

# THE HISTORIAN

## The Newsletter of THE BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Serving Boynton Beach, Ocean Ridge, Manalapan, Gulf Stream, Lantana, Hypoluxo, the Village of Golf, Briny Breezes and all areas of West Boynton to US Hwy 441  
Post Office Box 12 Boynton Beach FL 33425-0012

Voncile Smith, President

Volume 2005, No. 3, March, 2005

Voncile Smith, Editor

## EARLY SETTLER/SEMINOLE LIFE TOPIC FOR MARCH

The speaker for **March 14, 2005** for the Boynton Beach Historical Society will be **James "Jimmy" Hancock**. The meeting will be at **7:00 p.m. at the Boynton Woman's Club**, 1010 South Federal Highway.

Part of Mr. Hancock's family moved into Florida during the first half of the nineteenth century to raise cattle in the central part of the state. Another part represents a Seminole heritage. He will describe early pioneer life for cattle ranchers and will include information on the plight and progress of the Seminoles who had come into Florida and continued to remain as the state has moved into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mr. Hancock has spoken on these topics to various groups throughout the area and will present a most interesting discussion.

We will hold a short business meeting before the program to nominate and elect officers and directors for 2005-06.

**The program is FREE and open to the public.** For further information call Voncile 734-5653.

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### PROGRAMS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL AND MAY

The Society is fortunate to be able to schedule one of the wonderful programs sponsored by **The Florida Humanities Council** for the **April 11, 2005** meeting. **Bill Belleville** an award-winning writer and documentary film maker, specializing in environmental issues and how a 'sense of place' helps shape local culture, will present "**Rivers of Florida.**" Mr. Belleville has published more than 1,000 articles, co-produced and scripted three PBS documentaries and served as a writer on Discovery Channel oceanographic expeditions. He has lectured at various colleges and universities and writers' conferences. This program will be at the **Boynton Beach City Library** at **6:30** and is co-sponsored by the **Friends of the Boynton Beach City Library**.

The May meeting will be a covered-dish dinner scheduled for **Sunday, May 15 at 5:00** at the **Woman's Club** held in conjunction with the Mizner Foundation. The speaker will be **Rod Smith**, a legislator from the Gainesville area, who happened to grow up and attend school in Boynton Beach. He will speak about agriculture and the environment.

### CHURCH TO CELEBRATE CENTENNIAL

The First United Methodist Church of Boynton Beach will celebrate its 100 year anniversary this year. A Centennial Committee has been planning events for the past 14 months to mark the occasion. These are scheduled for the end of October and will extend through several weekends.

The Editor of *The Historian* is chairing a sub-committee charged with preparing a 100 year history to be published for the event. If any reader has a particular recollection, pictures or publications concerning the Church, I would be most grateful if you would contact me about it.

I have found there is very little information about the histories of the various churches in the area and the role they have played in the development of the community in the archives of either the Boynton Beach Historical Society or the Historical Society of Palm Beach County. Gathering information on all the churches in the city is one activity the Boynton Beach Historical Society hopes to implement.

**BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS—2004-05**

**OFFICERS**

President  
1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, Programs  
2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, Membership  
Recording Secretary  
Corresponding Secretary  
Treasurer

**DIRECTORS**

2005  
2005  
2006  
2006  
2007  
2007

**TRUSTEES**

2005	Harvey Oyer, Jr.
2005	Stanley Weaver
2006	Virginia Farace
2006	Jay Rowley
2007	Janet DeVries
2007	Marion Weems

Nancy Murray Lacy  
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Rosalie Avaroe Morrissey  
Alice M. Otis  
Harvey E. Oyer, III  
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Eleanor Murray Sala  
Jean Ann Thurber  
J. H. "Gym" Weeks  
Marion Weaver Clark Wester

Claire Weems  
Voncile Smith  
Harvey Oyer, Jr.  
Betty Thomas  
Gloria Gregory  
Sue Beaman  
Lucile Dickinson  
Fain Weems

**Thank You!** To all who have joined the Boynton Beach Historical Society for 2005, not only those of you listed above, but those whose names have appeared in earlier issues! Other members will be listed in the issue following receipt of their dues.

If you are not already a member, won't you please consider joining? For further information call 561-734-5653 (Voncile) or 561-735-3900 (Fain or Claire). Make your checks payable to Boynton Beach Historical Society, and mail them to P. O. Box 12, Boynton Beach, FL 33425-0012.

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**MEMBERS WHO HAVE RENEWED OR  
JOINED FOR 2005**

[This information is about members whose dues were received between February 1 and February 28, 2005. Members who paid dues prior to February were reported in the January and February issues of *The Historian*.]

**PATRON**

Donald N. and Ruth A. Besecker  
Bob and Linda Brown  
Ralph E. Myers  
Dorian Beck Trauger  
C. Stanley and Erma Weaver

**FAMILY**

James R. and Marjorie L. Bynum  
William and Nancy S. Earnhart  
Martin J. and Irene Feeney  
William G. and Erma Obemayr James  
Ward C. and Martha P. Parker  
Buddy and Evelyn Ward Stuart  
George and Mildred Traylor Tarasco  
Philip B. and Barbara S. Traylor  
Bill R. and Elsie A. Winchester  
Robert and Lillian Zimmermann

**INDIVIDUAL**

Helen J. Avery  
Barbara H. Bonin  
Cleo S. Bowers  
Callie Rousseau Brown  
Beverly H. Cormany  
Gillian Davis  
Ramona S. Davis  
May Foy Dillon  
Frances Haenny  
Phyllis A. Hammett  
Mary B. Kaleel  
Gladys Baker Knuth

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**FILLING IN THE PICTURE—**

**OUR MEMBERS SHARING BOYNTON'S HISTORY**

Almost everyone who joins the Boynton Beach Historical Society has some connection with or special interest in the City of Boynton Beach. Several of you have been generous enough to write to share your ties with us. From time to time, *The Historian* will include information from your letters to help present a fuller picture of our history. We are indebted to member **Cleo S. Bowers** for the following:

"My husband **Wilbur** and I came to live in Boynton Beach in 1955. We were not really pioneers, but the population of Boynton Beach at that time was about 2,500 so we are among the first residents. We so much appreciate the **Children's Museum**. Wilbur passed away in 2001, but both of us were very interested in preserving the 1927 High School building – all three of our children attended classes in both school buildings.

"We also were members of **First Baptist Church** all these years. I was on staff there for 30 years. Although we have recently dedicated our new building, the architects examined the old buildings and found them sound. Since the old sanctuary was erected in the 40s, it is possible that it could be on the Historical list for our city."

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**HISTORY IS PEOPLE AND THEIR LIVES –  
WON'T YOU SHARE SOME OF WHO YOU ARE?**

If you have been reading *The Historian*, you probably have some additional knowledge or information about Boynton and vicinity. Even if it is a very simple recollection or little story, it may have special meaning for others. Why not write it down, or simply call Voncile (561-734-5653) or Harvey Oyer (561-732-9305, Ex. 204) and tell us about it. Photographs, Letters, and other memorabilia are welcome. Share history with us. We cannot collect information on some important happenings without your help.



1927 Boynton High School (photographed in early 1930s)  
(Photo courtesy Sue Murphy Beaman)

# SAVED!

On March 1, 2005, the Boynton Beach City Commission voted 4-1 to support the restoration of the historic 1927 Boynton High School building. The Community Redevelopment Agency is to submit a draft proposal by the Commission's April, 2005 meeting indicating how the funds are to be raised and a general proposal about how the building is to be used. CRA Director **Doug Hutchinson** promised that the agency would pay \$2 million to help the renovation. An additional \$5.2 million is expected to come from state and local grants which should include a \$1.5 million operating endowment.

The CRA is expected to contract with the non-profit Boynton Cultural Center which runs the 1913 Schoolhouse Children's Museum. The Cultural Center expects to expand facilities for the Children's Museum into the building. Other possibilities are presenting traveling exhibits, lectures, art activities and other cultural undertakings. A retail operation such as a café is also a possibility.

The City has owned the building for over 15 years and has let it sit vacant and lacking in maintenance during that time. The city staff has repeatedly urged its demolition in order to use the space for a parking lot. The architect who worked on refurbishing the 1913 Schoolhouse designed outhouse-looking structures which have been placed in front of that building to partly obscure the 1927 building. The Historical Society has objected to these intrusive structures before and after their installation.

The Historical Society has continually urged preservation of both buildings. Until three years ago, however, the City Commission had refused to assign authority for any work on the 1927 building to anyone. In 2001 when the threat of razing the building seemed imminent, the Historical Society began a petition drive urging the preservation and restoration of the building. We asked restoration architect **Rick Gonzalez** who had been involved in the restoration of City Place in West Palm Beach and **Hedrick Brothers Construction Company** to complete a conceptual design and feasibility cost study to the old building. They found the old building to be structurally sound, historically significant, and suitable for a proposed "Cultural Center." Both Mr. Gonzalez and **Attorney Mark Parry** appeared before the City Commission during that year urging restoration and preservation. The City voted to assign responsibility for investigating possibilities to the CRA at that time.

The CRA established an advisory committee which hired another team of architects, **Bender and Associates** from Key West, to make recommendations. Their findings essentially duplicated what Gonzalez and his associates had recommended. The City Commissioners were justifiably concerned about the presence of some asbestos in the structure, however, and agreed to have the offending substances removed and/or controlled. This required them to invest capital in the building, which they did.

By 2004 the **Cultural Center** had a preliminary proposal to submit to the City urging that responsibility for the building be assigned to them, especially since they have established a record for fund-raising capability and have so successfully developed and operated the Children's Museum. At that time the Board of Directors of the Historical Society voted to support the proposal for the Cultural Center to be given responsibility for the building. Just recently the president of the Historical Society wrote each Commissioner setting forth our support for the efforts of the Cultural Center and/or the CRA to be given responsibility for the building.

We are especially grateful to **Mayor Jerry Taylor** and **Commissioners Mack McCray, Carl McKoy, and Robert Ensler** for their foresight. We are grateful that the building is being saved, but more importantly, potentially it will provide an important cultural enhancement for the people of Boynton Beach and the surrounding area.

Also to be commended are Doug Hutchinson and the members of the CRA and the Board of Directors of the Cultural Center, Inc. for their interest and perseverance.

Boynton High School opened in 1927 in a new building just west of the concrete block elementary school which had opened in 1913. Before its construction, students had to travel to West Palm Beach and later to Lake Worth to attend high school. The new structure was used as a shelter during the 1928 hurricane, but part of the roof collapsed because of poor construction and the storm refugees had to seek shelter elsewhere. When it opened, Boynton High School was considered one of the finest in the county and its construction had been made possible partly through the efforts of **Fred Benson**, a Boynton resident who was a trustee and school board member. The first high school graduation was held in June, 1929 with just two graduates, **Mary Frances Hodges** and **Robert Leon Williamson**. In 1935, **Leslie Crane** was named principal and served until 1940 when **Clyde Harris** assumed the position. Harris was principal until 1943. During World War II, there were several temporary principals. **C.M. Redding** headed the school from 1945 until it closed as a high school in 1949.

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## CRACKER CATTLE AND HORSES

Cracker Cattle and Cracker Horses have played a major role in the development of Florida's agricultural industry.

Florida Cracker Cattle are considered Florida's equivalent to the Texas Longhorn. Both breeds descend from the original cattle imported into the Americas by the Spanish. The name Florida Cracker is of recent origin, however. Previously the cattle were referred to as Piney Woods, Florida Scrub, or Florida Native Cattle.

While similar in appearance to the Texas Longhorn, Florida Cracker cattle are smaller in size and do not have the extreme horn length as in the Texas Longhorn. Colors and hide patterning are very similar to the Longhorns. The mature weight is usually under 900 pounds. Their age of puberty is quite young, and even prior to weaning, the fertility is excellent. This trait, combined with the animal's ability to withstand heat, insects, and humidity of the Florida terrain have made them very well-adapted to low-input beef production.

The State of Florida has been involved in preservation programs for Florida Cracker Cattle since 1970. In 1989 the Florida Cracker Cattle Breeders Association was formed to promote their preservation, and over 400 animals were evaluated and registered to serve as foundation animals. (continued on Page 5.)

Florida Cracker Cattle



(Florida Cracker Cattle and Horses, continued)

Like the Cracker Cattle the Cracker Horses were introduced into what is present day Florida by the Spanish in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The genetic heritage of the Cracker Horse is from the Iberian Horse and includes blood of the North African Barb, Spanish Sorraia, Spanish Jennet and the Andalusian. Its genetic base is generally the same as the Spanish Mustang, Paso Fino, Peruvian Paso, and Criolla. The Cracker Horse roamed freely after the Spanish left and over time evolved through natural selection. It has been known by a variety of names, some of which are Chickasaw Pony, Seminole Pony, Marsh Tackie, Prairie Pony, Florida Horse, Florida Cow Pony, and Grass Gut.

It varies from 13.5 to 15 hands in height and weighs from 750 to over 900 pounds. It has unusual strength and endurance, herding instinct, quickness and fast walking gait. Many have a running walk and some have a single-foot gait, which, in true Cracker dialect, is referred to as a "Coon Rack." Their colors are any color common to the horse.

Fortunately for the breed, several Florida ranchers continued to breed Cracker Horses into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The breed's survival in large measure resulted from the work of a these few ranchers. They include the Ayers, Harvey, Bronson, Matchett, Partin, and Whaley names.

The Florida Cracker Horse Association was chartered in April, 1989 as a non-profit Florida

Corporation. Its purpose is the preservation and perpetuation of the Cracker Horse as a distinct and unique Colonial Spanish breed of horse.

During the Civil War, Florida was the leading supplier of beef for both Confederate and Union troops. The Spanish horses were highly valued for transportation because they could travel in Florida's rough conditions where other horses had failed. After the war ended, Florida became one of the first states to establish a viable economy through its pioneer families who were exporting cattle to Cuba. The cow men (never "cowboys") insisted in payment in gold coin, a good replacement for worthless Confederate dollars. During Reconstruction, millions of Spanish gold doubloons came into the Florida post war economy as a result of the cattle trade. Thousands of Cracker Cattle were shipped. In one 10-year period (1868-1878) 1.6 million head of cattle were shipped to Cuba, Nassau, and Key West. *At this time Florida was America's leading exporter!* This was of extreme importance to Florida's agricultural economy. Many of Florida's oldest and largest business began as cattle ranching operations.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, The Florida Cracker Cattle Association (FCCA) and the Florida Cracker Horse Association (FCHA) have been instrumental in saving both the Cracker Cattle and the Cracker Horse. (See [www.florida-agriculture.com/livestock/cracker\\_cattle.htm](http://www.florida-agriculture.com/livestock/cracker_cattle.htm) and [www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/cattle/florida\\_cracker/](http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/cattle/florida_cracker/))

## 2005 DUES NOW DUE!

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE

### BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Memberships are for the Calendar year. Check the appropriate line and return this form with the dues for that category to The Boynton Beach Historical Society, P. O. Box 12, Boynton Beach, FL 33425-0012

Individual Membership \$25.00\_\_\_\_ Family Membership \$35.00\_\_\_\_  
Corporate Membership \$ 100.00\_\_\_\_ Patron Membership \$50.00\_\_\_\_

Member's Name \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> Members Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address/Telephone/E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

If you would be willing to serve on a Committee for the Society, please check all that apply:

Public Relations \_\_\_\_\_ Educational \_\_\_\_\_ Membership \_\_\_\_\_ Minority History \_\_\_\_\_  
Refreshments \_\_\_\_\_ Archives/ Preservation \_\_\_\_\_ Fund Raising \_\_\_\_\_ Program \_\_\_\_\_

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