



# 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 3

March 2010

## The Legacy of HENRY M. FLAGLER

Allison Goff, the Education Director at the Henry Morrison Flagler Museum in Palm Beach, will be our speaker for the March 8 meeting. She will discuss the man himself as well as his famous Palm Beach mansion, Whitehall, which is now better known as the Flagler Museum. A graduate of Michigan State University, she has been employed by the Museum since January, 2008. Previously she taught reading for three years at Toussaint L'Ouverture High School for Arts and Social Justice in Boynton Beach. She was a member of Literacy\*AmeriCorps.



Henry Morrison Flagler



The Flagler Museum in Palm Beach



Allison Goff

**WHAT:** Speaker Allison Goff from the Flagler Museum will discuss Henry Flagler and his Enterprises

**WHEN:** Monday, March 8, 6:30 p.m.

**WHERE:** BOYNTON BEACH CITY LIBRARY  
[Note Change of Location!]

**ALL PROGRAMS ARE OPEN FREE TO THE PUBLIC!**

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

**OFFICERS**

President	Voncile Smith
1 <sup>st</sup> Vice President, Programs	Janet DeVrie
2 <sup>nd</sup> 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](http://boyntonbeachhistoricalsociety.org) You can contact us at our e-mail address [boyntonhistory06@yahoo.com](mailto: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.

**ANNUAL MEETING**

According to our Bylaws, we are required to hold our Annual Meeting in April. The business at this meeting usually pertains only to the election of new officers for the coming year. All the officers' positions are open for election and the positions of two directors and two trustees are also open. The officers serve for one year and the directors and trustees for three years.

Eighteen members comprise the Board of Directors—the six officers, six directors and six trustees. The directors and trustees are each elected to three year staggered terms. The Board of Directors usually meets four to six times a year and is responsible for the supervision of the Society. If you are a member in good standing and would be willing to serve in one of these positions, please contact Sheila Taylor [561-737-1960], Chair of the Nominating Committee.

Newly elected officers, directors and trustees take office immediately after the election. We usually schedule an organizational meeting of the newly constituted Board within a month.

**IN MEMORIAM**

**JAMES DOUGLAS SHELDON**—The Boynton Beach Historical Society is much indebted to Jim Sheldon who was a long standing member and regularly shared with us pictures and vignettes of three generations of Boynton residents. Although he lived in West Hartford Connecticut, he never forgot his Boynton roots.

He is survived by his wife Claudia Marshall Sheldon; two sons, Christopher John Sheldon and Ryan Marshall Sheldon; and his brothers C. Wilton Sheldon and Samuel T. Sheldon.

James was born in Boynton Beach and attended all 12 grades in the area—Boynton Beach Elementary and Seacrest High School. We extend our thanks again to him and our sorrow and best wishes to his family.

**JOEL MAURICE BASKIN**—In years past Joel and his wife Bonne, who predeceased him, were members of the Boynton Beach Historical Society, but ill health and his sorrow over the loss of Bonne led to his recent inactivity with us.

He had a keen interest in anthropology and had presented a program on the local Indian mounds to the Society several years ago.

His parents, who also predeceased him, and other family members have been active and visible presences in the Boynton Beach community for many years. We are sorry for their loss.

**A MEMORIAL GIFT HONORING JAMES SHELDON**

The Boynton Beach Historical Society is most grateful to Harvey E. Oyer, Jr. for a gift of cash to honor the memory of James Douglas Sheldon and his family. Harvey, his parents and sisters knew well the Myers, Wards, Sheldons, Hodges, and Bowens who made up three generations of people related to James Sheldon.



Clarence and Lou Anna Ward Shelton with two sons in 1939  
Clarence is holding James. (Photo courtesy James Sheldon.)

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS SINCE FEBRUARY 1<sup>ST</sup>

[The following memberships were paid during the month of February. The list is current to March 1<sup>st</sup>. Earlier renewals are listed in the January and February issues of *The Historian*.]

### FAMILY MEMBERSHIP:

Earl and Lenore Benson Raborn Boonstra  
James and Marjorie L. Bynum  
Michael and Linda Martin Calloway  
Robert L and Virginia W. Foot  
Wayne F. and Eva Brooks Netzler  
Roy A. and Beth Simon  
Delma and Billie Jo Swilley  
Philip B. and Barbara S. Traylor  
Marion and Cecile Weems

### INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP:

Gillian Davis  
Joy DuBois  
Jack Fallon  
Virginia K. Farace  
Wendy Franklin  
Margaret "Peg" Guyder  
Barbara Harrison  
Elizabeth Miner LaBella  
Nancy Hood McNamee  
Jeff Morgan  
Cheryl D. Muster  
Margaret S. Newton  
Victor Norfus

Among the above we welcome new member Joy DuBois.  
Thank all of you for choosing to join us.

### VOTE ON MARCH 9<sup>TH</sup>

The Boynton Beach City election is scheduled for March 9. The City will be electing a new Mayor and one new Commissioner. As a not-for-profit organization we do not endorse in political races. We can say, however, that the fate of the old 1927 Schoolhouse may well depend on the outcome of this election. Those of you who are Boynton Beach residents, do your civic duty and go to the polls and cast your vote.



1927 Boynton High School – West Elevation  
[Photo courtesy Voncile Smith]

## FEDELI DAIRY FARM – BOYNTON, FLORIDA

By Mark Robinson

[Editor's note: Mark Robinson is the great grandson of Giacomo Fedeli. He became interested in his family's history and was excited to learn about their time in Florida. Shortly before writing to Janet DeVries to see if she could provide him with additional information, he came across a box filled with family records and photos some of which related to the family's time in South Florida. The following is an edited version of his story and includes some of the photos from the farm.]

Sometime between 1905 and 1916, an Italian immigrant named Giacomo Fedeli, saw an advertisement in a local paper in the Toronto, Ontario, Canada area advertising farm land in Florida. He responded and bought the property site unseen.

In 1913 he travelled there to find that it was an amazing and beautiful property. He returned to Canada for the birth of his first daughter Giovannina with his wife Giorgina.

On October 16, 1915, they crossed the border back into the United States to go to their new farm in Florida. It was originally a strawberry farm. But the family again returned to Canada for a period of three years where Anita and Giuseppina (Josie) were born in Peterborough, Canada. In 1921 Giacomo went back to the Florida farm alone while his family left Canada to go to Italy.

In October, 1927 his family joined him on the farm in Florida.



Unidentified Fedeli family members on the farm with friends

Two hand sketched maps of the layout of the farm show it was between two canals on Military Trail. From 1914-1929 the family operated it as Fedeli Dairy Farm. Stanley Weaver remembers Mr. Fedeli whose farm was not far from that of the Weavers. Stanley recalls the farm's being located on the west side of Military Trail with the C-16 canal [now named the C. Stanley Weaver Canal] on the north. Stanley also remembers going to school with Josie Fedeli.

[Continued on page 4, Fedeli Dairy Farm]

[Fedeli Dairy Farm – continued from page 3]

Three hired hands helped work the farm. One, an African-American fellow named Jim, was married while working on the farm. The entire Fedeli family dressed in their best attire and attended the wedding. They were the only white people present. Giacomo built a one room house for Jim and his wife on the property and eventually they had a baby girl.

Every Saturday night the Fedeli family went into Boynton for a night out, but if they wanted to see a show (movie), they had to go to Delray Beach.

On the farm the responsibilities were broken down so that the men milked the cows and did the manual labor. Giovannina, however, took charge of processing the bottles, bottling the milk and separating the cream to make butter. The farm had electricity, but water was retrieved from a well with a pump, and there was no bathroom inside the house.



Giacomo and neighbors in strawberry field 1927

In recalling the hurricane of 1928, Anita, calling it the “Great Storm,” remembered the window breaking and the roof starting to lift off the house.

Giacomo took his family to the Weaver’s feed barn where they barricaded themselves in with bags of feed. When they came out there were dead cows and chickens everywhere. The floor was the only part of their house left, and Anita remembers finding a chair from their house over a mile away. All their lemon, lime, and papaya trees were gone.

Giacomo rebuilt everything. The farm was comprised of 40-50 milking cows, 2 horses, 2 trucks, 1 automobile (a 4-door Chevrolet), chickens, and turkeys (which they sold). They had about 5 acres of land with no fences so that the cattle could graze all over. [Ed. Note: Florida had open-range until 1949.]

After the hurricane of 1928, Giorgina no longer felt safe, so she took her children, except for Mark Robinson’s grandmother, back to Italy. After Giacomo had rebuilt the farm, he sold it, and he too returned to Italy to be with his family.

After World War II, most of the family moved back to Canada where the author was born.



Giacomo Fedeli with Fedeli Dairy truck ca. 1932-1933

## AN EARLY BOYNTON PIONEER

One of the earliest settlers in the Boynton area was Abel Augustus Rousseau, known popularly to his family and friends as Ebb. He was born in 1878 in Hillsborough County, the youngest child of John Lewis Rousseau and Dora Ann McArdle Rousseau. Ebb’s parents and all his siblings were born in Florida.

In January, 1902, after having heard of the successful tomato farms near the Atlantic Ocean, he decided to go to Florida’s east coast. He rode his horse from Clearwater to Boynton



Ebb Rousseau as he looked about the time he arrived in Boynton  
[Photo courtesy Callie Rousseau Brown]

According to his daughter, Callie Rousseau Brown, he made this trip seasonally for several years, riding his horse coast to coast, traveling by day, and camping along the route. He said that it took a week to make the trip. His little dog, Dot, ran along beside the horse or rode with him in the saddle. Ebb farmed in the winter and rode back to Clearwater in the spring. One year, however, he did not return to Clearwater but stayed in Boynton where he remained for over 50 years.

Traveling long distances on horseback, by wagon, or on foot was risky during the time when Ebb was making his yearly trek between Clearwater and Boynton.

[Continued on page 5 – Ebb Rousseau]

[Ebb Rousseau – continued from page 4]

Threats from raids by the Seminoles no longer existed, but possible ambushes from armed robbers was a concern. Also wild animals such as panthers and bears were prowling in the wilderness areas. Because of these dangers and the need to hunt for food, a traveler carried a gun.

On May 24, 1908, Ebb married Katherine Missouri Ford at the home of his brother, Robert Henry Rousseau. One of the early pastors, the Reverend J. R. Blocker, of what was then the Boynton Methodist-Episcopal Church, South [now the First United Methodist Church of Boynton Beach], performed the marriage ceremony.



Katherine [Kate] Missouri Ford ca. 1900  
[Photo courtesy Callie Rousseau Brown]

Ebb played a crucial role in the construction of the first building erected by the Methodist Church in 1905. He hauled building materials using his mule and wagon from the East Coast Canal [now the Intracoastal Canal] to the church site at what is now the intersection of the northwest corner of Federal Highway and Ocean Avenue. These materials had been brought down the waterway by boat by Captain Frederick Voss.

Outside his family and his work, Ebb's greatest interest was in the Masonic Order. According to his family, he adhered strictly to the Masonic precepts of moral and spiritual conduct and, as a result, was a man of great integrity, honesty and fair-dealing.

As he advanced in age, he became less active in community affairs. He lived about with his various children and enjoyed the association of his grandchildren. Finally, in 1960 at age 82, he passed away after a brief illness.

[Sources include information from *Sun in My Hair, Sand in My Shoes*, Callie Rousseau Brown, Hawthorne Publishing, Carmel, IN, 2007; "The Community Mourns," *Boynton Beach News*, September 29, 1960, p.3]

## THE FREE AND INDEPENDENT REPUBLIC OF WEST FLORIDA

Many people who live here are unaware that part of what was once Florida declared itself an independent republic and had a flag with a blue field and a single white star. [A lone star republic long before Texas usurped the title and the star!] It lasted from October 2, 1810 until December 10, 1810.

Historically there had been much international wrangling over this area. In 1803 the United States had made the Louisiana Purchase from France. The United States claimed the territory between the Mississippi and Perdido Rivers since it had been in French possession prior to 1763. But Spain continued to administer that territory since Spain insisted it had not returned the territory to France.

In the meantime, new American settlers moving into the territory joined with former British settlers from the British era to protest Spanish rule. They rebelled in 1810. In September of that year, 75 West Florida protesters attacked a sleeping garrison of 28 Spanish soldiers in Baton Rouge replacing the Spanish colors with their "Bonnie Blue Flag" of the new nation. The battle left two dead and five wounded, but history does not tell us if they were Spanish or rebel. Independence lasted a total of 74 days. The town of St. Francisville became the capital. The borders were the 31<sup>st</sup> parallel to the north, the Perdido River to the east and the Mississippi River to the west. None of present day Florida was part of this new republic.

Some historians suggest that West Floridians were not so enamored of independence as by hope of acquisition by the United States. A former American consul general to France under Jefferson who had been involved in the successful negotiation of the Louisiana Purchase, Fulwar Skipwith, became "president" of the republic. In late October, 1810, the U.S. annexed the region by a simple proclamation claiming the territory was part of the original Louisiana Purchase. The West Floridians were not pleased with this occurrence because they had hoped to enter the Union on their own terms. They threatened to rebel again. Governor [or "President"] Skipwith stated he was ready to "die in defense of the Lone Star Flag" when a representative arriving from Washington to take possession of the territory refused to recognize his government. Ultimately Skipwith backed down and accepted American annexation. Spain continued to protest the annexation until it ceded all of Florida to the U.S. in 1819.

The republic even had a little marching song commemorating its creation: "West Floriday, that lovely nation--Free from king and tyranny--Through the world shall be respected--For her true love of Liberty." [Apparently "Floriday" was used strictly to enhance rhythm.]

**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 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Mailings \_\_\_\_\_  
 Fundraising \_\_\_\_\_  
 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



Boynton Beach City Park and Shuffle Boards 1950  
 [from a postcard with a March, 1950 postmark]