



The Historical Quarterly

of The St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.

Vol. 39 No. 1

Winter 2021



"The St. Lucie County exhibit of citrus fruit at the South Florida Fair Feb. 2-13, 1926, and which won the Grand Prize for the 8th consecutive year, probably the most beautiful display of citrus fruit ever shown in the world."—*The Citrus Industry*, Feb., 1926.

St. Lucie County's citrus fruit exhibit won the grand prize – for the eighth straight year – at the South Florida Fair, February 1926. Large version of this photo is on display at the museum.

Historic freezes caused havoc and changed Florida's agriculture

by Ted Burrows

A mass of bitter arctic air advanced through the Florida panhandle and down the peninsula. First, a line of slate-gray clouds brought stinging rain and even snow. Then came the killing cold. Snow fell as far south as Tampa, and lingered on the ground for three days in Tallahassee. Winter's icy breath swept across the central Florida hills and probed southward across Lake Okeechobee.

For decades afterward, Floridians would recall this simply as the "Great Freeze." Actually, it came as two separate cold waves, nature's savage one-two punch in the winter of 1894-95. It altered life in Florida radically and permanently.

During the three decades following the Civil War, Florida had attracted thousands of new settlers, many of whom began cultivating citrus fruit for an expanding northern market. One agricultural journal at the time said a hard worker could earn "the income of a nabob" from a 160-acre grove.

Most new groves were in the northern and central regions (southern Florida still was very sparsely

populated). Well-tended rows of citrus sprouted between Gainesville and St. Augustine, and as far upstate as the outskirts of Jacksonville. Hopes were high as the trees matured. Prosperity was on the way.

The Great Freeze changed everything.

On Dec. 29, 1894 temperatures fell to 14 degrees, ruining unharvested fruit and killing many young trees. But the new year brought better weather, an unusually warm and rainy January. Undamaged trees began sprouting new branches earlier than normal.

Then the second freeze hit. Trees full of rising sap and new growth began cracking as the mercury plummeted to 11 degrees on Feb. 7, 1895. The next two days were just as frigid. Families worked to exhaustion, feeding bonfires to warm the air near their dying trees. Nothing worked.

Entire groves froze down to the ground and looked, as one writer said, "as if a terrible plague had swept through them." In disgust, many growers cut their once-productive trees into firewood. Others simply packed up and moved

Families worked to exhaustion, feeding bonfires to warm the air near their dying trees. Nothing worked.

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Welcome - New Members

Sue Favorite, Membership Chairman

New (or returned) members include:
Brenda Summerlin, Joyce Randall, Katherine Hammond,
Barbara W. Secor, Bill and Darla Furst.

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).

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

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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 year has been a challenging one for our historical society, and for all our Treasure Coast residents. Most of us probably are glad to see the old year end. Now that a new year has begun, we continue to work toward keeping our society as active and useful as possible.

We did have two pleasant dinner meetings in November and December, though attendance was much less than usual. More dinner meetings are scheduled and we hope for interesting programs. Here's a reminder: The Bud Adams gallery of historic photos in the Cobb Building downtown is set to reopen on Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., starting January 9.

Our board of directors has been meeting regularly, outdoors and masked. The coronavirus continues to interfere, so it is not exactly business as usual. We are planning for changes to the SLHS web site, but this will take some time and we will keep our members informed.

We are awaiting updated details about the annual mid-January history festival in downtown Fort Pierce, and the St. Lucie County Fair in late February. Depending on the COVID-19 situation and necessary health precautions, we expect to participate in both events.

Volunteers are still needed at the museum, so if you can spare a few hours each week please let us know.

We wish all of you good health and happiness in 2021. Δ

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	10/21	Ted Burrows	1/21	Frank H. & LeVan Fee	10/21	Tyler Modine & Kristi	
Cynthia Putnam	10/22	Richard & Nancy Sheets	4/21	Bill & Letha Fowler	10/21	Cardona	10/21
Lynn Norvell	10/21	Linda Chastain	4/21	Richard & Priscilla Goff	10/21	Robert & Louise Summerhays	10/21
Floyd & Gail Hope-Henschel	7/21	Pommie Hardie	4/22	Vern & Marie Gosney	10/21	Pam & Larry Blandford	10/21
Michelle Franklin	7/21	Craig & Pat Brewer	4/21	Nels & Suzanne Hallstrom	10/21	J. Michael & Elaine Brennan	10/21
Sally Frey	1/21	Holly Theuns	4/21	Larry Hardie	10/21	Tom & Kathy Gladwin	10/22
Lelaine B. Rice	1/21	James Midelis	4/21	Charlie Hayek	10/21	Rhonda Hilson Realty	10/22
Mr. & Mrs. Robert J. Essay	7/31	Noah & Bonnie Ludlum	4/22	Carl & Kathryn Hensley	10/21	Carrie Sue Ray	1/22
Deborah & Stephen Billis	4/21	Victoria Bush	4/21	Jeanie & Dick Lattner	10/21	Jean Dunn Spivey	1/22
Joyce Moody-McGraw	4/21	Ann Procino Healy	4/21	Lindsay McClenny	10/21	Kenneth Roberts	1/22
Jack & Sue Favorite	4/21	Terry Sisson	7/21	Norma McGuire	10/21	John Honea	1/22
Jerry & Carolyn McNeil	4/21	Elizabeth Trachtman	7/21	Laura & Hoyt C. Murphy	10/21	Peggy Monahan	1/23
Grace Ann Scott	1/21	Beth Stafford	7/21	Jeff Priest	10/21	Herbert A. Bopp	1/22
William & Fran Slat	1/21	Roger Miller	10/22	Ronald & Maggie Waites	10/21	Adrian Strickland	1/22
Ernie & Judy Merrill	1/21	Adele Lowe	10/22	Peggy & Robert Allen	10/21	Charlene & R.N. "Koby"	
Bob Burdge	1/21	Matt & Crystal Samuel	10/22	Linda Hudson & John Bailey	10/21	Koblegard	1/22
Robyn Hutchinson	1/21	Thomas Bailey	10/21	Tracy Curtis	10/21	The Koblegard Girls	1/22
Richard & Marianne Coffman	1/21	Claude & Cindy Baker	10/21	Pat Modine	10/21		
Bob Davis	1/21	Leonard & Peggy Berg	10/21	Rick & Lisa Modine	10/21		

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away. A few tiny citrus communities, such as Windsor near Gainesville, became virtual ghost towns.

Starved of citrus income, all business suffered. At Ocala both banks failed. Damage to Florida's economy totaled more than \$100 million, a staggering sum in 1895. Recovery was slow for the ravaged citrus industry. Six years later, in 1901, Florida harvested only 975,000 boxes of citrus, compared with 5 million boxes in 1894 before the freeze.

Two hundred miles south of the former citrus heartland, a few groves already had been planted along the Indian River. The Great Freeze of 1894-95 started a large-scale migration in this direction.

Except for some coastal settlements, most of southern Florida was still a mosquito-infested wilderness. Fort Pierce, Stuart and Vero were tiny villages. Miami had only 1,600 inhabitants and Palm Beach 500.

Henry Flagler had just brought his new railroad to Palm Beach, planning to make it the end of the line. But beside the Miami River, beyond the grasp of the Great Freeze, **Julia B. Tuttle** looked at her thriving orange trees and had an idea. She sent a sprig of blossoms to Flagler, who quickly recognized the commercial prospects. By 1896 he had laid track all the way to Miami.

The combination of milder climate and rail

transportation opened southern Florida to expanded agriculture – not only for citrus fruit but also for winter vegetable crops, sent to northern markets when their own farms were snowbound. Citrus groves increased steadily in Indian River, St. Lucie and Martin counties. By the 1940s, Indian River fruit had become famous nationwide.



Indian River labels on fruit boxes became familiar nationwide after freezes pushed the citrus industry southward in Florida.

Over the years other freezes have strongly impacted this area's fruits and vegetables.

In 1957-58, two severe cold snaps less than a month apart damaged fruits and vegetables throughout this region. Temperatures of 27 in December and 24 in early January froze tomatoes in many fields and oranges on the trees. Snow fell as far south as Lakeland. A December Fort Pierce News-Tribune headline read "Vegetable crop complete loss; further cold due."

Another freeze, in January 1977, brought a dusting of snow to Fort Pierce and flurries as far south as Miami. Temperatures sank into the 20s again in most of the Indian River area. Agriculture officials estimated statewide damage could top 15 percent of the citrus crop. Again, vegetable farms sustained heavy losses.

1985 brought another disastrous freeze. North of Orlando, above where State Road 50 cuts an east-west path across the peninsula, many citrus groves went out of business. A newspaper headline read "For some growers, 1985 is last straw." (Much of the acreage eventually was

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Jean Ellen Wilson's new book details Watergate insider's view

Jean Ellen Wilson, one of our historical society's most respected local historians, has just published a new book, this time on a national political topic. It is titled *The Puzzle of Watergate*. This is essentially an as-told-to book. In this 164-page volume the author relates the results of many videotaped interviews with former FBI agent **Alfred Carlton Baldwin III** during 2018 when, terminally ill, he was residing in Vero Beach.

Baldwin had a varied and often colorful career. By 1972 he was an assistant to **James McCord**, one of the five men who broke into Democratic Party headquarters in the Watergate complex in Washington D.C. Baldwin

describes his activities as "watchman" for the burglars from his lookout post in a Howard Johnson hotel across the street.

Through his series of videotaped interviews, Baldwin offers his perspective on the events that eventually destroyed **Richard Nixon's** presidency. There have been various explanations of exactly why the Watergate burglary was planned and carried out. Baldwin's own conclusion about the "big secret WHY" may come as a surprise to some readers.

The paperback book is priced at \$20, available at the museum or directly from Jean Ellen Wilson. Δ

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turned into housing developments for that area's fast-growing population.) An Associated Press report said "This freeze turned oranges rock-hard in groves as far south as Palm Beach." Along the Treasure Coast and inland toward Lake Okeechobee, temperatures in the 20s damaged citrus and ruined crops of tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and squash.

Longtime local residents undoubtedly can recall other episodes of frigid weather. After each freeze, farmers and grove owners have tried to move farther south, hoping to keep their crops beyond winter's grip. Yet there is always a risk. For more than a century, Florida's periodic freezes have profoundly influenced agriculture in our state. Δ

Coronavirus ... COVID-19 outbreak made 2020 a year of struggling

As a historical society, an important part of our mission is to note important events that affect life here along Florida's Treasure Coast. Beyond doubt, this year's coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic has been of historic significance. Our communities continue to struggle with the rising toll of deaths and severe illnesses, business dislocations and the disruption of our familiar cultural, educational and social activities.

Just after Christmas, as this edition was being prepared for printing, official statistics indicated that since March there have been 13,419 confirmed COVID-19 cases in St. Lucie County, 6,275 cases in Indian River County, 7,508 in Martin County and 1,247,546 throughout Florida.

Confirmed COVID-19 deaths totaled 387 in St. Lucie County, 155 in Indian River County, 206 in Martin County and 20,995 statewide. The toll is expected to rise in the near future.

Now that several vaccines are becoming available, we can hope for widespread distribution during the coming months. Perhaps there will be some relief from the suffering by mid-2021. Δ

Feedback

Here are some recent visitors' comments about the St. Lucie County Regional History Center, compiled from the guest book:

Granese Family, Bath, PA: "We love exploring new places. Beautiful museum."

Marvel Family, Charlotte, NC: "Loved it!"

Chris Lucas, Fort Pierce: "Lovely, exceptional afternoon."

Lorena Briagas, St. Louis, MO: Very beautiful, absolutely loved it."

Crochet Family, Versailles, France: "Very nice displays and informative."

Chris & Melissa Hancock & Family, New Market, AL: "We come every year and always enjoy."

Edward & Kathy Taylor, Finger, TN: "Love all the history of Fort Pierce."

Donna Miller & kids, Vero Beach: "Very interesting, kids love it."

Karen Ann Rosinsky, Titusville: "Very well done."

Howard & Michelle Lyons, Port St. Lucie: "Excellent tour and guide."

Jim Sowinski, Fort Pierce: "Excellent."

Frey Family, Fort Pierce, FL: "So nice to learn about our history."

Jessica & Blake Bullard, Fort Pierce, FL: Fantastic history of our beautiful home! We loved learning today!"

Carolyn & Bob Welton, Venice, FL: "Exceptional, very interesting."

The Hitchcocks, Colorado Springs, CO: "Awesome! Thanks Richard."

Amanda Holmes, Palm City, FL: "Awesome visit."

Jesse Hamreck & Family, Golden CO: "What a treasure! Kids loved the hunt." Δ

Remembrances

Elaine Adams Harrison

A member of one of this area's leading business and ranching families, **Elaine Adams Harrison**, died Oct. 11 at age 92. Fort Pierce was her birthplace, July 10, 1928. She was the daughter of Justice **Alto Lee Adams**, brother of rancher **Alto L. "Bud" Adams Jr.** and widow of construction executive **Nathaniel Harrison** who developed the Ocean Village condominiums where she resided.

She lived a life of adventure, as an aircraft pilot, mountaineer, expert horsewoman, talented musician and world traveler. Her family contributed greatly to the St. Lucie Historical Society and many other worthy local causes.

John Knox Bailey

Historical Society member **John Knox Bailey** died Nov. 21 at age 77. He was born April 4, 1943 in Greenville, S.C. and had been a local resident since 1967. He was a U.S. Navy veteran of the Vietnam War, and retired in 2003 after a long career with the U.S. Postal Service.

With his wife, Fort Pierce Mayor **Linda Hudson Bailey**, he was a familiar presence at monthly dinner meetings and supported various SLHS service projects.

Kristi Benway Turner

Historical Society member **Kristi Benway Turner**, a member of the family that donated the elaborate model steam locomotive on display in our museum, died Sept. 6 at age 64. She was born July 25, 1956 in Wisconsin and came to Fort Pierce as a child. She was a 1974 graduate of Fort Pierce Central High School.

Her grandfather, **Jesse Earl Benway** (died 1970 at age 83) was a talented machinist who spent decades building and refining the detailed locomotive model. It was displayed at the 1934 Chicago World's Fair. Eventually the family carried it to Fort Pierce where it holds a prominent place in the museum's entry hall, a reminder of the railroad's vital place in local history.

Vern Gosney

Historical Society member **Vern D. Gosney** died Dec. 7 at age 83. A native of Steubenville, Ohio, he was born Sept. 21, 1937 and came to Fort Pierce in 1949. He was a 1956 graduate of Dan McCarty High School and also attended Florida State University. He served 21 years in the local U.S. Army National Guard unit.

He had a varied business career and was active in civic life, including service as a Fort Pierce city commissioner in 1973-74. He was chairman of the Sandy Shoes Festival for four years and also was president of the Fort Pierce Lions Club.

Adrienne Moore

Respected journalist and local historian **Adrienne Moore** died Dec. 5 in Stuart at age 73. Born Mary Adrienne Moore in New York, N.Y. on April 20, 1947, she came to Fort Pierce in 1957. After graduation from Barry University in Miami, she spent most of her career in journalism – with the Palm Beach Daily News, television station WPTV (Ch. 5), then for 25 years WQCS radio (88.9 fm) at Indian River State College.

An expert on Treasure Coast history, she contributed articles to the SLHS Historical Quarterly and helped local groups establish the "Zorafest" events celebrating writer **Zora Neale Hurston**. Δ

Donations are welcome

Jack and Sally Chapman, longtime SLHS supporters, recently made a general-purpose donation to help in the historical society's projects.

Mr. and Mrs. William Abramowicz also made a recent donation in honor of **Anna Bennett**.

In addition, **Mr. and Mrs. Robert J. Essay** recently made a general-purpose donation to the society.

We thank them all for their generosity. Donations in any amount are much appreciated. Δ

Florida Facts

Rollins College, Florida's oldest private institution of higher learning, was established April 18, 1885 in Sanford, named for its benefactor, Alonzo Rollins of Chicago. However, when classes began in November of that year they were held in Winter Park, where the college remained.

The historic Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach was operated by the U.S. government as a plastic/neurosurgery hospital for wartime wounded from 1942 to 1944. It was one of several Florida luxury hotels converted to hospital use during World War Two.

The first flight by U.S. Navy aviators in Florida took place at the Pensacola Naval Air Station on February 2, 1914. Lt. J.H. Towers and Ens. G. Chevalier made a 20-minute flight over the new military reservation.

St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.
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Fort Pierce, Florida 34954

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St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.

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

Name _____

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Names and ages of minor children:

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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.