was an outpouring of gratitude toward health care workers, police and fire-rescue professionals who risked their own health while responding to emergencies. Postal workers and delivery drivers also stayed on the job.

Fortunately, workers also stayed on the job at many grocery stores and pharmacies (classified as essential facilities), though shortages quickly developed in such items as toilet paper, bottled water, bread and disinfectants. Amid so many closures, thousands of local residents lost their jobs. Some businesses (particularly small family-owned ones) will never return.

Most local families remained homebound through March, April and May, going out only as absolutely necessary. Lately things have begun to re-open, though many residents are still being very careful to avoid crowds. For glimpses at how local families have been coping with the COVID-19 outbreak, here are some observances by St. Lucie Historical Society members.

**Deborah Billis:** “Though these are extremely trying times for many, [husband] **Steve** and I are staying very busy with projects working on our house and yard. Except for not gathering with friends, sticking close to home hasn’t affected us very much. Our outings have been simplified to going out only for necessities. I’m enjoying having the quiet time to reconnect with nature’s beauty and do more reading. ... We’re all being very careful to do our part to curb the spread of this virus.”

**Bob Burdge:** “All of my city [of Fort Pierce]

boards on which I serve have not met for the past two months. The clubs which have monthly meetings have been suspended. I now shop for food only once a week and do it in the evening when there are fewer people in the store. I find fewer cars on the street when I travel.”

**Sue Favorite:** “The worst thing is my son and I have not been able to attend a church service. Live streaming is not the same. The good thing is my son comes down to eat brunch with me every Sunday. What are people doing with all that toilet paper? I have not seen it in any store in over two months. Fortunately I had plenty on hand. I miss volunteering at the museum, going to board meetings and our dinner meetings – wonder when they can all take place again. ... I am cooking more than I have in over six months. ... I have painted bathroom cabinets, the patio and flower pots. I have cleaned out more closets and drawers than I even knew I had. ... My son adopted a puppy during this whole mess and, guess what he named it? He named it COVID. I love my son! He makes me laugh.”

**Norma McGuire:** “Oh, how my life has changed! My active life came to a standstill. My children and daughter-in-law have been doing my grocery shopping – I make a list and text it to them. We are trying to support local restaurants with take-out orders. My line dance classes at Riverwalk were canceled. ... **Tommy Bailey** and I are walking the trails from Paleo Hammock, Teague Hammock, Oxbow, Sweetwater and others several times a week.

... continued on page 5

## Remembrances

### Allan King

Longtime SLHS member **Robert Allan King** died on March 31 at age 79. A devoted local history enthusiast, Allan worked for many years at the St. Lucie County Regional History Center. One of the museum's most familiar publicity photos shows Allan, dressed in an old-time railway stationmaster uniform, outside the museum's entrance, which was designed to replicate one of Henry Flagler's passenger depots.

He was born Aug. 3, 1940 in Fort Pierce, the son of **J. Elvin King** and **Ruby Helen Braswell King**. Talented in music and the visual arts, Allan was a graduate of Florida Atlantic University and also studied at Stetson University and the University of South Florida. In recent years he was a resident of Sandersville, Ga.

### Herman Summerlin Sr.

A man whose family is famous in this area's marine industries, **Herman Roy Summerlin Sr.** died March 20 at age 81. He was a third-generation St. Lucie County resident and a member of a large and active family, several of whom have been members of the historical society.

He was born May 4, 1938 to **Richard Robert Summerlin Sr.** and **Claudia Ramsey Summerlin**. After attending local public schools, he spent most of his adult life in commercial fishing, operating a seafood market, and in marine construction. His civic interests included the Conservation Alliance, Marine Industries Association and Organized Fishermen of Florida, among others. He and his family often hosted fish-fry fundraisers to benefit local organizations and to help those in need.

Memorial donations to the historical society in his honor have been made by **Margaret Summerlin** and **Maxwell C. King**.

### Louis Forget

**Louis Conrad Forget**, a prominent local citrus grower and agribusiness consultant, died March 17 at age 92. He was a lifelong Fort Pierce resident, born Nov. 19, 1927 to **Conrad** and **Armande Forget**. A 1945 graduate of St. Anastasia School, he earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Florida in 1949.

While developing a career in the citrus and fertilizer business, he also remained a reserve military officer. He commanded the Army National Guard unit in Fort Pierce for 12 years and retired from the Army Reserve as a major in 1970. He was a longtime member of the historical society. His other civic interests included the St. Lucie County Farm Bureau, Indian River Citrus League and Knights of Columbus.

### Bert Bittan Jr.

A distinguished local attorney, **Benjamin Albert "Bert" Bittan Jr.** died April 19 in Vero Beach at age 91. He was born Sept. 26, 1928 to **Benjamin Albert Bittan Sr.** and **Ruth Snyder Bittan**. He came to Florida from New Jersey as a child when his parents moved the family, first to Stuart, then to Fort Pierce where he spent most of his life.

Bert Bittan was a 1946 graduate of Fort Pierce High School and attended the University of Florida where he earned a law degree in 1950. He also served in the U.S. Army Reserve.

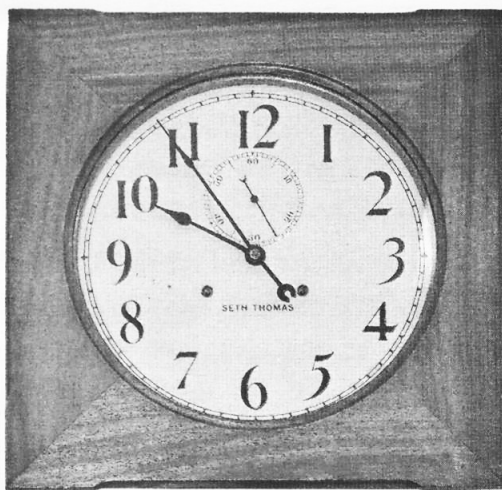
During his long career, he devoted himself to more civic betterment projects and organizations than can be briefly tallied. Bert also was a collector of rare stamps, coins and antique bottles. He was a supporter of the St. Lucie Historical Society and donated much of his antique bottle collection for display in our museum.

*COVID-19... continued from page 3*

Our church, Midway Baptist Church, canceled services. ... We will be glad when we can get back to our 'new normal'."

**Terry Howard:** "We've lived in St. Lucie Village since 1976. Our neighbors are our friends. ... Most people in the village seem to be taking it seriously. People have been outside more than usual – riding bicycles, walking, running. ... Some wear masks. Everyone respects each other's space. ... Much of the population is over 65 and as one elderly neighbor pointed out, 'If we catch the virus it will be a death sentence for us.' For my wife and me the most difficult aspect about isolating has been not being able to hug our kids and grandchildren. Not being able to travel, dine out, and missing volunteer time at the museum are some other aggravations. ... All in all, the isolation has been a bearable nuisance for us and most of our friends in the village."

## Old clock runs like new



The century-old Seth Thomas clock that hangs above our museum's check-in desk has recently undergone its periodic check-up, cleaning and adjustment, and is back in its usual spot.

Master craftsman **Mel Liebman**, of The Clock Shop, in Fort Pierce's Arcade Building, 101 N. U.S. 1, Suite #123, did the work at no cost to the Historical Society. The antique timepiece dates from the early 20th century, he said, although its exact date of manufacture is uncertain. The clock requires occasional servicing by an expert to keep it operating properly.

We appreciate Mel Liebman's generosity and expertise.

**Katy Purcell:** "We led a very quiet life, really – followed the rules and stayed home. I became a 'teacher' to my granddaughter who successfully completed second grade. We painted rocks, pine cones, cardboard, canvas – you name it; we planted flowers and seeds, re-potted some others; we sewed Barbie clothes by hand; created a few dance moves; built forts and did a whole lot of coloring. So glad to start to return to our new 'normal'."

As of June 22, the latest local COVID-19 statistics were: 1,214 confirmed cases and 41 deaths in St. Lucie County; 389 cases, 15 deaths in Indian River County; 1,525 cases, 20 deaths in Martin County. The statewide total of cases was close to 100,000 and rising. Floridians are still being urged to wear masks when out in public. How long it may take for COVID-19 to run its course is unclear. Some health experts warn of a potential resurgence a few months from now.

This is a historic event unlike anything most of us have seen in our lifetimes. This pandemic is likely to shape our future in ways we cannot yet imagine. Δ

## Florida Facts

The freighter MV Summit Venture collided with a pier supporting southbound lanes of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge spanning Tampa Bay on May 9, 1980. The collision occurred at 7:33 a.m. during a blinding rainstorm, causing a 1,200-foot section of the bridge to fall into the bay. Unfortunately, 35 people were killed as a result of the accident. A new bridge was opened in 1987. (Florida Historical Society)

**Florida Fact:** On May 3, 1901 a boiler explosion at a candle factory in Jacksonville spread to a nearby mattress factory. The fire was initially underestimated and within hours it had spread across the city, resulting in one of the worst disasters in Florida history. Known as the "Great Fire of 1901," the blaze destroyed over 2,000 buildings and left 10,000 people homeless in the span of about eight hours. Some reports claimed that the flames could be seen from as far north as Savannah. Amazingly, only seven deaths were reported at the time, although actual deaths were probably much higher, as many people were forced to jump into the St. Johns River to escape the conflagration. (Florida Historical Society)

St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.  
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**Membership Application**

**St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.**

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Names and ages of minor children:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Business Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Cell \_\_\_\_\_

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 5<sup>th</sup> Street**

**Fort Pierce, Florida 34950**

Society General Meetings are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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](mailto: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.