

# THE HISTORIAN

The Newsletter of

## THE BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Serving Boynton Beach, Ocean Ridge, Manalapan, Gulfstream, Lantana, Hypoluxo, the Village of Golf, Briney Breezes and all areas of West Boynton to US Hwy 441

Post Office Box 12 Boynton Beach FL 33425-0012

Voncile Smith, President

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Voncile Smith, Editor

## NEXT MEETING – MONDAY, JANUARY 12, BOYNTON BEACH CITY LIBRARY, 7:00 p.m. A FLORIDA HUMANITIES COUNCIL PROGRAM, “STEAMBOATS of FLORIDA”

Ed Mueller, author and historian, from Jacksonville will present one of three Florida Humanities Council programs co-sponsored by the Boynton Beach Historical Society and the Friends of the Boynton Beach City Library. (The other programs are discussed in another section.) The steamboat was often the only means of reaching isolated settlements in Florida at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Paddlewheelers operated on all the major rivers, bringing in supplies and shipping out the citrus and cotton of a booming agricultural economy. This talk with slides will present an overview of steamboats in Florida. **Free admission. Everyone is welcome.**

### BEFORE THE RAILROAD-- A DIFFERENT MENTALITY

In a special series of articles that were printed on brown paper by *The Palm Beach Post* and called appropriately enough “the Sunday brown wrappers,” the late **Judge James R. Knott**, and others, described early life in what is now Palm Beach County. One article, printed for September 11, 1983, includes portions of a description written by a winter visitor, **Vincent Gilpin**, before the era of the big hotels. Judge Knott comments that these visitors had a different outlook than later tourists or visitors, “They were *explorers*, full of curiosity, willing to forego luxuries and even comforts for new experiences. Many of them were widely traveled, well-read, intelligent cosmopolitans, and their talk was a feast.” Gilpin reported:

“We found our way to Palm Beach after four seasons on the Gulf Coast, as passengers on the ‘St. Sebastian,’ head of the new fleets which served the Indian River. They were similar to the stern-paddle wheelers of the west, about 200 feet long, with two feet draft, wood-burning engines, very handsome gleaming white enamel and gilt.

“We left our baggage in Jacksonville, took the St. Johns River boat to Enterprise, and then 40 miles of rail to Titusville. . . And so to the St. Sebastian at the Titusville wharf and what a reception we received from the boat’s ebullient **Captain Bravo!** We found ourselves old friends, led to the pilot-house and regaled with stories of the river, and with grapefruit prepared in his special way.”

No other transport compares with the inland steamboat travel of those days, “either by comfort, or for intimate inspection of the country. This Indian River run gave us a glimpse of virtually every plantation home. The new steamer service was the lifeline of the river, both commercially and personally, tying it to the world, attracting alert and ambitious people. Every few miles a long, long wharf ran out over the sand flats to water deep enough for the steamer. There she tied up. . . The boat carried

all the freight and all the people that moved on the river. She was the event of the day, and the crowd was all smiles and greetings with fluttering handkerchiefs and gay parasols. Capt. Bravo was in his element, leaning over the rail on the upper deck. He knew everybody, they knew and liked him, and jokes and gossip flew fast.”

“The southern end of this run was through lonely and picturesque country, where the mile-wide lagoon narrowed down to a winding channel between billowing forests of huge red mangroves, towering high above the boat, and reaching out as though to close the passage. These were the two ‘Narrows’ of the Indian River below St. Lucie with Jupiter at the south end. . . Navigation in the Narrows was a good test of the skipper’s skill and experience. The flat-bottomed boats were clumsy and every puff of wind pushed them off course. To swerve violently into a bush mangrove was common enough, with shouts of warning, rending of netted railings, crackling of branches, and a frenzied ringing of the engine bells. But the real grief came . . . when the boat fetched up, not on tree, but on a mudbank.

“Our first trip was an uninterrupted run to Jupiter, where the tiny inlet marked the end of the Indian River, and the old brick lighthouse stood on its Indian mound—the only landmark between Canaveral and Cape Florida. Here Capt. Bravo remarked on the beauty of Lake Worth. ‘What’s that?’ said we. ‘A lovely lake, eight miles away. Aren’t you going to look at it?’ They say, ‘See Lake Worth, and die happy!’”

“So we planned to spend a night there, and to return on Bravo’s next run up the river. Piling into the funny little narrow-gauge railroad [the ‘Celestial Railroad’] at Jupiter, we puffed away to Juno—just a handful of houses—the county seat. Here at the head of Lake Worth lay the little steamboat, the only public transport. We found there were rival hotels, with ‘runners,’ and **Gene Dimick** promised rainwater to drink at the Coconut Grove House, so we went there (a previous visit to Florida had involved a near fatal illness from well water).



## BOYNTON PIONEER CELEBRATES 90 YEARS

**Mrs. Hilda Girtman Pitts** was recently honored by family and friends at a ninetieth birthday celebration at the Holiday Inn Catalina. Mrs. Pitts, who has lived in Boynton Beach continuously since her birth here on December 8, 1913, is the oldest living lifelong resident of Boynton Beach as the City recognized at the Centennial Celebration in 1995.

Her parents were **Willie C. and Julia Hadley Girtman**. At age 21 she met and married **Soloman Pitts**. Their wedding was held at St. Paul A.M.E. Church. **Margaret Bolden** was her attendant, and Margaret's husband **Buster Bolden** was best man. They built their first home at 115 N.E. 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Boynton Beach.

The couple had eight children: **Will Soloman, Clifford, Geronia Mae, Charles McClendon, Cleveland, James, Elizabeth Ann, and Katherine**. Nine grandchildren, eleven great grandchildren, and two great, great grandchildren now also represent the family.

Mrs. Hilda is commemorated through the name of the antique shop, "Mrs. Hilda's" on Ocean Avenue owned and operated by two of her children, James and Katherine.

[Information on history and family members is from the 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration Program prepared by her family.]



Mrs. Hilda Girtman Pitts

## HOW FAR SOUTH IS "SOUTHERN"?

A recent note from Margaret Garnett Harris (Mrs. Clyde) refers to a comment in her book, *Pioneer Daughter*, 1990, p. 38, that of the 48 members of her graduating class from Lake Worth High School in 1926 only two, one of whom is she, were born in the state of Florida. She notes that although her

ancestry was based in Kentucky and Virginia, she did not learn to talk "Southern" until she attended college in Georgia. She contends Palm Beach County may be in the South, but the speech here is not "Southern."

To a great extent she is right. Even in the early years of the county immigrants from the Northeast, the Middle West, the Caribbean Islands, and other locations were affecting how people spoke. In the completion of her Master's thesis your editor studied and wrote about changing pronunciation patterns throughout Florida. Urbanization, decreasing rural life, and other factors of geographic mobility have had perhaps greater influence than ancestry. But my study indicated, and one can still hear in the speech of a surprising number of people in the County what, for want of a better term, I shall call 'southernisms.' The minority of people who have lived here while growing up acquired in their youth from their peers some of these forms which followed earlier immigrants to the County from other Southern states. And we still have people arriving from Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee, and various parts of the South who bring with them patterns that most linguists would label "southern." How long these uses, or even those from New York and other Northeastern areas, will continue is anybody's guess. We have become such a polyglot state that many new forms are bound to emerge in the future.

## 2004 MEMBERS

Memberships in the Boynton Beach Historical Society are for the calendar year, January 1 through December 31. The following are the paid members for 2004 at the time this newsletter was prepared:

### Patron Membership:

Betty Perry Duffy  
Marie Shepard  
Voncile Smith

### Family Membership:

Jack and Liz Armstrong  
Beverley and Margaret Brown  
Gabino and Ann Cuevas  
Bob and Jeanne Gayler  
Bill and Theresa Macacci  
James and Maria McMahon  
Helen, Charles, and Fred Senior

### Individual Membership:

Christine Edward  
Margaret Harris  
Barbara Harrison  
Madelene A. Hawkins  
Elizabeth Hill  
Kelley M. Kirton  
Anne Weems Michael  
James Miriana  
Dorothy Moore  
Cindy McClain Nye  
Margaret H. Rousseau  
Mary Lou Muster Ryder  
Raymond E. Weeks  
Rhys Williams

If your name is not on this list, please consider completing the enclosed membership form and sending it along with your check for the appropriate dues to Boynton Beach Historical Society, P. O. Box 12, Boynton Beach, Florida 33425-0012.



# BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## OFFICERS—2003-04

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

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2004  
2005  
2005  
2006  
2006

Barbara Harrison  
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Helen Meisenheimer  
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## TRUSTEES

2004  
2004  
2005  
2005  
2006  
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## NOMINATING COMMITTEE SEEKS NOMINEES

Fain Weems, chair of the Nominating Committee, asks that those of you who are interested in serving in an office for the Society contact him at 561-735-3900. All the officers are elected annually, and two Directors and two Trustees are elected for three years terms. The terms will begin in May, 2004. Officers will serve until May, 2005, and the newly elected Directors and Trustees will serve until May, 2007.

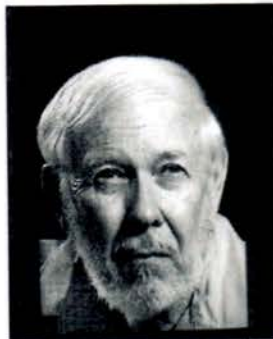
The Nominating Committee will report at the March meeting of the Society, and after a call for nominations from the floor, the election will take place. Installation is scheduled for the May meeting.

## SPRING PROGRAM SCHEDULE

The Historical Society meets on the second Monday of the months of October, November, January, February, March, and April either at the Boynton Beach City Library or the Boynton Woman's Club Building. Meetings at the Library are usually scheduled at 6:30 or 7:00 because the staff requests that we be out of the building no later than 9:00. We usually plan a pot-luck dinner on a Sunday in May for our installation meeting. We often plan a program meeting for September, and some months we may have occasional field trips to points of historic interest.

The following meetings are scheduled for spring, 2004. Please reserve the dates on your calendar.

**Monday, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2004:** Distinguished journalist, noted writer, and documentary filmmaker



Stuart McIver

Stuart McIver will discuss the history and circumstances that lead to the writing of his latest book, *Death in the Everglades: The Murder of Guy Bradley*, America's First Martyr to Environmentalism. This is a story about the Florida plume hunters and how their devastation was ultimately curbed by the bird protection movement which included Guy Bradley's role in law enforcement. Bradley had ties to Palm Beach County, and knew among others

Vincent Gilpin who is mentioned in the Knott article on steamboats on page 1 of this newsletter. McIver is an exciting storyteller who will recreate vividly life in a bygone era.

**Monday, March 8, 2004, 7:00 p.m.** Boynton Beach City Library. This is the second program of the year scheduled



Judy Gail

through the **Florida Humanities Council** and is jointly sponsored with the Friends of the Boynton Beach City Library. **Judy Gail**, professional actress, will portray **Ivy Stranahan** who has been called The First Lady of Fort Lauderdale and Watchie Esta/Hutrie—Little White Mother to the Seminoles. As president of the Florida Equal Suffrage Association, Ivy was a leader in the fight for women to vote along with **May Mann Jennings**, wife of

the governor, and made speeches with **Mary Elizabeth Bryan** and her orator husband, **William Jennings Bryan**. She founded the Fort Lauderdale Audubon and Historical Societies, the library, parks, schools, hospitals and more. Another name she proudly bore was The Battling Belle of Broward.

**Monday, April 12, 2004, 7:00 p.m.** Boynton Beach City Library. This is the third

program from the **Florida Humanities Council** which we are co-sponsoring with the Friends of the Boynton Beach City Library. **FORT MOSE: Free Black Town on the Spanish Frontier** concerns the establishment of the first legally sanctioned free black community in what is now the United States. In 1738 more than 100 Africans who had escaped slavery under the English had arrived in St. Augustine to ask religious Sanctuary and freedom by the Spanish. Historical and archaeological research have revealed that the African-American



Fort Mose

experience went far beyond slavery to provide a view of a rich and balanced life in the the Spanish colony. The program presenter is **Darcie MacMahon**, Exhibits Coordinator, Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida, Gainesville.

Other programs:

**May, 2004, Date, Time, Place TBA.**

**Installation of Officers and Pot-Luck dinner**

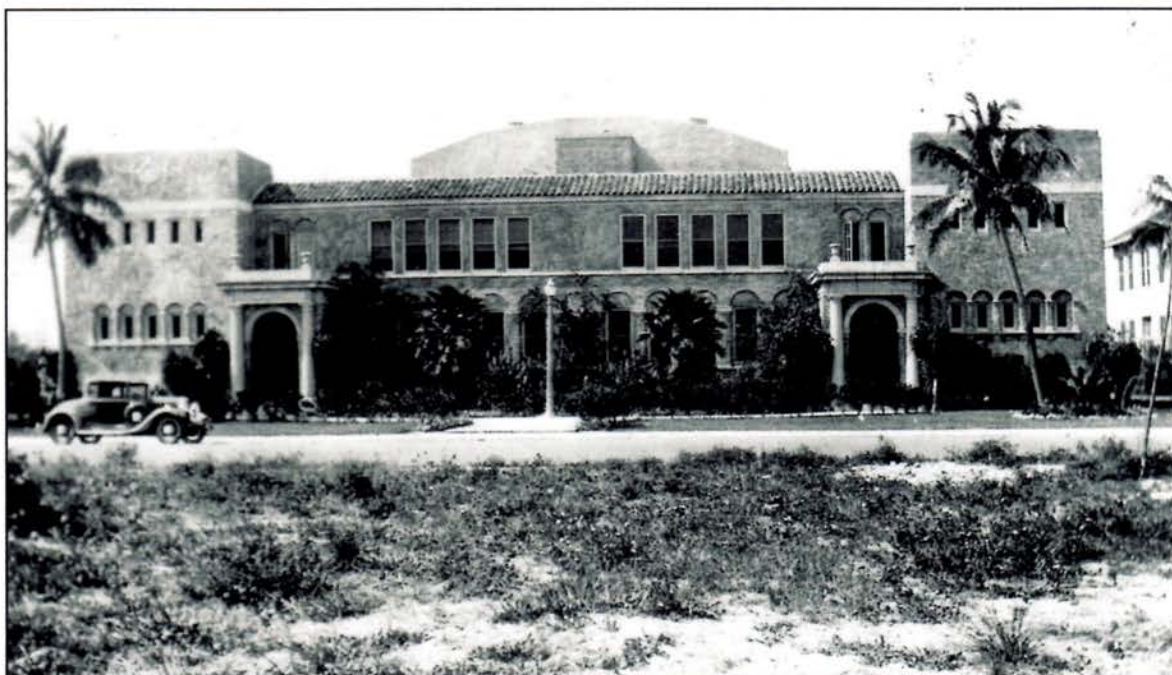
**Field Trip, Date, Time, Place TBA.**

**Betty Thomas** and **Sarah Bollenbacher** have promised to lead us on a special trip to view the mural in the Scottish Rite Temple by **Bernard Thomas** and to discuss his other works.

## IN MEMORIAM

Historical preservation in Palm Beach County suffered a serious loss January 3, 2004, when Retired Judge Marvin U. Mounts, Jr. succumbed to lung cancer. He was a devoted keeper of county lore, and County Commissioner Karen Marcus had planned to nominate him official County Historian at the Commission's January 13 meeting.





Boynton High School, 1927 (Photo courtesy of Sue Beaman)

## UPDATE ON HISTORIC HIGH SCHOOL

Back in the Spring/Summer, 2002 issue, *The Historian* reported that the Board of Trustees of the Historical Society was working to encourage the City to preserve the 1926 Historic Boynton High School building. We attended meetings of the City Commission and hired Rick Gonzalez, restoration architect, to examine the building, make recommendations, and contribute to our presentation to the City. The City staff had suggested demolishing the building and paving the area where it had stood for a parking lot. A majority of the Commission members referred it to the Community Redevelopment Agency which appointed a special task force to study the building.

The task force hired an architectural firm from Key West, Bender and Associates, to examine the building and make suggestions. Their report recommended preservation, and the consultant, according to Doug Hutchinson, Director of the C.R.A., "was amazed we considered tearing it down."

The consultants recommended a thorough cleaning and the immediate removal of pigeon waste, as well as re-roofing the building, installing roof drains and weatherproofing skylights. Those initial repairs were estimated to cost \$209,000. To renovate fully the 28,000 square-foot building will require about \$3.4 million, but to demolish and replace it would cost at least double that amount the report said. The Commission did order an immediate asbestos and lead paint testing for the building, but the consultant said any problems with either would be easy and relatively inexpensive to fix.

Several groups have expressed an interest in using space within the building. The Schoolhouse Children's Museum, housed next door in the 1913 schoolhouse, needs expansion space for storage, to create exhibits, and offer programs geared toward middle-school-aged children. The Department of Recreation and Parks needs space to offer courses and activities. And the City itself, which is short of office space, is eyeing the building for its own expansion.

The Historical Society has long sought space for an office, archival storage, and an exhibit room. Such space was originally promised in the 1913 Schoolhouse when its preservation began, but the needs of the Children's Museum revealed how little area that building contains. As we reported in an earlier newsletter, our archival storage room is overcrowded and somewhat chaotic despite the continuing willingness of the City Library to share its limited space with us. The failure of the recently proposed \$11 million bond issue will prevent any immediate expansion of the Library or recreation facilities.

The preliminary paperwork was done some years ago to have the 1926 Mediterranean revival-style building placed on the National Register of Historic Buildings. Such classification would open the possibilities for additional grant money, especially if the building is used primarily for cultural and recreational purposes, but the awarding of most grants requires in-kind support and matching money. The Historical Society would like to begin a fund drive to help pay some share of the costs for restoration if space is allocated in the building for our use. We will keep you informed about how you can help us in the months ahead.





BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Post Office Box 12  
Boynton Beach, Florida 33425-0012

**2004 DUES ARE NOW DUE**  
**effective January 1 to December 31, 2004**

**BECOME A MEMBER OF THE BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

THE PURPOSE OF THE SOCIETY IS TO ACT AS A LIVING REPOSITORY FOR BOYNTON BEACH'S TRADITIONS AND HISTORY, TO INTERPRET ITEMS OF HISTORICAL AND ANTIQUARIAN SIGNIFICANCE, AND TO PROMOTE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF HISTORY. WE ARE PROUD TO SERVE BOYNTON BEACH, OCEAN RIDGE, MANALAPAN, GULFSTREAM, LANTANA, HYPOLUXO, BRINEY BREEZES, AND ALL AREA WEST OF BOYNTON BEACH TO U.S. 441, AND, ON OCCASION, GREATER PALM BEACH COUNTY.

THE BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEEDS YOUR HELP. By BECOMING A MEMBER TODAY, you can help us to preserve the AREA'S TRADITIONS AND HISTORY. MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE NOMINAL!

ONE OF OUR VERY IMPORTANT GOALS IS TO ASSIST IN THE PRESERVATION OF THE "HISTORIC old BOYNTON HIGH SCHOOL," ADJACENT TO THE 1913 SCHOOLHOUSE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM. WE COLLABORATED ON THE RESTORATION OF THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM AND WISH TO HELP PRESERVE THIS OTHER HISTORIC BUILDING AS WELL. THE OLD HIGH SCHOOL IS WEST OF THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM ON EAST OCEAN AVENUE, JUST EAST OF SEACREST BOULEVARD. WE INVITE YOU TO DRIVE BY TO SEE JUST HOW PRECIOUS THESE STRUCTURES ARE TO THE RESIDENTS OF OUR SERVICE AREA AND TO CITIZENS EVERYWHERE—NOT ONE, BUT TWO BEAUTIFUL RESTORATIONS side by side! WHAT A COUP THIS WOULD BE FOR ALL OF US!

BUT, WE CAN'T DO THIS WITHOUT YOUR SUPPORT!!! By BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY you will help us with our goals. AS A MEMBER, you will RECEIVE INFORMATION ABOUT OUR UPCOMING FREE PROGRAMS AND EVENTS, AND you will CONTINUE ON YOUR MAILING LIST FOR OUR NEWSLETTER, *THE HISTORIAN*. THESE NEWSLETTERS PROVIDE DETAILS ABOUT OUR HISTORY AND OUR RESIDENTS, PAST AND PRESENT.

WOULDN'T YOU PLEASE SEND US YOUR TAX-DEDUCTIBLE MEMBERSHIP FEE AND APPLICATION NOW?

TO BECOME A MEMBER, PLEASE MAKE YOUR CHECK PAYABLE TO BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY FOR THE CALENDAR YEAR 2004, AND MAIL IT TO POST OFFICE BOX 12, BOYNTON BEACH, FLORIDA 33425-0012. THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

CHECK ONE:	Individual	___\$25.00	Family	___\$35.00
	PATRON	___\$50.00	CORPORATE	___\$100.00

MEMBER'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ 2<sup>ND</sup> MEMBER'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE # \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

YES ☐ I WOULD LIKE TO SERVE ON THE FOLLOWING COMMITTEE(S)    Archives/Preservation ☐    PROGRAM PLANNING ☐  
Mailings ☐    Telephone ☐    Hospitality ☐    Membership ☐    Public Relations ☐    Seeking Sponsors ☐  
Minority History ☐    Fundraising ☐    OTHER (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_    OTHER (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, CALL VONCILE SMITH, PRESIDENT AT 561-734-5653, OR CLAIRE WEEMS, MEMBERSHIP AT 561-735-3900.

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Boynton Beach, FL 33425-0012

Special Thanks to Don and Sean Fenton, Investment Representatives, EDWARD JONES, 901 N. Congress Avenue, Boynton Beach, FL 33426, for underwriting a portion of the cost for mailing this Newsletter.

The Boynton Beach Historical Society is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Therefore, all gifts are tax deductible; and gifts of securities or real property may provide additional tax advantages as well. When you are considering your donation, you should consult with your tax advisor so that you can maximize the effectiveness of your contribution.

A thoughtful anytime gift for anniversaries, holidays or other special occasions is a Gift of Membership to the Boynton Beach Historical Society. Include the name of the receiver as you wish it to appear on the gift card and the level of membership you are awarding:

**I WANT TO GIVE A GIFT OF MEMBERSHIP TO:**

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You may also give a memorial gift to the Society to honor a friend or family member. We appreciate your thinking of the Boynton Beach Historical Society.