

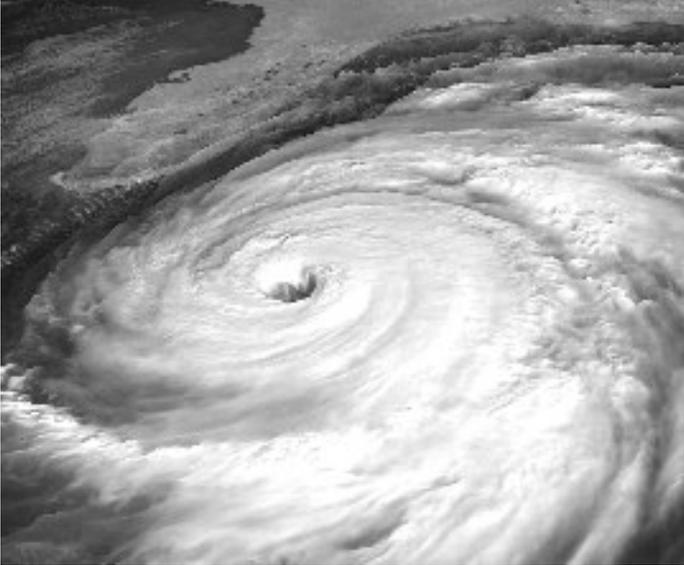
THE QUARTERLY OF THE
BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

THE INDIAN RIVER JOURNAL

Volume II, Number 2

Fall 2003

**Brevard County Historical
Articles & Features
Organizations & Activities
Announcements & Reviews**



Hurricane Floyd approaches the east coast of Florida in September, 1999. Anticipated as the Storm of the Century, it veered northward and did little damage here. Although almost half of all hurricanes that hit the United States pass over the State of Florida, disastrous results in Brevard County are rare.

The Indian River Journal is published by
the Brevard County Historical Commission.

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THE INDIAN RIVER JOURNAL

Co-Editors:

Karen Raley
David Paterno

Contributing Editors:

Bob Gross
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Roz Foster

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The scene above shows an automobile attempting the early road to Cocoa Beach. This sandy view was taken in the 1920s by an Eau Gallie resident who complained that someone dumped a load of tacks along the way. This wound up creating several flat tires and a lot of frustration for the residents!

IN THIS ISSUE:

Hurricanes-

Hurricane Signal Flags, Roz Foster	10
Hurricanes in the Indian River Region, Karen Raley & Bob Gross	12
Titusville and the Hurricanes of 1893 and 1894, Jim Ball	15
The Hurricane of 1910 in Titusville, Roz Foster	23

Roads and Rails-

William Jennings Bryan in Brevard, Bob Gross	6
Ferry Train Across the St. Johns, Ed Vosatka	8
Mims-Sanford Highway Completed in the 1930s, Roz Foster	25
Stop, Look, and Listen!, Ed Vosatka	26

Local History News-

The Sams House and Property, Stephen Benn	4
The Central Brevard Mosquito Beaters, Ada Parrish	18
George "Speedy" Harrell: A Profile in Local History Activism, Karen Raley	21
Mystery Photos	24
Upcoming Events	28
Historical Organizations	29

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THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Brevard County has a long and unique history that spans the time from early Native Americans to the NASA Space Program. Because of this uniqueness, it is important that we must identify the activities and artifacts of the past, preserve what we can discover, and make available to citizens, researchers, and most especially our children--all of the history of the county that we are able. To that end, the Brevard County Historical Commission is charged, by county code, to do just that.

In my lifetime, I can remember when private papers, photographs, newspapers, deeds, office records, individual oral histories, county maps, and grandmother's high school albums were not considered major historical materials--important enough to take up space on library and archive shelves. Often these materials were found in cardboard boxes somewhere in the backrooms of those historical buildings. Now, these materials have become so important to researchers as primary resources that much effort is now being expended to catalog and index these materials at archives such as the one at the Historical Commission.

This month, the Historical Commission was the recipient of a major historical collection from NASA. Comprising 40,000 photographs and transparencies, the contribution covers the era of the first Shuttle program in 1981 to flights in 2001. The photographs include launches, astronauts, the Space Center, activities in the International Space Center, and views from outer space. It is an extraordinary collection, and the NASA will be providing the Historical Commission with assistance in creating a catalog of the material. As the materials are catalogued and archived, they and other materials in the Historical Commission's archives will become available for historical research on the history of our county.

Another fine place to conduct historical research is the Alma Clyde Field Library of the Florida Historical Society. Although

the Library contains important collections of Floridiana in general, it also has many printed materials about Brevard County, including books, maps, personal collections, and exhibits. Those who wish to learn more about Brevard County history should contact Debra or Nick Wynne at the Alma Clyde Field Historical Library on Brevard Avenue in Cocoa Village.

David Paterno, Chairman
Brevard County Historical Commission

A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

The editors of the Brevard County Historical Commission's quarterly are pleased to bring out our Fall issue. Our selections concentrate on the seasonal topic of hurricanes. Upon studying the history of such storms in Brevard and the Indian River area, one cannot help but notice that we have been spared far more than we have been troubled by bad weather. In fact, since the area has become heavily populated, there have not been any massive disasters here such as those seen in the Keys, Miami, Okeechobee, Palm Beach, the Panhandle, and in other states. Brevard newspapers do have some lively accounts of past storms, however, and the periodic downsings and hard blows from tropical storms and hurricanes are regular events in our area.

We include a number of interesting articles on the topic of travel in the early automobile era. Since Florida's economy has been so dependent on rail and highway transportation, it is fascinating to look back and imagine what that age must have been like. Finally, we are very pleased to present selections on our local history activities and activists. Enjoy your reading!

Karen Raley and David Paterno
Co-Editors

THE SAMS HOUSE AND PROPERTY

STEPHEN BENN AND BOB GROSS

The former home of the John A. Sams family, pioneers of Merritt Island, has been acquired by the Brevard County Environmentally Endangered Lands (EEL) program as part of an ad valorem tax purchase of the environmentally endangered Pine Island Conservation Area. The 879-acre parcel of land is located at the northern end of North Tropical Trail. The property contains significant natural resources, including fresh and saltwater wetlands and pine flatwoods.

The Sams House is a complex of two joined structures. One of these portions, the attendant home, dates to the early 1870s. It is the oldest dated structure on Merritt Island and is a prime example of Florida vernacular construction. It was originally built in Eau Gallie. Soon after, it was dismantled, barged up the Indian River lagoon, and reassembled at its present site. The main portion of the Sams house is a two-story structure built in the early 1900s.

The Sams Family occupied the home until 1997. The family has been diligent in recording the history of the structure and has offered to supply documentation and artifacts that will be placed on exhibit there. The attendant home is proposed for restoration to its original condition and will be used as a reception area containing historical and environmental displays. The main home will be renovated and used as a field office for the EEL Land Manager and AmeriCorps Volunteers. The Indian River Anthropological Society will perform an archeological survey in the area of the houses to advise the architects in designing the renovation and restoration of the properties.

Source: *State of Florida Master Site File*



The main house, shown above, has an enclosed screen porch along its eastern face. Perpendicular to the main house is the older portion, shown below. Referred to as the attendant home, this section has three rooms and is partially ceiled. It is currently connected to the newer house at the kitchen of the latter. The home stands in an old citrus grove, and there are the remains of outbuildings in the hammock to the west. Adjacent to the home is an enormous hickory tree.



WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN IN BREVARD COUNTY

BOB GROSS

Col. W. J. Bryan Visits Cocoa

Our town had an unexpected visit last Sunday from Col. W J Bryan. The Great Commoner was en route to his home in Miami from Kissimmee to Lake Winder by auto, being met there by L. S. Shiver, of our town, and brought by launch down the St. Johns to Lake Poinsett landing, from which place he was brought by Walter Hatter by auto, stopping at the Cocoa House for an hour or two until the belated Key West train on the F. E. C. Ry., gave him an opportunity to continue his journey. This trip across the country gave Col. Bryan a rather unique experience, as it afforded him an opportunity to see the almost unexplored region constituting the headwaters of the famous St. Johns. It is needless to say in this connection that Col. Bryan's visit had no political significance whatever. Only a few people who caught sight of him as he was whirled along our streets knew of his presence, together with some who met him at the station while waiting for his train. Mr. Bryan passed through here again Wednesday on his way to attend the inauguration of President Wilson.

---Florida Star, February 28, 1913

The excerpt from the *Florida Star* tells of the time when William Jennings Bryan visited Brevard County. Bryan was famous as the Democratic Party's candidate for President of the U. S. in 1896, 1900 and 1908. Bryan attained the rank of Colonel when he served in Florida in the Third Nebraska Volunteer Regiment during the Spanish American War of 1898-99.

Bryan was known as the Great Commoner because he favored currency backed by silver rather than gold. In his most famous-campaign speech, he asked for a loosening of the money supply to benefit farmers and laborers, declaring that the government should not crucify its people on a "cross of gold." During Woodrow Wilson's administration, Bryan served as Secretary of State.

In 1925, Bryan successfully argued against the theory of evolution in the Scopes "Monkey" trial. The story of this trial is told in the classic movie *Inherit the Wind*, starring Spencer Tracy as Clarence Darrow, who defended Tennessee schoolteacher John Scopes, and Frederick March, who portrayed Bryan. The state of Tennessee forbade the teaching of evolution on religious grounds. Scopes lost the case and Bryan died five days later after eating a hearty meal. The case was ultimately reversed a year later by the Tennessee Supreme Court.

Regular automobile traffic could not traverse the St. Johns River south of New Smyrna until the Melbourne-Kissimmee Highway was completed in 1917, although the Union Cypress Railway from Hopkins (South Melbourne) to Deer Park could ferry wagons, buggies, etc., across the river as early as the fall of 1912. This original road was poorly maintained. In 1923 it was closed to traffic in order that the bed could be raised and widened.

The road re-opened in 1925, and served the public until the 1960s, when it was replaced by the present highway. Bryan could travel from Kissimmee to Miami in a few hours down the Florida Turnpike today instead of the way he made the trip in 1913 by automobile, launch, and train, which took the better part of a day.

At the right, William Jennings Bryan, as he appeared near the time of his visit to Brevard County. (Library of Congress photo)



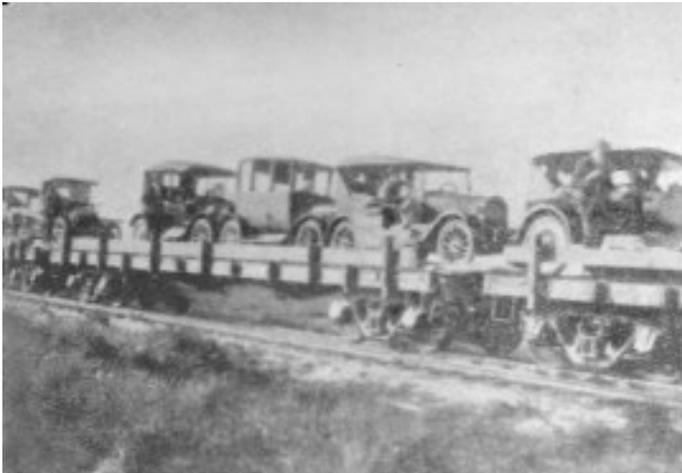
FERRY TRAIN ACROSS THE ST. JOHNS

ED VOSATKA

In March, 1923, the Kissimmee Highway (now U.S. 192) was closed so that 2 ½ miles of badly eroded fill across the St. Johns floodplain could be raised and widened. New bridges were also to be built. The work was predicted to require "over three months." With the closure of the highway, traffic between Melbourne and Orlando had to go by way of New Smyrna and Deland. This made the route twice as far as it had been before.

As a courtesy, the Union Cypress Railway began ferrying autos across the St. Johns valley. Up to 12 autos could be carried on two flat cars. Trips were scheduled every 30 minutes. The fare was \$1.00 per car and passengers or \$5.00 per bus. Loading ramps were built in June Park and Deer Park.

A new locomotive (#6) was purchased on October 6, 1923 to operate the ferry. In December, the Deer Park Hotel opened to assist travelers.



It was the only such facility in the fifty miles between Melbourne and St. Cloud. By March of 1924, the company was leasing four 40-foot flat cars from the F.E.C. Ry. With this addition, the ferry could handle 16 autos per trip, and five round trips were made every day.

The soft swamp muck made building a good highway fill very difficult. When the highway contractor defaulted, frustrated travelers unjustly accused Union Cypress of charging exorbitant fees ("\$2.00 to \$3.00 per auto"), making excessive profits, and even purposefully delaying the completion of the highway. Profit from the ferry train did partially offset company losses in 1923. In 1924, earnings from the ferry train were sufficient not only to offset the loss in mill revenues, but also to show a substantial profit for the year. Ferry service ended when the highway was re-opened on January 21, 1925.



These photos, taken about 1923-4, are of the Union Cypress ferry train. At the left, automobiles ride atop the flat cars leased from FEC. Above is the Union Cypress train engine.

HURRICANE SIGNAL FLAGS
ROZ FOSTER

*Instructions To Shipmasters As To The Use Of
Hurricane Flags*
Willis L. Moore, Chief of Bureau

The hurricane flags (two six-foot red flags with square black centers) are loaned by the Weather Bureau to Shipmasters who are willing to cooperate with the Bureau in the dissemination of hurricane warnings, and whose vessels pass within sight of coasts and islands beyond the reach of ordinary methods of transmission of these warnings.

--Titusville Star Advocate, August 1895

In the latter portion of the 19th century, Floridians and navigators along the Florida coast were aided by the hurricane warning flag system of the U. S. Signal Service. It was in 1871 that the Signal Service was also charged with recording of data on weather phenomena. Since that date, the historical information we have available on hurricanes and other storms that hit the U. S. is reliable from that date forward.

The system of warning flags included both land and sea-based display. The quote from the *Titusville Star-Advocate* above shows how ships' captains were required to participate in the warnings. Both sailors and shoreline residents were dependent on the displays of passing ships.

On land, hurricane signal flags were flown at all principal ports on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, on the Great Lakes and at numerous small harbors in those regions. In addition, they were displayed on light-ships that were moored in places where navigation was dangerous. Light-ships typically bore lights, foghorns, sirens and so on, to warn or guide pilots. Hurricane flags were used on the Cross Rip light-ships in

Nantucket Sound, Sandy Hook, New York and off the North Carolina coast.

Shipmasters were instructed to hoist their own flags whenever they saw the hurricane signal flags at any of these points. They were then to seek information as to a storm's location and probable duration from the nearest Weather Bureau office. The Bureau would tell them how long their signal flags should remain up. As a rule, the flags would be lowered within twenty-four hours from the time of hoisting. Vessels within sight of the Florida reefs were instructed to be particularly watchful in this region during hurricane season. The Jupiter or Sand Key



lights were especially important places for passing ships to check for hurricane flags.

The storm warning flag system includes the following insignia: one red triangular pennant--small craft warning, 38mph winds; two red pennants--gale warning, 39-54 mph winds; one red flag with black center--storm warning, 55-73 mph; and, finally, two red flags with black centers--hurricane warning, 74+ mph winds.

The photo above of the flags was taken in 1964 during Hurricane Cleo. Cleo followed a typical path through the West Indies, across Cuba and along the east coast of Florida. The eye came ashore at Key Biscayne, continued north through Brevard County, then veered slightly offshore, following the coastline. The eye came inland again, passed over Savannah, Georgia, and moved into South Carolina.

HURRICANES IN THE INDIAN RIVER REGION

KAREN RALEY AND BOB GROSS

Hurricanes, often called gales, cyclones, tropical storms, and three-day storms, have been reported in the earliest accounts of Florida's history. European explorers often suffered from the destruction of their ships in such storms. It was a hurricane that marooned Jonathan Dickinson in the Indian River area in 1697. Dickinson left us with an account of his travels through the region, including his encounters with the Ais Indians, who were gone from Brevard by about 1780.

The 18th-century hurricane that is best known in the area of the Indian River occurred in 1715. The storm sunk the Spanish treasure fleet off the coast between St. Lucie and Cape Canaveral, thus providing Indian River County with its nickname of the "Treasure Coast." Both Spanish and modern-day salvage operations have recovered some of the precious Spanish cargo, and relics are on display in the McLarty Museum south of Sebastian Inlet.

During the 1780s, some of the worst hurricanes of the century struck Florida, destroying settlements, driving off settlers, sinking navies, and even contributing to the outcome of the Revolutionary War. Hurricanes effected settlers, agriculture, transportation, and the Indian River lagoon itself. An 1845 storm created Gilbert's Bar near the St. Lucie River. The inlet was closed by another hurricane two years later. The January 1, 1886 issue of the *Florida Star* cited storms in 1876, 1878, and 1880 that decreased the salinity of the Indian River lagoon. An 1893 hurricane apparently destroyed all the docks on the Indian River. The tent colony built by workers who were extending Henry Flagler's railroad south from Eau Gallie to Ft. Pierce was blown away.

Hurricanes were frequent and disastrous for the Indian River area during the 1870s and 1880s. Barbara Ann Faber, who moved to Brevard in 1867, recalled the worst storm in her memory, which took place in 1871 and passed over Cocoa Beach. Quoted in the *Florida Star* in August of 1877, she recounts: "First it blew down the cabin so my husband and I and the children went to the chicken house. Then when it

blew down, we crouched behind the big oak trees on the place for a day and a night, but we didn't get hurt." That September, the *Florida Star* reported an "Equinoctial Storm" that hit on the 7th and damaged the northern part of Brevard County, flooding creeks and roads, downing fruit, and wrecking boats. The hurricanes of 1873 and 1876 passed over Melbourne, and one or two huge storms raged from Cocoa Beach to Palm Beach in 1880. In August of 1885, another hurricane cut a swath through the area of Cocoa Beach, wiping the original settlement off the peninsula. Local lore holds that the devastated inhabitants were blacks who never returned to rebuild beachside.

Hurricane activity in the Indian River region intensified in the 1920s after the Florida Land Boom was well underway. A 1921 storm had created temporary havoc in Tampa, and Flagler continued to experience occasional setbacks in rail expansion. Yet these storms failed to halt the upward spiral of real estate speculation. A shaky economic structure underlay the frenzy of business, with a small group of men controlling politics, finance, and land development in the state. When the disastrous hurricanes of 1926 and 1928 struck Florida, they would be blamed for ending the Land Boom. Actually, the Bust was well on its way before the storms came.

In 1926 and 1928, hurricanes that hit the Indian River region were followed by devastating and deadly ones that created ruin in South Florida. In June of 1926, a tidal wave rolled into Merritt Island. In September, a massive and deadly storm that was the worst recorded at that time, struck Miami. Wielding 150 mph winds, it left a trail of shocking destruction. Crossing the state, the storm flooded Moore Haven and drowned as many as 300 people. Then, in 1928, a hurricane struck the Indian River region in August, presaging the horrible events to come in September from which Brevard County would be spared.

The *Melbourne Times-Journal* reports in August, 1928, that a hurricane hit Ft. Pierce, damaging Stuart and Vero Beach as well, and leaving debris from Palm Beach to Melbourne. Melbourne's response was typical and systematic: Legionnaires, firemen, and policemen patrolled the streets, nailing boards across broken or straining window

glass, tying up awnings, checking the barometer in the window of Stewart's Hardware, and guarding against petty thievery. Roofing materials were afloat everywhere, and damage occurred from airborne debris, flapping doors, and the like. Fruit was blown from trees, reducing a would-be bumper crop to that of an ordinary year's yield.

When the deadly September hurricane came, unscathed Melbourne and Eau Gallie sent workers, boats, medicine, food, clothing, bedding, and other supplies to the afflicted Palm Beach and Belle Glade areas. Men returned with stories of flooding, total destruction, and mass graves. Disaster struck next with the great storm that lay waste to Miami on Labor Day of 1935. Brevard was spared.

In 1949, after over 20 years of relative calm, the Indian River region was struck again. The storm damaged Palm Beach, Jupiter and Stuart, where the roof of the City Hall exploded into pieces and was driven through the air. In one part of town, houses were blown into each other. There was also heavy loss to the crop of Indian River fruit.

Named hurricanes to hit our area begin with Donna in 1960. Donna blew across Florida, creating serious damage on both coasts and in the Keys. Brevard County suffered damages as well with Cleo in 1964 and David in 1979. Some parts of the area saw the highest water in living memory after Erin in 1995. In 1999, Floyd veered away from Florida but removed much of the protective sandbar just offshore. Later that season, Irene washed away much of the county's beach. Replenishment projects have temporarily replaced some of the sand.

In 1992 Andrew, the most destructive storm in U. S. history, created a revision in Florida's preparedness planning, building codes, insurance coverage, and emergency systems. Andrew's long-range impact has been profound. Hurricanes are a fact of life for Floridians, and we continue to anticipate and cope with the special problems they bring.

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TITUSVILLE AND THE HURRICANES OF 1893 AND 1894

JIM BALL

September and October often witness the most violent storms of the Atlantic hurricane season. Thanks to the many launches of weather satellites from our own space coast over the past four decades, the science of storm tracking and forecasting has improved greatly. But in the developing Brevard County frontier communities of the late 1800s, our area's early settlers had far less warning of approaching disaster.

Titusville's experience with passing hurricanes in October 1893 and September 1894 illustrates the primitive condition of storm predictions of those times, and reveals how the community learned of and survived these events.

A local weather bureau office was established in Titusville about 1886 and was, at the time of these two storms, staffed by weather service officer J.E. Lanouette. He was said to be "a close and accurate observer; thoroughly informed as to all the minutiae of his work and possessing admirable clearness of judgement."

It was Mr. Lanouette who received the first telegraphic warning of a severe "cyclonic disturbance" south of Cuba on a Tuesday morning in October 1893. He posted the bulletin warning of approaching gales in the Titusville post office and signaled the alert throughout the county. The barometer fell rapidly Wednesday morning as "the old settlers who had gale experience put on a knowing look and awaited developments."

By that evening, the howling winds built to a steady blow of 60 miles per hour as measured by the anemometer atop the cupola of the Indian River Hotel before the instrument was blown away. It was estimated that hurricane force winds of 80 miles an hour buffeted

the town along with driving rain through the night. In the morning, Lanouette ventured out to install another anemometer on the mount fixed to the hotel's roof, only to have that instrument also blown away in the persisting gusts. He had the clearness of judgment not to try again.

On Friday, residents agreed it was the worst storm they had experienced in a decade. Telegraph and electric light lines were down everywhere. No loss of life was reported but damage was extensive. The news reaching Titusville from City Point was that the orange crop had been stripped from the trees, the steamer Romona was wrecked at Eau Gallie, and it was reported from Rockledge that the roof of the Hotel Indian River had been carried away by the winds.

In Titusville, a number of homes and commercial establishments had lost roofs or suffered other substantial damage. Nearly every roof in town had leaked under the deluge of more than eight inches of rainfall. Fences, chimneys, wind mills, and signs were toppled. "Boats as far out as the end of the railway wharf were aground," wrote a witness to the storm's aftermath. "The water having been blown south, it was a novel sight to see men and boys walking where the river was a day before, picking up large quantities of fish that were floundering around trying to find sufficient water to swim in."

Less than a year later, in September 1894, Titusville and the other communities of Brevard braced for another blow, with Mr. Lanouette telegraphing the warning. For those places without telegraphic equipment, Lanouette sent the storm warning by mail. The 1894 storm was less severe but it left considerable damage in its wake, especially to Titusville's maritime interests. Winds averaged 60 miles per hour for an 18-hour period, and nearly eight inches of rain fell.

Steamboat captains had to scuttle the steamer *Cleo* to prevent the vessel from being smashed against the railroad wharf by heavy winds

and seas. Several sloops and schooners were washed ashore or heavily damaged from colliding with the town's wharves. Boat-building shops along the shoreline were submerged. Washington Avenue and other downtown streets were badly flooded.

The *Indian River Advocate* provided a brief account of one resident's attempt to deal with the storm's impact. "In consequence of the large amount of water standing around Dr. Screven's residence since the storm, he came to the conclusion that he would fill in his lot with sand and grade it to the level of the road. After carting several cartloads of sand to the lot, he found the experiment too expensive, as the sand had to be hauled too long a distance, so he decided to give up his intended project of filling in. His house is still surrounded with water."

Source: *Indian River Advocate*, Oct. 13, 1893 and Sept. 28, 1894.



The weather is a concern for farmers. Grove owners' crops could be ruined by a freeze or a storm. This picture shows Florida citrus on the ground, blown off the trees by a September hurricane in the early 1900s.

THE CENTRAL BREVARD MOSQUITO BEATERS

ADA PARRISH

A mosquito beater is a handmade implement fashioned from the palmetto frond, bound together much like a large feather duster with a handle at one end with a hook on it. The other end was left loose and used to swat mosquitoes from one's clothing before entering a home. Mosquito beaters were very popular before mosquito control planes and trucks patrolled the area. Most households kept mosquito beaters hanging by each exterior door to brush off the little pests before entering.

The evolution of the Central Brevard Mosquito Beaters began with a group of "old-timers" who had just attended the funeral of one of their departed friends who lamented the fact that the only time they saw each other was at funerals! George "Speedy" Harrell and a few friends took the ball and ran with it by making arrangements for an informal gathering to be held at Kiwanis Hall on May 6th, 1986.

The get-together was a great success leading to the formation of a loosely-structured group which eventually came to be called the Mosquito Beaters. To this day there are no bylaws, dues, or programs. There is a volunteer steering committee which meets twice yearly to keep things moving along. Speedy has been elected to chair this group since its inception. Volamae (Roberts) Brinkley served as secretary until Lois (Dixon) Gray took over. Dora Ann Thompson guarded the treasury until Kay (Wylie) Nix relieved her. Speedy was quoted by a local newspaper as saying "Nothing's gone wrong...because we don't plan anything."

Today Mosquito Beaters is a weekend affair, beginning on the second Friday night in March with a party which was originally hosted by Dora Ann Thompson at her home. Attendance soon forced the event to be moved to the Garden Club in Rockledge and still later to the Cocoa Civic Center. In the 1990s, alumni of the local high schools have been scheduling their class reunions to coincide with Mosquito

Beaters instead of the traditional summer reunions. Local Mosquito Beaters bring snacks and finger foods. Refreshments and cash bar are provided.

The Saturday get-togethers have been held at the National Guard Armory in Cocoa. In 2003, the Armory was not available, so the event was held in the all-purpose building on Kiwanis Island. Activities for the day included chatting with old friends and making new ones while sipping complementary coffee and orange juice provided by local fruit growers and stands. There's reminiscing and an "awful lot of huggin' goin' on"! A catered lunch is available if desired.

For many, the highlight of the weekend is the unveiling of the Memory Book for the year. Volunteers contribute stories and pictures from yesteryear. Some Memory Books include quizzes about how things "used to be," favorite recipes, school class pictures, sketches about unforgettable characters of the area, pages copied from old telephone books, poems and other printable memorabilia. The first book was published in 1986. It was put together by Speedy, Volamae, and Wanda (Harrell) Speir. Next, Bobby and Josie (Skipper) Cowart took over the editor's chair, followed by Kay



A group of Cocoa friends gather at the first Mosquito Beaters reunion in 1986. From left to right: Doyle Carlton, Peggy Ergle, Roger Dobson, Jim Ergle, Marilyn Dobson and Dave Nesbit.

(Ingram) Bartberger, Gayle (Huntington) Harris and Frankie (Abels) Potts. Current editors are Gene and Norma Jean (Leighty) Baird. The book publication is funded by donations.

Not only is the Memory Book prized by the Mosquito Beaters, but one of the reference librarians at the Central Brevard Library called it her number one reference for local history. A complete file is maintained there as well as in the Alma Clyde Field Library of Florida History where the Mosquito Beaters maintains office space.

Mosquito Beaters was originally aimed at people who were living in the area by 1950 (the beginning of the Space Age) but later the doors were opened to welcome anyone who is interested in local history, meeting old friends, or making new ones. Speedy says if you are interested, you are a Mosquito Beater! The 2003 mailing list contains 2,451 names, roughly half being "Mr. and Mrs." entries. It can be safely said that there are between three and four thousand Mosquito Beaters living in all fifty states and seven foreign countries.



A group of happy Mosquito Beaters smiles for the camera at the 2003 gathering. From left to right are: Joan Woods Gattings, John Anderson, Pat (Blackman) Gandolfi, and Mary Anderson.

GEORGE "SPEEDY" HARRELL: A PROFILE IN LOCAL HISTORY ACTIVISM

KAREN RALEY

George "Speedy" Harrell, organizer and president of the Mosquito Beaters, the Space Coast Post Card Club, and volunteer at the Florida Historical Society, smiles when he tells the story of how the Mosquito Beaters originated. It was 1986 and Speedy wondered if anyone would be interested in planning a get-together of old friends. His idea was to create a "gathering of people that maybe knew Mike Froh, bought candy from Jarvis Store, lumber from Fortenberry Sawmill, or knew directions to Abney and Abney store, Hart's Blacksmith," and so on, as his initial letter to potential attendees stated. That first meeting drew about 100 people. As Speedy sat upon a countertop to conduct the proceedings, he held a mosquito beater in his hand. John Bennett suggested it be the group's name; the newly-elected treasurer, Dora Ann Thompson, opened a bank account for the "Mosquito Beaters."

Harrell was a natural to lead the effort to bring pre-1950 Central Brevard residents together. He surely knew the territory--after all, Speedy worked over 30 years for the U. S. Post Office in this area. His family arrived here when his grandfather, William Henry Harrell, came to Brevard in the early 1900s and began work at the Sunset groves on Merritt Island. Harrell's father worked for various grove owners. Later on, he contracted grove care and land clearing. Young Speedy Harrell was graduated from Cocoa High in 1945, was drafted and sent to Germany with the occupation until 1947. Beginning work with the Cocoa Post Office in 1948 as Christmas help, Speedy later became a route carrier, clerk, and finally the superintendent of the Patrick Air Force Base Branch.

Today his office is in the basement of the old post office on Brevard Avenue, now the Alma Clyde Field Library of the Florida Historical Society. Harrell, as President of the Mosquito Beaters, maintains the organization's archives--memory books, collections of photographs



George "Speedy" Harrell holds his mosquito beater and poses in front of one of the many displays on local history at the Alma Clyde Field Historical Library. The Mosquito Beaters maintains an office at the Florida Historical Society facility.

and old school yearbooks dating back to 1920, documents, and artifacts. But Harrell is not only involved with the Mosquito Beaters. A born organizer and community servant, he has also coached girls' softball and helped organize a knife collectors' club. In 2000, he founded the Space Coast Post Card Club and has served as its president ever since. Finally, he keeps a regular schedule with the other dedicated volunteers at the Historical Library.



A bigger-than ever crowd of Mosquito Beaters responded to the call for a get-together in 2003. Above, a few of the reunion participants visit, mull over Memory Books, scan displays, eat, and have a great time.

THE HURRICANE OF 1910 IN TITUSVILLE

ROZ FOSTER

On Monday, Oct. 17, 1910, beating rain and terrific winds howled through the night and into the next afternoon, forcing rain through the smallest of crevices and leaving not a dry house in Titusville. While there was little damage to property in town, high water and big waves along the west shore of the Indian River made the Indian River rise several feet. Crushing waves washed away the wharves and boats, leaving them piled up along the shoreline. So many launches were put out of commission that river transportation in the Indian River was brought to a halt. The old yacht club house and city wharf "went board by board," with the latter to be rebuilt from its scattered remains.

The winds were so strong that oranges and grapefruit were blown off trees, windmills blew over, windows were smashed, and fishermen lost their nets and boats. If it hadn't been for the quick work of a Mr. Medina and "a force of colored men," the metal roofs of the C. J. Denham and Banner Drug stores would have been blown off also. Heavy rains also caused so many washouts along the F. E. C. Railway tracks that the train schedule was disrupted. Bad washouts occurred on the riverside track north of Titusville and between Palm Beach and Jupiter. The Titusville newspaper reported: "Conditions could have been much worse. Such a severe storm has not been seen in Titusville for a great many years, and we are very thankful it was no worse. Not one person was drowned or killed owing to the storm; but our people have been telling their experiences through the hurricane." The article went on to mention that "certain parties" who had not lost anything in the storm were gathering the scattered lumber from the storm and selling it for a good price. Several of the townspeople brought this matter to the attention of both town and county authorities, prompting the sheriff to give warning "to stop or be arrested."

Source: The *Titusville Advocate*, Oct. 21, 1910.

MYSTERY PHOTOS

Can you identify these locations? See how good you are at spotting these historic Brevard views. Answers are at the bottom of page 28.

**MIMS - SANFORD HIGHWAY COMPLETED
IN THE 1930S****ROZ FOSTER**

The Mims-Sanford Road had a ferry crossing of the St. Johns River approximately ten miles west of the town of Mims. Although traffic on this road was light in the 1930s, the ferry had provided area residents with the necessary means to cross the St. Johns for many years.

In the spring of 1934, the State Road Department announced plans to replace the ferry with a bridge. By that time, funding had already been appropriated to replace the center span of a wooden bridge near Sanford with a new concrete structure. Sanford's old wooden center span was moved to Mims and erected at the ferry crossing west of Mims.

This "recycled" wooden bridge became part of the new Mims-Sanford Highway. Beginning at the Dixie Highway (U.S. Hwy. 1) in Mims, it led west over the St. John's River, connected with roads in Orange and Seminole counties, and thus provided a shortcut from the city of Sanford to the east coast of the state. Construction of this new road grade from Mims to the St. John's River took two years to complete. Labor was provided by a convict work crew, supervised by the engineer in charge, Mr. A. L. Wright of the State Road Department.

Upon completion of the Mims-Sanford road, Wright relocated his convict work crew to Fellsmere. There, they began a project which consisted of 29 miles of road grade building that extended across the St. Johns marshes from Fellsmere to Kenansville. Today, one of our most scenic drives is over the St. John's River plains to Sanford on Highway 46.

Source: articles in the *Titusville Star-Advocate*, March and April, 1934.

STOP, LOOK, AND LISTEN!**ED VOSATKA**

In 1913, Melbourne residents living on Crane Creek in 1913 became “exceedingly annoyed” with F. E. C.’s “fierce whistling” crossing the trestle, citing the morning and noon northbound trains as the worst offenders. Those living some distance upstream “suffer as well because the sound carries fine on water.”¹

In December of 1924, Melbourne Mayor A. A. Ultcht wrote to his City Council:²

On April 17th, 1923, I sent in a communication to your honorable board complaining of the unnecessary noise, of blowing of whistles, shunting of trains all night here in the heart of our city....I recommended to your Council to adopt an ordinance to govern the East Coast Railway from blowing whistles, shunting cars, and blowing off of exhaust.

People accepted that “a certain amount of whistling is very necessary, but some engineers seem to take a delight whistling all the way through town.”³ One seriously ill Cocoa resident counted 107 nighttime blasts from one freight engineer passing through the city.⁴

Did Cocoa really have 27 crossings (requiring two long and two short blasts each) or was that engineer actually a little heavy handed? At that time, the main line ran along Florida, Forrest and Brunson. The freight station was on the upper level of the Cocoa Village parking lot between Oleander and Stone. The passenger station was on the west side of Forrest Ave. between Peachtree and Center.⁵

Sometime during the mid- to late-20s, F. E. C. responded to such whistle complaints by outfitting an engine with a couple of dozen whistles, in all different shapes, sizes and tones. She whistled her way up and down the line so people could hear and vote for the whistle they liked best. The winner, perhaps in tribute to a bygone era, was the low, deep-toned whistle of a steamboat.⁶

Even though locomotives were large, made a lot of noise, sent up considerable smoke, rang a bell and blew a whistle when approaching a crossing, motorists who survived an accident usually said they did not see the train. Yet “...it is a hard thing for a train to get behind a bush, or lie in wait only to pounce down on its victims at such places.” Motorists who didn’t slow down to see if the track was clear often discovered “...trains have that peculiarity of appearing where they were not a moment before.”⁷

Florida’s rapidly growing population was brought increased traffic on both the railroads and the highways. Around 1918, the Florida Railroad Commission began adding a column for “automobiles and wagons struck” to their annual accident reports.⁸ In 1921, the Commission reported: “There is no State authority at present having jurisdiction or power to regulate these matters.”⁹

The Florida State Chamber of Commerce suggested in 1926 that, in the interest of safety, motorists stop 100 feet from a crossing when a moving train was in sight.¹⁰ Finally on Oct 1, 1927, following “a rather heated fight in the lawmaking body,” the Florida “Stop, Look and Listen” law went into effect.^{11, 12}

1. *Melbourne Times*, July 16, 1913.

2. “A. A. Ultcht Makes Fine Report to Old City Council,” *Melbourne Times*, December 10, 1924, p. 6.

3. “Too Much Whistling,” *Melbourne Times*, February 23, 1921, p. 1.

4. “Unnecessary Noise,” *Cocoa Tribune*, April 6, 1922.

5. *Map of Cocoa, including Rockledge*. (New York: Sanborn Map Co., May, 1924)

6. D.B. McKay, ed., *Pioneer Florida* (Tampa: Southern Publishing, 1959), p. 283.

7. “Bad Manners at Crossings,” *Melbourne Times*, from *Palm Beach Post*, June 25, 1924.

8. “Wrecks and Accidents Report,” *Twenty-third Annual Report*, (Tallahassee: Florida Railroad Commission, February 29, 1920, p. 308)

9. “Grade Crossings,” *Twenty-fourth Annual Report* (Tallahassee: Florida Railroad Commission, March 1, 1921)

10. “Stop 100 Feet from Railroads and Will be Safe,” *Cocoa Tribune*, September 21, 1926.

11. “Florida Drivers Must Now ‘Stop, Look and Listen’ at R.R. Crossings,” *Cocoa Tribune*, June 14, 1927.

12. “Stop--Look and Listen Law Effective on October 1st,” *Cocoa Tribune*, September 27, 1927.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Hester Wagner Community House, Melbourne Village

Work has been completed on the renovation of the Melbourne Village Community House. The building is a former barracks from the Banana River Naval Air Station, now Patrick AFB. It was barged down the Indian River and moved overland to its present site. There will be a Grand Opening of the Community House in the near future. Call the Town of Melbourne Village at 723-8300 for more information.

Cape Canaveral Lighthouse Tour

Carol Andren of the South Brevard Historical Society has been working with Dave Paterno of the Historical Commission to provide the public with a commentated bus and museum tour of the historic Cape Canaveral lighthouse and grounds. Participants will meet at the Walmart parking lot at the intersection of A1A and Eau Gallie Blvd. by **8 AM on October 24th**. Return will be at 2 PM. The tour is \$20 a person and includes lunch. Call Carol Andren at 725-4115 for more information. Space is limited and registration closes Oct. 21.

Space Coast Post Card Club Vintage Post Card Show

The Space Coast Post Card Club will be giving its second annual post card show at the newly remodeled Cocoa Civic Center in Cocoa Village from **10 AM to 5 PM, Saturday, November 8**. A selection of historic view and other postcards, collectible ephemera, and other memorabilia will be on display. Many dealers will be selling items.

The Brevard Heritage Council

Rockledge Historic Homes Walking Tour

The Heritage Council has redirected their efforts this year into more preservation activities and will not be giving an annual holiday walking tour. However, some members of the Council are planning a walking tour of historic Rockledge homes along Barton Avenue. For more information, contact Amber Forrest at 321-690-1820.

The identification of the Mystery Photo IDs is as follows. Top Left--Haulover Canal, late 1800s; Top Right--Dr. Hughlett's House, c. 1905, Cocoa; Center--Rodeo Parade, New Haven Ave., Melbourne, 1940s; Bottom--9th St. (now Eau Gallie Blvd.) looking East, Eau Gallie, 1920s.

HISTORICAL ORGANIZATIONS:

African American Preservation League, Helen Williams, President, 321/638-3805. Meets at Field Library 7pm, 1st and 3rd Tuesdays

American Police Hall of Fame & Museum, 6350 Horizon Dr., Titusville, FL 32780

Alma Clyde Field Historical Library (Florida Historical Society Library), 435 Brevard Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922

Brevard Cultural Alliance, Kay Burk, President, 2725 Judge Fran Jamieson Way, Building B, Room 104, Viera, FL 32940

Brevard Geneological Society, Jacque Rubins, President, P. O. Box 1123, Cocoa, FL 32922-1123

Brevard Heritage Council, c/o Alma Clyde Field Historical Library, 435 Brevard Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922

Brevard Museum of History and Natural Science, 2201 Michigan Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922

Canaveral Lighthouse Foundation, Chris Lahnertz, President, 15 Azalea Avenue, Satellite Beach FL 32937

Florida Historical Society, Nick Wynne, Executive Director, 1320 Highland Ave., Melbourne, FL 32935

Geneological Society of North Brevard, Randy Hill, President, P. O. Box 897, Titusville, FL 32781-0879

Grant Historical Society, Ruby Lord, President, P. O. Box 44, Grant, FL 32949

Indian River Anthropological Society, Tom Pender, President, 3365 Heather Dr., Titusville, FL 32796

Liberty Bell Memorial Museum, Rachel Felton, Curator, 1601 Oak Street, Melbourne FL 32901

The Mosquito Beaters, George "Speedy" Harrell, President, 435 Brevard Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922

National Railway Historical Society, Florida East Coast Chapter, Chuck Billings, President, PO Box 2034, Cocoa, FL 32923-2034

North Brevard Historical Society, 301 S. Washington Ave., Titusville, FL 32780

Preservation & Education Trust, Incorporated, Carol Pope, P. O. Box 560823, Rockledge. FL 32956-0823

Rockledge Heritage Foundation, Amanda Mitskevich, 27 Barton Avenue, Rockledge, FL 32955

South Brevard Historical Society, Betty Preece, President, P. O. Box 1064, Melbourne, FL 32902-1064

Williams Building Committee, Ann Downing, Secretary, Old Town Hall Historic Center, 2373 Oak St, Melbourne Beach, FL 32951

**THE
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Brevard County Historical Commission
801 Dixon Blvd., Suite 1110
Cocoa, Florida, 32922.