



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 7

October 2010

LAWRENCE ROAD

is the subject for the October program presentation offered by the Boynton Beach Historical Society, "A History of Lawrence Road," by Dr. Ginger Pedersen, Dean of Curriculum, Planning & Research at Palm Beach State College. Dr. Pedersen, a native of Palm Beach County, has roots in the County back to the 1930s. Her family founded, owned and operated the Africa USA tourist attraction in Boca Raton, the first cageless animal attraction in the country. She maintains the complete history at the Africa USA website [www.africa-usa.com]. She writes also a local history blog [www.palmbeachpast.org] that tells the tales of Palm Beach County's past, focusing on the small stories that have been lost over time.

Consider the roles of oranges and racecars. Dr. Pedersen will discuss them and other information about the history of Lawrence Road, a thoroughfare older than Congress Avenue and full of history from Boynton's past, from the Norse Colony that never was to the Boynton Speedway.



Ginger Pedersen

WHAT: HISTORY of LAWRENCE ROAD
Presented by Dr. Ginger Pedersen

WHERE: BOYNTON BEACH CITY LIBRARY
208 South Seacrest Boulevard
1st Floor Program Room

WHEN: MONDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2010
6:30 p.m.

All Program Meetings of the Boynton Beach Historical Society are open and free to the Public

OPEN FREE TO THE PUBLIC

BOARD OF DIRECTORS—2010-11

OFFICERS [Elected Annually]

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Archivist and Webmaster	Janet DeVries

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2011	Steve Anton
2011	Sally Dye
2012	Sheila Rousseau Taylor
2012	Delma Swilley
2013	Tim Bednarz
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2011	Randall Gill
2011	Harvey Oyer, Jr
2012	Victor Norfus
2012	Dan Rousseau
2013	Brian Edwards
2013	Virginia Farace

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. Voncile can be reached at 561-734-5653.

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.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS ON LOCAL HISTORY

The Boynton Beach Historical Society has available copies of the two children's books written by Harvey E. Oyer III about the late 19th century adventures of his great-grand uncle Charlie Pierce in Southeast Florida. These stories are based on true adventures described in a journal written by Charles Pierce.

Harvey will discuss the second book, *The Last Egret*, at our November meeting.

If you have an elementary or middle school aged child among your friends or family, either or both of these volumes would be a nice holiday gift.

The Society asks for a donation of \$20 for each volume requested. Their titles are *The American Jungle* and *The Last Egret*. If you wish to receive copies in the mail, please send an additional \$5 for each copy to cover the costs of

handling and postage. Harvey E. Oyer, Jr. also has copies of both available in his office on Ocean Avenue. You may obtain copies at the October meeting.

MEMORIAL GIFT

In late spring the Boynton Beach Historical Society received a cash contribution from Topypy and Georgie Raulerson to honor the memory of Joel and Bonne Baskin.

Both Joel and Bonne, lifetime Boynton residents, had been members and supporters of the Society for many years. Bonne succumbed to cancer about 20 years ago and Joel died of heart complications last year. Joel was interested in archeology and had been concerned about preservation of local Indian mounds. The Historical Society misses very much the support and contributions of both of them. We are grateful to the Raulersons for making this most appropriate gift in their memory.

OCTOBER BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The next meeting of the Board of Directors is scheduled for Monday, October 25, 6:30 p.m. at the Boynton Woman's Club. Any member may attend and participate in the discussion.



Mystery Swimmers?

Do you recognize any of these young ladies from the 1930s? Three have been identified as Lorraine Leverenz, Margaret Shepard, and Lenora Benson.

Which ones are they? and who are the others? Your editor is guessing that Lorraine is on the far left, Margaret is in the left foreground, and that Lenora is in the center at Margaret's left. Let us know if you can help with the identities, and if the editor has mistaken her guesses.

THE WILCOX – MINER HERITAGE

Two families who moved into the Boynton area in the early decades of the twentieth century and had important roles in shaping the town were the Wilcoxes and the Miners. The most obvious present day reminder of their one-time preeminence is Miner Road.

Perhaps the most visible in the early years following his arrival in 1913 was Ray Wilcox. Ray by his own definition was an inventor, a farmer, and a cabinet maker.

Ray had lead a rather interesting life before moving to Florida, however. In the first decade of the twentieth century, while living in Parma, Michigan, Ray was a mound pattern maker. During that time he cooperated with engine designer Fred Weinberg to produce the first Hudson motor patterns. [Remember the Hudson? It was an American automobile manufactured from 1909 to 1954.]

Wilcox remarked that “Every backyard mechanic went crazy” after the bicycle-making Wright Brothers made a successful flight in 1903. Wilcox himself was no exception. About 1909 he completed his own successful plane and started a “cow pasture” flying school on his father’s farm.

He advertised widely in the various new “flying” journals which had sprung up, and one of these ads was seen by Sun Yat Sen who imaginatively saw the possibility of using the new flying machines to aid in helping the Wuchang Uprising depose the Qing Dynasty.



This group of 21 flying cadets, part of a class of 40 stand in front of the Nanking field hanger where in February, 1912 American Ray Wilcox [arrow] acted as instructor. The plane behind the group is the only one of six assembled to furnish the 40 cadets with flying instruction. The Chinese had bought six planes in the U.S., dismantled them, and shipped them into China as “printing equipment.”

Sun Yat Sen contacted Ray Wilcox who with his wife Ida went to China to serve the Nationalist Chinese in Nanking as what was possibly the first military group flight instructor. In April, 1911 at a mile square Nanking parade ground, Ray Wilcox began instructing a 40 student class for Dr. Sun Yat-Sen’s new government. Although the planes were

never used, and the pilot training had been extremely limited, their presence suggested that the new government was progressive and planned to be around for some time.

In 1913, after returning to the U.S., Ida and Ray Wilcox purchased a three acre tract along U.S. 1 in what is now considered North Boynton.

For a time Ray worked with Cooper C. Lightborn producing Addison Mizner designed homes for people like J.S. Phipps and H.C. Phipps, among others, and the Gulfstream Golf Club. Ray also worked for a considerable period with Jessup, Inc., in West Palm Beach helping to create cabinets and other fine wooden objects for Addison Mizner and other builders of the day. Ray’s nephew, James Miner, also worked with Jessup. Ray’s fine cabinet work was used in many of the homes in Palm Beach and in the Palm Beach Episcopal Church Bethesda-by-the-Sea.

Ray Wilcox also constructed and owned homes in Boynton Beach. The two houses which follow were pictured in an earlier issue of *The Historian*. Both located on the corner of NE 5th Avenue and Seacrest Boulevard were razed last year by the Boynton Beach CRA.



This single story stucco frame house was built in the 1920s by Harvey E. Oyer, Sr. and Ray Wilcox. The house was originally sold to W.B. Miller the founder of Briny Breezes who was a major rum-runner later convicted and sent to Federal prison. Wilcox, himself was a staunch prohibitionist, and since Miller was from a well respected family on the Ocean, Wilcox did not suspect Miller’s rum-running activities at the time he sold him the house.

Among the other families who lived in the house was the Godfrey James family. William [Bill] James, one of the Historical Society’s members who in adult life became a State Legislator, was born there. After

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the James family left, Albert and Ruth Lacy McGregor lived in the house. Their daughter Marjorie Anne was born there. Still later the house was owned by Vernie Law who had a farm on US 441, but lived in this house. Vernie's son Reynolds Law married Betty Magnuson [now BBHS member Betty Zobel]. Reynolds' and Betty's son, Mark Law, later worked for and retired from the Boynton Beach Public Works Department. Betty was City Treasurer at one time.



Ray Wilcox once called this two-story building home.



Ray and Ida Frisk Wilcox celebrated 50 years of marriage on November 1, 1955. Ida died just over a year later in January 1957. By 1962 Ray Wilcox was 80 years old. Both he and Ida had been active their entire lives in community organizations, including their church. He died at Bethesda Memorial Hospital in 1962.

Other family members moved to Boynton from Michigan, too. Zeri T. Wilcox and his wife Mary Elizabeth Wilcox, who were the parents of Ray Wilcox,

were among them. Zeri 's brother Victor M. Wilcox moved to Boynton in 1913. All participated regularly in church activities.



Victor Wilcox was the teacher for this Methodist Men's Bible class in 1914.

Ray Wilcox's nephew was James Miner who was from Parma, Michigan and moved to Boynton in 1930. While he worked as a carpenter and a cabinet maker for a number of years, he developed an interest in horticulture as the years passed. Meanwhile, he met and married Bernice Ellis from Cape Cod. She had moved to Boynton when her father's work in bridge construction brought him here.



Bernice and James Miner

In the late 1930s the Miners bought acreage along what is now Miner Road west of US 1 and

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made plans to begin growing mangos. Soon after they began planting, however, World War II intervened. When the war had ended, James Miner increased his acreage in proportion to an increasing public demand for mangos, developed a nursery of several thousand mango plants of many varieties to determine how they would produce, and thus, to enable him to do a good job of growing and marketing.

As part of his marketing campaign, he released an illustrated pamphlet describing the food value of mangos. The pamphlet also described how to ripen, slice, and serve them. In addition, he included some history of the mango's origin, development, and popularity.

As demand for the fruit increased, and he learned which varieties were the most desirable, he increased his land holdings from the original 12 acres along Miner Road (which became a road about 1946), so that he had 20 acres along US 1 to the west, 25 acres in young mangos and 20 in sour guavas. He had 32 acres along the Turnpike's proposed route [then designated as Sunshine State Parkway]. He was also in charge of 70 acres in other properties and hoped to add some 40 acres more.

But a mango crop is an "iffy" proposition since production is dependent on the weather. Blossoming may start and stop as the temperature varies. Sometimes fruit will set on a second blooming. Sometimes it may not.

Miner began growing roses hydroponically in 1959 and 1960. By 1961 on his Vita-King Farms in North Boynton he was growing 32,000 rose bushes for commercial purposes.



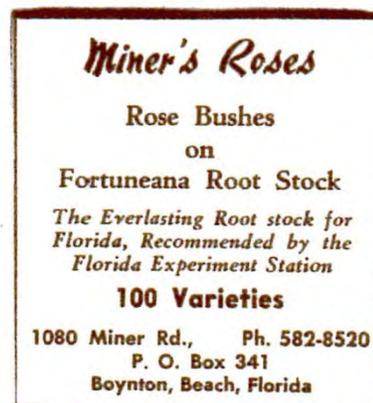
James Miner examines a rose bush.

The hope was that the improved roses grown on Fortuniana root stock would produce outstanding perennial plants that would lead to a whole new industry in Florida replacing the one-season only roses that had previously been the only ones available.



James Miner

Some members of the Wilcox and Miner families still live in the area, and some still faithfully attend the First United Methodist Church of Boynton Beach. The days of farm and horticultural experimentation by the two families seem long gone as housing developments now border almost all of Miner Road and western expansion has changed the use of the land James Miner once planted near the Florida Turnpike right-of-way



[Editor's Note: Thanks to Katherine Garnett Eubanks for providing numerous copies of old news articles from the *Boynton Beach Star*, the *Palm Beach Post-Times*, and other newspapers containing information used in this story. Katherine also forwarded pictures of James and Bernice Miner to the *Historian*. Thanks also to Harvey E. Oyer, Jr. for sharing his recollections of good family friends, especially Ray Wilcox and James Miner.]

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

Join now for the calendar Year 2011. 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, 2011. Current members may renew now with 2011 dues effective until December 31, 2011.

BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM, CALENDAR YEAR 2011

Members Name _____

2nd Member's Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP: INDIVIDUAL (\$25.00) _____
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 CORPORATE (\$100 or more) _____

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



Farmers' Market, early 1940s, located approximately where St. Marks Church is today.
 [Photo courtesy Katherine Garnett Eubanks]