



The Historical Quarterly

of The St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.

Vol. 42 No. 1

Winter 2024

History festival a success, first time held at museum

The seventh annual Treasure Coast History Festival was held at the St. Lucie County Regional History Center for the first time, following six years along Second Street in downtown Fort Pierce. This year's festival, held on Saturday Jan. 13, was pronounced a success based on attendance estimates and remarks by visitors.

"The festival was very successful. Everybody was very positive about being here," said St. Lucie Historical Society President **Nancy Bennett**. The free event welcomed the public to the museum building and grounds, including the historic Gardner house. Visitors browsed among exhibits by history-related organizations and heard talks by experts in local lore.

Indian River Magazine publisher **Greg Enns** and his staff originated the festival and hosted it for six years downtown. The magazine and the St. Lucie Historical Society now are main co-sponsors of the event. Also co-sponsoring this year's festival was St. Lucie Battery and Tire Co.

A highlight early in the day was the dedication of a memorial bench in the museum's garden honoring two of the historical society's deceased presidents, **Lucille Rights** and her daughter, **Catherine Rights Browning**. The dedication featured remarks by **Roberta Rights Murray**, another daughter of Lucille Rights, and by Fort Pierce Mayor **Linda Hudson**. Local artist **Anita Prentice** created the bench, with intricate tilework designs.



From left: Roberta Rights Murray, SLHS President Nancy Bennett and Fort Pierce Mayor Linda Hudson at dedication of memorial bench honoring Lucille Rights and Catherine Rights Browning.

A precise count of visitors was impossible because crowds wandered on and off the grounds through three gates. Estimates ranged from 800 to 1,000 persons from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The **Summerlin Family's** fish fry just outside the gates sold 150 dinners; also, the barbecue vendor reported a sellout to hungry visitors.

Exhibitors included historical groups from Martin, Indian River and Okeechobee counties, a group saluting famed author **Zora Neale Hurston**, the Audubon Society, Navy Seal Museum and Fort Pierce Main Street. "The guest speakers were fascinating," said SLHS board member **Terry Howard**. Music was provided by The Square Ones band. Historical re-enactors led by **Jim O'Dell** displayed 1800s uniforms and equipment and even fired off an antique cannon.

Many attendees took advantage of free admission to the museum, expressing pleasure, even some surprise, at the variety of scenes and artifacts on display. Board member **Ernie Merrill**, who helped guide museum visitors, stated, "Many said 'I didn't realize this place was even here!'" Events such as the annual festival should enhance the museum's public visibility.

Historical society members volunteered in many ways. Also helping were the Fort Pierce Central High School History Club and the Lincoln Park Academy Key Club. Parking was handled by the Fort Pierce Central ROTC, while Sheriff's deputies provided security. Δ



Festival visitors browse through the museum's photo gallery depicting pioneer families along the Treasure Coast.

Welcome - New or Returning Members

Sue Favorite, Membership Chairman

Jim & Kathy Wilson, James Handy, Preston Perrone,
Mitch & Linda Smeykal, Janie Baugh & Dennis Jurkiewicz,
Sunrise Theatre Foundation, Peter & Debb Robinson,
Juan Vega & Yvonne Fraga, Sam Crutchfield,
John W. & Kathleen Davis Jr., Timothy Donovan & Cheryl Milisi,
Christian Andersen, Beth Russell, James Carr,
Jim & Charlene Moses, Jim O'Dell

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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

It was a real pleasure to be at our museum on Saturday, Jan. 13, for the Treasure Coast History Festival – our first hosting of the event. Even a brief late-morning rain shower couldn't dampen the enthusiasm of the people who attended.

Our board of directors spent the past several months planning all the details, where to put everything, how to arrange parking, what to do about entertainment and food, plus so much else. We hoped not to miss any vital details, especially because this year's event was new to our location after six years in downtown Fort Pierce.

As always, our devoted volunteers did a wonderful job. We are grateful to our co-sponsors and to the school groups that participated. Also, we were glad to have several other historical groups as exhibitors. Naturally, we hope for similar success next year.

Next we have the St. Lucie County Fair in late February and early March. We always have a popular exhibit at the fair and as usual will need volunteers to take shifts there.

We all can be thankful to have such a busy, active historical society, thankful too for all the great people who pitch in and help whenever needed. 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).

Lynn Norvell-----4/25	Susan Roberts----- 10/24	Mike & Peggy Monahan -----7/25
John Honea -----4/25	Elizabeth Trachtman ----- 10/24	Carolyn Dodge -----7/24
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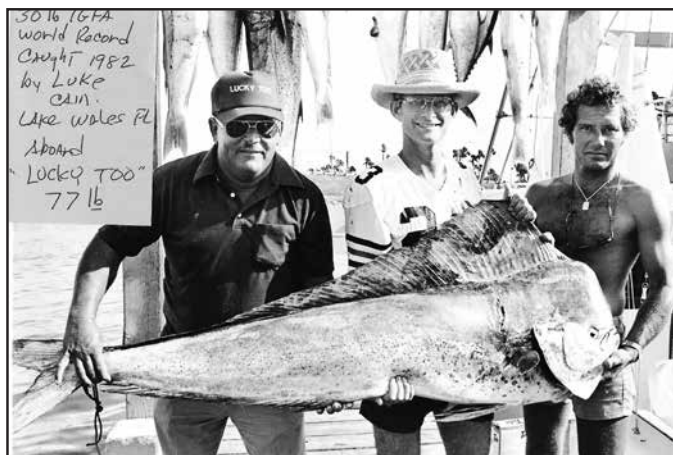
Respected charter skipper tells amazing fishing tales

By Terry Howard

As a commercial fisherman, it was a special honor to share the speakers' table with **Captain Sam Crutchfield** at the December 2023 Saint Lucie Historical Society dinner, at the Fort Pierce Elks Lodge. Captain Crutchfield's friends and special guests at the table included **Captain Chip Shafer** and his wife **Terry**, Sam's former mate and yacht builder, **Mark Willis** and **Tish Taylor Chapman**.

In 1973, charter captains Sam Crutchfield, Skip Shafer and **Ron Lane** had their boats docked behind Simonsen's Restaurant on Seaway Drive in Fort Pierce. The pinochle of Florida charter fishing has traditionally been the ocean-going marlin and sailfish boats. Charter captains also target other species, but sails and marlin are the most desirable target fish. Every locality along the coast has different generations of top charter captains. For their time, the 1970's and 80's, Sam Crutchfield, Chip Shafer and Ronnie Lane (he could not make it to the dinner because of health issues), were arguably the best charter fishing captains on the Treasure Coast. The owners of NASCAR thought highly enough of Captain Ron Lane to hire him to captain their fleet of oceangoing fishing boats. At 76, Captain Chip Shafer, known for his skill and kindness, still works for a private boat owner and specializes in fly fishing for bill fish off the west coast of Mexico and Costa Rica.

Sam Crutchfield has a colorful and engaging personality that attracts a following wherever he goes. While he was still charter fishing, he also sang in a popular country music band that played in local establishments and produced several acclaimed CD



In 1982 Capt. Sam Crutchfield (at left) helped his charter client catch a world-record pound dolphin.



Fishing captains (from left) Terry Howard, Sam Crutchfield and Chip Shafer, following Crutchfield's after-dinner speech to the St. Lucie Historical Society.

albums. Sam also wrote an excellent book, *Forever Saturday*, which chronicles his experiences.

Now that he is retired, Sam is often the guest of his friends and former charter clients on hunting and fishing excursions. Louisiana back country is one of his favorite destinations. As a well loved and respected patriarch of the Treasure Coast charter fishing community, Sam was a special guest at this year's prestigious Pelican Yacht Club Sailfish Tournament.

Sam was born in 1939 in Fort Meade, in Polk County. It's a small community just east of Tampa about 95 miles from Fort Pierce. Sam's father, an insurance salesman, used to bring him to Fort Pierce as a child to fish because the fishing was so superb here. After a tour of duty in the Coast Guard, Sam attended the University of South Florida in Tampa where he earned a degree in broadcast journalism. He came to Fort Pierce in 1964 because of the fishing. While interviewing for a broadcasting job at radio station WIRA in Fort Pierce, he made up his mind to become a charter fishing captain. He walked out of that interview and bought his first boat and that was the beginning of his stellar fishing career.

Sam's first boat was a 21-foot wooden boat built by **Ray Lowe**, named "The Lucky". His next two charter boats were a 23-foot TCraft and a 30-foot TCraft. Finally in 1974 he purchased a 40-foot Warren/O'Neal wooden (juniper wood) boat built in Oregon Inlet, North Carolina, named "Lucky Too". That was the boat

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Historical re-enactor Jim O'Dell and his helpers prepare to fire an antique replica cannon.

The cannon was heard several times during the festival. The re-enactors had clothing and equipment typical of the mid-1800s.

Family expresses gratitude for tribute to Lucille Rights

The following letter is from Roberta Rights Murray, regarding the tributes to her late mother, Lucille Rights, by historical society members.

I want to express our family's gratitude and appreciation for everyone who made donations in Lucille's name to the Society's memorial fund, and for the fantastic tribute in the summer Historical Quarterly newsletter.

When I opened my summer Quarterly newsletter and saw mom's photo and the wonderful tribute to her, I realized what an impact she had on others. She's always been a strong role model for us,



Roberta Rights Murray on the memorial bench honoring her family members. This view shows how artist Anita Prentice created intricate tile designs on both front and back.

as a parent and educator. However to see her impact on others truly brought home the magnitude of not just our loss, but everyone's loss.

Thank you for recognizing her contributions over the years.

As a family with three generations of volunteers with the Historical Society and Museum: Lucille Rights, Catherine Rights Browning and our grandmother Lelia Rieley, the Historical Society and

museum have always been an integral part of our lives. For that I thank you all.

RESPECTED SKIPPER... continued from page 3

he fished until he retired; the boat he'll always be known for. He told me that boat is still in operation in North Carolina today.

At the dinner Sam shared many interesting and entertaining stories about his life on the water. Sam noted that once while fishing aboard his friend **Tim Bankston's** outboard, a bull shark attacked their propeller, not once but twice! During that same fishing trip with Bankston, they caught seven big kingfish and sharks ate every one of them.

Another story he shared was about how in 1983 he caught a world record 77-pound mahi on 30-pound test line!

Sam has caught many record catches. He spoke of a memorable 78-pound king mackerel he caught near the beach off Pepper Park. He said large "smoker" king mackerel used to migrate near shore in 15 to 30 feet of water along St. Lucie County. Sam said large king mackerel gill nets often set and drifted down the shoreline in the 1970's and 80's. Sadly, he said, that put an end to schools of big kings that once congregated along the Fort Pierce beaches.

Sam lamented that the fishing here is not nearly as good as it once was. He pointed to the death of sea grasses in the Indian River Lagoon due to pollution as one big factor in the decline of fishing on the Treasure Coast. Many species of fish and sea life spawn and grow in the lagoon's sea grasses. He also said that today's recreational fishermen have better electronics for locating fish than ever before. Their tackle is state of the

art too. And the rapidly growing and huge population of recreational Florida fishermen is putting incredible pressure on today's fish populations.

Perhaps the most entertaining story Sam told the audience was of being attacked by a 12-foot alligator. While wade fishing for bass in Lake Istokpoga, a shallow lake 70 miles west of Fort Pierce known for big bass and big alligators, he believes he stepped on and frightened the giant. The gator rose up and grabbed Sam on the butt. Based on the teeth marks Sam's friend and gator expert said it was at least 12 feet long. Sam thinks the leviathan grabbed him as a reflex from being stepped on. Somehow he survived with no serious injuries.

Had this giant been hunting for food the story might have ended differently for Sam. As it was, the incident made all the local newspapers and television stations. You can imagine the headlines: "Fort Pierce fishing legend, Captain Sam Crutchfield survives being attacked and bitten on the butt by a giant alligator while wade fishing in a South Florida lake." Fortunately, the bite hardly broke the skin.

Today, on a given morning when the weather and tides are right, you might find Captain Sam with a spinning rod at the Fort Pierce South Jetty either fishing or holding court on a park bench with one of his many admirers or former mates.

Captain Sam Crutchfield's talk at the history dinner was priceless. He said he too enjoyed the experience and would be happy to speak to us again next year and share some new and different stories! That would be awesome! Δ

Remembrance

Joyce Gillette

Longtime St. Lucie Historical Society member **Joyce Evelyn Rogers Gillette** died Jan. 3 at age 96. She was a native and lifelong St. Lucie County resident and a descendant of one of our pioneer families.

She was born Nov. 6, 1927 to **Jesse C. Rogers** and **Margaret Lenore Brown Rogers**. She was a granddaughter of St. Lucie County Sheriff **R.L. Brown**. She was a great-great granddaughter of Fort Pierce pioneers **Capt. Benjamin** and **Annie Hogg**.

She was predeceased by her husband **Edgar "Bud" Gillette**, whom she met while he was stationed on Hutchinson Island during World War Two. She is survived by her sons **Stacy, David** and **John Gillette**. Δ



Visitors enter the museum's main gate in front of the Gardner House for the history festival, greeted by SLHS volunteers. Attendees had an opportunity to buy special festival shirts.

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.

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Spouse's Name _____

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 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 \$14.00 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.