



The Historian

The Newsletter of the Boynton Beach Historical Society

Serving Boynton Beach, Ocean Ridge, Manalapan, Gulf Stream, Briny Breezes, Lantana, Hypoluxo, the Village of Golf and all areas of West Boynton, in addition to supporting the preservation of the history of Palm Beach County and the State of Florida as a whole.

2010 Number 2

February 2010

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY: BOYNTON BEACH & FLORIDA

In honor of Black History Month, on February 15, several members of the Boynton Beach Historical Society and other representatives from the City will discuss a little, self-published book by Br. Victor Norfus, *Boynton Beach & Florida; African American History*. Br. Norfus and Odessa Holt have worked together to complete the research. Several months ago *The Historian* included a list Victor had prepared of African Americans pioneers who resided in Boynton in 1918. Using this list as a starting point, Victor, Odessa, and Carole Mahoney will describe the contents of the book. Victor has invited a number of people whom he interviewed to the meeting to participate in the discussion afterward. Among these are his mother Dr. Martha Meeks Light, Edith Palmer, and Blanche Girtman.

The book is dedicated to the 1918 pioneers it discusses and to the Heritage Park Honorees of Boynton Beach. The Heritage Park Honorees listed below all had a significant impact in a particular area of service to the community whether it was social, religious, educational, or governmental.

Copies of the book will be available for \$10.00, and A CD related especially to the 1918 pioneers is \$5.00.

The Heritage Park Honorees are: William H. Miller, Blanche Hearst Girtman, Juanita Suttles Meeks, Samuel Lamar Wright, Rev. Randolph M. Lee, Clyde Harris, Leroy Harris, Jr., James Willis Butler.

All programs of the Boynton Beach Historical Society are free and open to the Public.



Victor Norfus

- WHAT:** Discussion and Book Review by Victor Norfus and others
- WHEN:** Monday, February 15, 6:30 p.m.
- WHERE:** Boynton Woman's Club, 1010 South Federal Hwy.

**BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS—2009-10**

OFFICERS

President	Voncile Smith
1 st Vice President, Programs	Janet DeVrie
2 nd Vice President, Membership	Bev Cormany
Recording Secretary	Virginia Farace
Corresponding Secretary	Carol Mahoney
Treasurer	Fran Tuite McKeral
Editor <i>The Historian</i>	Voncile Smith
Archivist and Webmaster	Janet DeVries

DIRECTORS

2010	Gloria Partin Turner
2010	Tim Bednarz
2011	Steve Anton
2011	Sally Dye
2012	Sheila Rousseau Taylor
2012	Delma Swilley

TRUSTEES

2010	Wendy Franklin
2010	Marion Weems
2011	Randall Gill
2011	Harvey Oyer, Jr
2012	Victor Norfus
2012	Dan Rousseau

The Boynton Beach Historical Society's website is boyntonbeachhistoricalsociety.org. You can contact us at our e-mail address boyntonhistory06@yahoo.com or mail inquiries or information to our mailbox at P.O. Box 12, Boynton Beach, FL 33425-0012.

The Historian is mailed eight times a year—September, October, November, January, February, March, April and May—to all members. No copies are produced in December, June, July and August.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS TO MEET

The Board of Directors of the Boynton Beach Historical Society will meet Monday, March 1, 2010, 6:30 p.m. at the Boynton Woman's Club. We did not have a quorum present for the February meeting, so any actions were postponed to the March meeting.

All meetings of the Board are open to any member in good standing. Members who attend are welcome to participate in the discussion, but only Board members may vote on an item. A notice of this meeting will be posted on our website.

ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULED FOR APRIL

According to the Bylaws of the Society, we must hold our Annual Meeting in April. The primary business of this meeting is the election and installation of new officers, directors, and trustees. If we are considering any amendments to the Bylaws, they are also discussed and voted on at the Annual Meeting. A Nominating Committee is

appointed in February, and the composition of that Committee will be announced at the February 15 Program Meeting. The names of the Nominating Committee members will be posted on the website by the time of the February meeting.

For the organization to continue functioning, we need members to volunteer to serve in office. All officers are elected annually. Directors and trustees serve for 3 year staggered terms. Thus, this year we will elect the president, 1st vice-president, 2nd vice-president, recording secretary, corresponding secretary, treasurer, two directors to serve until 2013, and two trustees to serve until 2013. If you would be willing to accept one of these offices, contact the chairman or one of the members of the Nominating Committee. Their names and phone numbers will be listed on the website. Please help us to build this organization.

IN MEMORIAM

LINDSEY GARNETT— We are saddened by the death this past summer of Lindsey Garnett after a lingering illness. He was a grandson of Andrew Garnett who came into this area as an early pioneer. All five of Andrew Garnett's children were community leaders and played major roles in the development of the area. Lindsey was the son of Irl, Andrew's oldest son, and Julia, both long deceased. Lindsey was an active member of the Boynton Beach Historical Society and attended our meetings regularly. Our best wishes go to his widow Elaine, their son Michael, and his sister Katherine Garnett Eubanks.

MARGARET "Peggy" ROUSSEAU— Peggy, another active member and supporter of the Boynton Beach Historical Society, passed away in mid January. The Rousseaus have been a major force throughout the history of Boynton and the state of Florida. In the past, *The Historian* has contained a number of articles, features, and pictures contributed by various family members.

Peggy, with husband John, had four children. Two, Bob and Sheila Rousseau Taylor are also members of the Historical Society. Another son, Jimmie, lives in Clewiston. A second daughter died several years ago. Sheila is a member of our Board of Directors. We send our condolences to all the Rousseau family, but especially to Peggy's children and their families.

MORE MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS FOR 2010

[The following were received during the month of January
.Subsequent memberships will be listed in later issues.]

CORPORATE MEMBERSHIP:

Charlotte Oyer
Daniel R. Suiter
Curtis and Nainie Weems Weaver

PATRON MEMBERSHIP:

Lois Oyer Dooley
Tim Bednarz
Steve and Andee Holzman
Evelyn C. Howell
Fred W. Love
Betty Thomas
Dorian Trauger
C. Stanley Weaver

FAMILY MEMBERSHIP:

Ronald and Sarah Thomas Bollenbacher
L. Don and Jeanne Combs
M. Randall and Ann B. Gill
William G. and Erma O. James
Stallworth M. and Juliette C. Larson
William and Theresa Marcacci
John A. and Ranni Melear
Ernest G. and Norma B. Simon
Steve and Gay Voss
Beverley Warnke and Tom Warnke
Walter G. and Dorothy F. Whittaker
Herbert and Betty Magnuson Zobel

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP:

Heidi Bell
Doris Braunworth
Brett Brown
Janet DeVries
Betty Perry Duffy
Gloria Gregory
Mary Haggard
Phyllis H. Hammett
Marie Horenburger
David Kennedy
Gladys Baker Knuth
James Irvin Lacey
Sandra McGregor
Anne Weems Michael
Rosalie Avaroe Morrissey
Marjorie W. Nelson
Lillian Ostiguy
Barbara Ready
Jose Rodriguez
Dan Rousseau
Mary Lou Muster Ryder

Leland Smith
Katherine Foy Thompson
Jean Ann Thurber
J.H. "Gym" Weeks
Marion Weaver Wester
Debra Kolendo Wilson

Listed among those above are new members Stallworth and Juliette Larson, Barbara Ready, Jose Rodriguez, and Debra Wilson.

Thank all of you for choosing to join us, and thanks too, to the continuing members who have mailed in your dues for 2010.

A GIFT HONORING THE SUITERS

One of the members of the Boynton Beach Historical Society, Daniel R. Suiter, has recently made a gift to the Society of \$1,000 to honor the memory of his parents, John N. and Kathleen T. Suiter.

John and Kathleen, who both passed away in 2008, were long time members and supporters of the Society. They had lived for almost 50 years in the same home in Palm Springs.

Just a few weeks before his death, John sent a number of photographs of his parents, his immediate family, and other family members to our Archives.

John's grandfather was Robert H. Rousseau who served in the 1890s as a representative from this area on the Dade County Board of Commissioners. (Remember in 2009 we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the creation of Palm Beach County when it was separated from Dade County.) The Rousseau family has been in Florida for many generations. Some had moved into North Florida about the time the United States acquired Florida from Spain. Robert Rousseau had been one of the first to move into what is now Boynton Beach. One of Robert's daughters, Verna Rousseau, was the mother of John N. Suiter.

We are so grateful to Dan for choosing to honor his parents through this generous gift to the Boynton Beach Historical Society. It is our honor to celebrate committed individuals who have sought to preserve the history of our local heritage.

Thank you, Dan, for your role in helping to make this possible.

FROM AN EARLIER HISTORIAN ---

The following page appeared originally in *The Historian* November, 2002. At the time the editor copied the pictures borrowed from Bob Katz who had used them to decorate the interior of the historic old Katie Andrews which still stands a block south of Ocean Avenue on the west side of the Florida East Coast Railway tracks. Bob Katz had moved the house from its original location and restored it. It is still a part of the Bob Katz estate.

The same picture of the Reverend James Butler, Sr. is one that Victor Norfus includes in his collection. Notice also that Odessa Holt was working at that time to preserve Boynton's African American history.

THE BUTLER FAMILY



Reverend James Butler, Sr. was one of Boynton's early settlers. The top left photo was taken between 1949-1950. Butler owned and operated the first known minority general store in the black community, named "The Community Store." In addition to groceries, the store was stocked with fresh produce, clothing, and all types of housewares.

Irene Curry Butler was the wife of Rev. James Butler. Utilizing skills learned in her native Bahamas, Mrs. Butler owned and operated the first known restaurant in the black community. The top left photo was taken in early 1920.

The Butler's had four daughters and one son. As the caption by the lower



ORIGINAL PHOTO TAKEN
IN THE EARLY 1920'S

CHILDREN OF JAMES AND IRENE BUTLER

THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN IN THE
EARLY 1920'S.

THE ONLY MALE CHILD IN THE
PHOTO GREW UP TO BECOME THE
FIRST BLACK TO JOIN THE BOYNTON
BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT.
JAMES WILLIS (BILL) BUTLER STILL
RESIDES IN BOYNTON.

STANDING LEFT TO RIGHT
MILLIS (JAMES WILLIS' TWIN SISTER)
HAZEL (FIRST BORN)
YVONNE (SEATED WITH HAT)
BLONEVA (YOUNGEST)
JAMES WILLIS

photo above taken in the early 1920s indicates, the only male child **James Willis "Bill" Butler** became the first black to join the Boynton Beach Police Department. The four girls are Millis, Hazel, Yvonne, and Bloneva. (Photos and captions courtesy of Bob Katz with permission from Bill Butler.)

HELP WITH BLACK HISTORY

Odessa Holt and **David Harp** are currently doing research and compiling historical data about the black community. Let's hope that with our combined efforts we can preserve more of the Boynton Beach heritage.

CONSTRUCTION OF A DEPRESSION HOUSE

By Voncile Smith

Several years ago I wrote a story for *The Historian* about the sawmill my grandfather, R.M. Fletcher, began operating on Military Trail about a mile north of the Boynton Canal in late 1936. He had been a lumberman most of his life, and this was mill #59. At the time he was renting a 1920s house in Lake Worth. Then timber was still relatively plentiful, especially on the Lake Worth Drainage District right of way. From the time he acquired the mill, he had planned to build a new house of his own not too far from the mill site.

This was a period before poured concrete foundations and cement block construction had gained a foothold in housing construction. Frame houses were built off the ground a foot or more with wooden floors, high ceilings, and windows placed to allow good cross ventilation. There was no air-conditioning, and, if people had any heat at all in cool weather, it was provided by fireplaces supplemented by the use of space heaters.

Since my grandfather had access to lumber in any amount, size and length he might need, building materials were not a problem. Labor was. He hired some of his more skilled mill hands to work on the house when he was not operating the saw mill or his planning mill, or searching for timber. Progress was slow.

He purchased 16 acres of some rather swampy land on Military Trail about a mile north of the mill yard, chose a spot for the house and had numerous dump truck loads of fill hauled in to raise the height of the yard where the house was to stand. Construction began in January, 1937. No architect was involved. My grandfather knew how to design and determine lumber needs for rectangular houses, and this was to be H-shaped, composed of three rectangles.



The south leg of the H was constructed first. This would ultimately be the south side of the house consisting of two bedrooms and a bath. But the initial rooms had no electricity or plumbing and were divided by studs which at first had nothing covering them, but later planed 1x10 boards were nailed to the studs to provide interior walls covered with wallpaper when the house was completed.

My father and mother were travelling around the country while Daddy tried to sell planatariums and encyclopedias to various school systems. I needed to attend school regularly, so I was left with my grandparents and my aunt Mary and enrolled in Boynton School.

The four of us moved into the three rooms right after New Years in 1938. We had an old-fashioned hand pump for water which we had to carry to the house for drinking, cooking, and bathing. Our bathtub was a galvanized laundry tub, but most people relied primarily on sponge baths.

The east room contained two metal framed double beds and two chests of drawers. I slept with my aunt. We hung some of our clothes in a corner which later would accommodate a closet. The middle room was smaller and was the temporary kitchen. It had a 3-burner kerosene stove with a removable oven. We also had an ice box. The ice truck delivered ice regularly to rural homes in the area. My grandmother arranged to have the wife of one of the mill workers do our washing and ironing.

The third room on the west end of the house served as the temporary living-dining area. We had two kerosene lanterns for light, so we usually went to bed early. We had no radio, but the rural mail carrier delivered a day-old *Palm Beach Post* regularly to our mailbox by the highway.



I was puzzled because the north side of this basic dwelling was covered with tar paper. At age six I had no vision and had not been told that other rooms would be extended from that side. A separate garage was also an initial construction. This was important for storing materials and keeping lumber dry as it was awaiting use.



By the spring of 1939 the overall house was complete despite lack of windows or interior work. The house, finished and landscaped by 1940, is shown below. It was razed long ago. Now Hidden Oaks Elementary School is located where the house once stood.



BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM, CALENDAR YEAR 2010

Member's Name _____
 2nd Member's Name _____
 Street _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Telephone _____ E-mail _____

TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP:
 INDIVIDUAL (\$25.00) _____
 FAMILY (\$35.00) _____
 PATRON (\$50.00) _____
 CORPORATE (\$100 or more) _____

Yes, I would like to serve on the following committee(s) [Circle choices]
 Archives/Preservation _____
 Program/Planning _____
 Membership _____
 Minority History _____
 Public Relations _____
 Seeking Sponsors _____
 Fundraising _____
 Mailing _____
 Telephone _____
 Website _____
 Other (Specify) _____

Join now for the calendar year 2010. Complete the form below or copy the information and return it or the copy with your check for the type of membership you desire payable to The Boynton Beach Historical Society, P. O. Box 12, Boynton Beach, Florida 33425-0012. New memberships will be effective from now until December 31, 2010. Current members may renew now with 2010 dues effective until December 31, 2010.

Boynton Beach Historical Society
 Post Office Box 12
 Boynton Beach, FL 33425-0012



PLAYERS AND CHEERLEADERS 1950-51 at Boynton School in Gymnasium of what in previous years was 1927 Boynton High School. Teacher, Joseph Lee. 3rd Row: L to R, Jeanne Byrd, Paula Powers, Nancy Knowles, Donna Roush, Louise Lassiter, Darlene Gerotts, Barbara Green, Gladys Baker, Elaine Calloway, Bobby Swilley. 2nd Row: Charles White, Dick Moody, John White, Bob Gayler, Grady Stern. 1st Row: Jimmy Newman, Jimmy Melear, Ronnie Carr, Unknown, Kenny Carr, Martin Boos, Richard Marcinkoski. [Photo and names courtesy Gladys Baker Knuth.]