



The Historical Quarterly

of The St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.

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Early days at Fort Pierce: Sherman's tragic tale of Pilot Ashlock

Compiled by Terry L. Howard

In 1840 there was a gentleman familiar with the ways of the Indian River and the Atlantic Ocean. He knew how to harvest the bounty of both and shared his knowledge with the soldiers at Fort Pierce. The gentleman, known only as Pilot Ashlock (no first name is recorded), is introduced in Chapter 1 of William Tecumseh Sherman's autobiography. Here is Sherman's account of his own arrival to Fort Pierce in the early fall of 1840, as well as his account of Pilot Ashlock.

"In due season we arrived off the bar of Indian River [on a steamer] and anchored. A whale-boat came off with a crew of four men, steered by a character of some note, known as the Pilot Ashlock. I transferred self and baggage to this boat, and, with the mails, was carried through the surf over the bar, into the mouth of Indian River Inlet. It was then dark; we transferred to a smaller boat, and the same crew pulled us up through a channel in the middle of Mangrove Islands, the roosting-place of thousands of pelicans and birds that rose in clouds and circled above our heads. The water below was alive with fish, whose course through it could be seen by the phosphoric wake; and Ashlock told me many a tale of the Indian war then in progress,

and of his adventures in hunting and fishing, which he described as the best in the world. ...

The season was hardly yet come for active operations against the Indians, so that the officers were naturally attracted to Ashlock, who was the best fisherman I ever saw. He soon initiated us into the mysteries of shark-spearing, trolling for red-fish, and taking the sheep's-head and mullet. These abounded so that we could at any time catch an unlimited quantity at pleasure. The companies also owned nets for catching green turtles. Our cooks had at all times an ample supply of the best of green turtles. They were so cheap and common that the soldiers regarded it as an imposition when compelled to eat green turtle steaks, instead of poor Florida beef, or the usual barreled mess-pork. I do not recall in my whole experience a spot on earth where fish, oysters, and green turtles so abound as at Fort Pierce, Florida. ...

W.T. Sherman as a young Army officer. As a recent graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, Sherman was posted to Fort Pierce during 1840-41.



There was at the time a poor, weakly soldier of our company whose wife cooked for our mess. She was somewhat of a flirt, and rather fond of admiration. Sergeant Broderick was attracted to her, and

hung around the mess-house more than the husband fancied; so he reported the matter to Lieutenant Taylor, who reproved Broderick for his behavior. A few days afterward the husband again appealed to his commanding officer (Taylor), who exclaimed:

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of The St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.

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The President's Message

by Nancy Bennett

Recently, board members were thinking of hosting a history festival at our museum this coming January. Now, this update:

Gregory Enns, publisher of Indian River Magazine, has said he is willing to organize a downtown history festival again in January, as he has done in recent years. Enns said it would be planned to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Fort Pierce's landmark Sunrise Theater.

Our St. Lucie Historical Society will be one of the co-sponsors of the festival. Plans are incomplete so far, but it is understood that most events would take place inside or directly adjacent to the Sunrise Theater. We'll keep you posted on details as they develop.

Before then, of course, the holiday season will arrive with the usual festivities. Our society will again be represented in Fort Pierce's annual "Sights and Sounds on Second" parade in early December.

Let's all enjoy the holidays and greet the New Year ahead with optimism and enthusiasm. 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).

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Adele Lowe ----- 10/22	Terri Sisson -----1/23	DJ & Rob Gardner ----- 10/23

YOUNG SHERMAN... *continued from page 1*

“Haven’t you got a musket? Can’t you defend your own family?” Very soon after a shot was heard down by the mess-house, and it transpired that the husband had actually shot Broderick, inflicting a wound which proved mortal. The law and army regulations required that the man should be sent to the nearest civil court, which was at St. Augustine; accordingly, the prisoner and necessary witnesses were sent up by the next monthly steamer. Among the latter were Lieutenant Taylor and the pilot Ashlock.

After they had been gone about a month, the sentinel on the roof-top of our quarters reported the smoke of a steamer approaching the bar, and, as I was acting quartermaster, I took a boat and pulled down to get the mail. I reached the log-hut in which the pilots lived, and saw them start with their boat across the bar, board the steamer, and then return. Ashlock was at his old post at the steering-oar, with two ladies, who soon came to the landing, having passed through a very heavy surf, and I was presented to one as Mrs. Ashlock, and the other as her sister, a very pretty little Minorcan girl of about fourteen years of age. Mrs. Ashlock herself was probably eighteen or twenty years old, and a very handsome woman.

I was hurriedly informed that the murder trial was in progress at St. Augustine; that Ashlock had given his testimony, and had availed himself of the chance to take a wife to share with him the solitude of his desolate hut on the beach at Indian River. He had brought ashore his wife, her sister, and their chests, with the mail, and had orders to return immediately to the steamer to bring ashore some soldiers belonging to another company. Ashlock had left his wife and her sister standing on the beach near the pilot-hut, and started back with his whale-boat across the bar. I also took the mail and started up to the fort, and had hardly reached the wharf when I observed another boat following me. As soon as we reached the wharf the men reported that Ashlock and all his crew, with the exception of one man, had been drowned a few minutes after I had left the beach. They said his surf-boat had reached the steamer, had taken on board a load of soldiers, some eight or ten, and had started back through the surf, when on the bar a heavy

breaker upset the boat, and all were lost except the boy who pulled the bow-oar. ...

I instantly took a fresh crew of soldiers and returned to the bar; there sat poor Mrs. Ashlock on her chest of clothes, a weeping widow, who had seen her husband perish amid sharks and waves; she clung to the hope that the steamer had picked him up, but, strange to say, he could not swim, although he had been employed on the water all his life.

Her sister was more demonstrative, and wailed as one lost to all hope and life. She appealed to us all to do miracles to save the struggling men in the waves, though two hours had already passed, and to have gone out then among those heavy breakers, with an inexperienced crew, would have been worse than suicide. All I could do was to reorganize the guard at the beach, take the two desolate females up to the fort, and give them the use of my own quarters. Very soon their anguish was quieted, and they began to look for the return of their steamer with Ashlock and his rescued crew. The next day I went again to the beach with Lieutenant Ord, and we found that one or two bodies had been washed ashore, torn all to pieces by the sharks, which literally swarmed the inlet at every new tide. ... I had to return to the fort and bear to Mrs. Ashlock the absolute truth, that her husband was lost forever.

Meantime her sister had entirely recovered her equilibrium, and being the guest of the officers, who were extremely courteous to her, she did not lament so loudly the calamity that saved them a long life of banishment on the beach of Indian River. By the first opportunity they were sent back to St. Augustine, the possessors of all of Ashlock’s worldly goods and effects, consisting of a good rifle, several cast-nets, hand-lines, etc., etc., besides some three hundred dollars in money, which was due him by the quartermaster for his services as pilot.”

Pilot Ashlock will go down in history as “a character of some note.” He may also be remembered as a gentleman of some means. His young widow’s \$300 inheritance in 1840 is approximately equivalent to \$8,500 to \$10,000 in today’s currency. Δ

Echoes from our past



Here is a scene only longtime local residents are likely to remember. The early St. Lucie County Courthouse, built in 1909, once was the locale for almost all of this area's judicial and local government activities. At the time of its construction, St. Lucie County encompassed most of what later became Martin and Indian River counties, plus part of what is now Okeechobee County. Located along Pine Street, now

South Second Street in downtown Fort Pierce, the two-story brick building occupied a handsome perch overlooking the Indian River. It served local needs into the 1960s, when rapid population growth made it necessary to replace it with a larger and more modern courthouse. This 1910 photo also shows the county jail (and jailer's quarters) to the right, plus part of the Boston House.

SLHS dinner meeting prices rise this season at Elks Lodge

Meal tickets for our Historical Society's monthly dinner meetings have risen again this year – now \$14 each compared with \$13 last year. Last year's price also was an increase from the \$12.50 that had been in effect through the past decade.

The SLHS board of directors discussed meal prices

during its September meeting and agreed to accept the new price. President **Nancy Bennett** attributed the increase to the higher food prices now being charged in an inflationary market. She said the Elks would rather not have raised the meal price but had to cover their own rising costs. Δ

Remembrances

Nels Hallstrom

Historical Society member **Nels Edwin Hallstrom Jr.** died unexpectedly on Sept. 9, just a week before he was to be the guest speaker at the monthly SLHS dinner meeting. He would have offered his recollections of growing up in Fort Pierce during the 1950s. He was 77.

He was born Oct. 31, 1944 in Plainfield, N. J. and came to Fort Pierce as an infant with his parents, **Nels E. "Whitey" Hallstrom Sr.** and **Marie Smith Hallstrom.** He was graduated from Dan McCarty High School and spent much of his career with East Coast Lumber.

He was predeceased by his parents and by one brother, **Brian G. Hallstrom.** He is survived by his wife, **Suzanne W. Hallstrom** and daughter **Brenna Renee Hallstrom.**

Clifford O. Taylor

Former Historical Society member **Clifford O. Taylor** died Sept. 22 in Lake Worth at age 96. A member of a prominent St. Lucie County family, he spent much of his four-decade education career in Palm Beach County. He served as a teacher, administrator and school principal. An elementary school is named in his honor.

He was a Navy veteran of World War Two, and was active in his church and in civic activities. He was predeceased by his wife, **Dorothy Ann Pearce Taylor.** They had no children. Survivors include numerous nieces and nephews. Δ

Volunteer invites others for healthy outdoor exercise

SLHS Members,

If your doctor recommends that you walk more on a regular basis in order to maintain and improve your overall health, I would like to suggest that you consider spending one morning a week helping **Nancy Bennett** pick up trash around the St. Lucie County History Center.

Feedback

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

Carolyn Kicliter Asmussen, Fort Pierce: "Loved it. Awesome!"

Jan Russell, Fort Pierce: "Love it!!"

Rob & Deb Phebus, Melbourne: "Amazing artifacts and history to learn."

Daniela Solla, South Korea: "Very nice, really interesting. We learned a lot."

Shephard Family, Fort Wayne, IN: "Great place to learn things. Really enjoyed!"

Megan & Jacob Sumner, The Villages: "Love the attention to detail. Love the models!"

Claire Tanner & Family, Denver, CO: "Wonderful museum and staff. Thank you!"

The Hough Family, Nottingham, England: "Relaxing and interesting."

Shirey-Lindfors Family, Malmo, Sweden: "Cool museum with passionate volunteers!"

Tommy Gore, Alma, GA: "Excellent!" (*Longtime St. Lucie County resident Tommy Gore recently returned here for a visit from his current home in Georgia. He and family members toured the museum and he pointed out some of the historic artifacts he had donated in the past.*) Δ

It only takes about one hour and you'll cover about one mile. Plus you will have the pleasure of meeting some nice Fort Pierce folks that are regular walkers, runners and fishermen in the area. It's fun and it's a win-win opportunity.

Sincerely,

Terry L. Howard

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

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

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P O Box 578

Fort Pierce, Florida 34954-0578

For Information telephone: (772) 461-8020

General Meetings 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 \$13.00 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.