



# *The Historian*

*The Newsletter of The Boynton Beach Historical Society*

Voncile Smith, President

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Voncile Smith, Editor

## **“WHAT I FOUND IN MOTHER’S CLOSET”**

### **FRAN McKERAL LOOKS AT MOMENTOS FROM THE PAST**

Mabel Rousseau and John Tuite represented families with long histories in Boynton Beach. After John’s death last fall, their daughter, Frances Tuite McKeral, began going through the closets and cabinets in the home she had shared with her father. Many boxes had set undisturbed, as her father had requested, since before her mother’s death some years ago. What Fran found chronicles much of 20<sup>th</sup> century Boynton Beach history. Local newspapers from the 1920s and 1930s, their companies no longer in business; pictures; programs; letters—a wide variety of items which tell a story of times past.

Mabel Rousseau Tuite taught school for many years in the 1913 schoolhouse and later in the 1927 building on Ocean Avenue originally designed to be Boynton High School. John Tuite was the first employed fire chief for Boynton and later served in law enforcement in Boynton and as a deputy sheriff for Palm Beach County. The Rousseaus have a long history in the area going back to the early 1900s. We are always delighted when a member of the Boynton Beach Historical Society offers to share with us ideas and information about our history.



Frances Tuite , Age 3

**WHAT: Presentation and Discussion  
by Frances Tuite McKeral**

**WHERE: Boynton Woman’s Club  
1010 S. Federal Hwy**

**TOPIC: “What I Found in Mother’s Closet”  
Momentos and Records of  
Mabel Rousseau Tuite**

**DATE Monday, April 9, 2007  
& TIME: 6:30 p.m.**

**ALL PROGRAMS OF THE BOYNTON BEACH  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE  
PUBLIC.**

## SOME PICTURES FROM "MABEL'S CLOSET"



Boynton High School Girls' Basketball Team 1929-30  
Mabel Rousseau is 2nd from right; her sister Esther Rousseau is 2<sup>nd</sup> from left



Mabel Rousseau, 1939, after graduation  
from Florida State College for Woman



Mabel, above at her school desk, 1954  
Lower, seated on school steps, 1940s



Jack Tuite with baby Frances, 1945



Mabel and Jack's son John Tuite



**BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS—2006-07**

**OFFICERS**

President	Voncile Smith
1 <sup>st</sup> Vice President, Programs	Randall Gill
2 <sup>nd</sup> Vice President, Membership	Bev Cormany
Recording Secretary	Betty Thomas
Corresponding Secretary	TBA
Treasurer	Claire Weems

**DIRECTORS**

2007	Gloria Turner
2007	Curtis Weaver
2008	Lucile Dickinson
2008	Fain Weems
2009	Helen Adams Bonomini
2009	Nain Weaver

**TRUSTEES**

2007	Janet DeVries
2007	Marion Weems
2008	Harvey Oyer, Jr
2008	Stanley Weaver
2009	Virginia Farace
2009	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.

**ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL  
MEETING**

Just before the program, at the April 9 meeting, the Society will hold a short business meeting to elect officers, directors and trustees for 2007-2008.

The Agenda will be as follows:

- Call to order
- Pledge to the flag
- Report of Nominating Committee
- Nominations from the floor
- Close nominations
- Vote
- Announce results
- Other business
- Program

All officers are elected for one year terms. Directors and Trustees for 3-year, staggered terms. In addition to the need to elect two trustees to serve until April 2010, there is a one year vacancy for a term expiring in 2008. We are sad to report that for health reasons **Stanley Weaver** has asked to have someone else complete the remaining year of his term. So we will elect all officers, two directors (3 year terms), two trustees (3 year terms) and one trustee (1 year term).

**IN MEMORIAM**

**Robert Spence** was a true history buff. He was a long time friend and supporter of the Boynton Beach Historical Society and had once served as its president. He passed away recently at the age of 93. A memorial service in his honor will be conducted at the Boynton Beach Congregational Church (United Church of Christ), 111 North Federal Highway, on April 3, 2007 at 10:30 a.m. On behalf of the Historical Society, we extend our best wishes to his family.

Many long-time Boynton residents will remember **Margaret "Peggy" Pierce Powell**, the daughter of **Charles Leon "Chuck" Pierce**. She died recently in Broward County. In her girlhood, Peggy attended Boynton schools, but when her family moved to West Palm Beach, she and her sister Celia attended Palm Beach High School. **Celia Pierce** died in Massachusetts c. 2005. Additional information about the history of the Pierce family and its role in settling early Palm Beach County is contained elsewhere in this newsletter.

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**BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

The next meeting of the Board of Directors for the Boynton Beach Historical Society is scheduled for Wednesday, April 18, 2007, 5:30 p.m. at the Boynton Woman's Club, 1010 South Federal Highway. Although business is conducted by the members of the Board, anyone who is a member of the Society in good standing is welcome to attend and participate in the discussion.

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**COVERED-DISH DINNER PLANNED FOR MAY**

The event will be described in the next issue of *The Historian* to be distributed for the month of May, but plan now to attend our last scheduled event before summer. As has been our tradition for several years, the Boynton Beach Historical Society will meet with the members of the Mizner Foundation of the Boynton Woman's Club for a covered-dish dinner late on a Sunday afternoon between Mother's Day and Memorial Day. The date this year is Sunday, May 20, and we begin at 5:00 p.m.

**Tim Bednarz**, president of the Mizner Foundation, and also knowledgeable about food preparation and service (a history in the restaurant business) will oversee furnishing the meat entrees and beverages. We ask that members who attend bring a salad, vegetable dish, or dessert sufficient to serve eight. Several members have asked that we schedule no program, but encourage people to visit with one another.

## THE PIERCES – A HISTORY OF AN AMERICAN FAMILY

[The information in this article was narrated by Harvey E. Oyer, Jr. in March. It is his recollection at this time based on what he remembers his grandparents, especially his grandmother Lillie Elder Pierce Voss, telling him in his youth.]

The events recounted herein relate primarily to Hannibal Dillingham [H.D.] Pierce; Margaretta Moore Pierce, his wife; and their two children Charles and Lillie. H.D. and Margaretta were Harvey's great grand parents.

The Pierces were an old New England family of English descent. They arrived in Massachusetts about 1635. Later they acquired property in Newburyport where a young, single man named Spencer had been granted 400 acres on the Merrimac River. Because of some type of dispute with the Church, Spencer returned to England and later moved to Jamaica. The Pierces acquired the land and built a house on it some time between 1670 and 1700. The original house still stands, but it has been added to and modified over the years. It is currently operated as a museum, the Spencer-Pierce-Little House, by the Association for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.



The Spencer-Pierce-Little House in Newburyport, MA

The American British colonies operated under the British laws of inheritance, primogeniture, so after several years, members of the Pierce family who no longer had a claim to the house moved on to other locations.

H.D. Pierce's forebears moved to Maine. H.D. was born in Reidsville, Maine. Many New Englanders earned their livelihoods as seafarers—fishermen or whalers. H.D. went to sea at age 16. He went by clipper ship around Cape Horn and on to Australia and New Guinea. Later he was on a sailing ship in the Bering Sea, and still later on a sailing cargo ship in the Great Lakes where his ship ran aground near Waukegan, not far from Chicago.

He moved in with a family in that area named Moore and fell in love with and married their daughter Margaretta.

Margaretta had a brother named Will Moore who had consumption, a common illness at that time. His doctor advised him to leave the harsh Midwestern climate and seek a warmer place to try to improve his health. He traveled south to North Florida where he camped out on the banks of the St. Johns River and fished, hunted, and relaxed. When he had grown stronger, a couple drove by his campsite on a mule or ox drawn cart and invited him to accompany them on a trip

farther south. He eventually arrived in Fort Pierce. While there, he saw an abandoned cottage surrounded by an orange grove. He bought it, then returned to Chicago.

It was c. 1871 and the Great Chicago Fire had destroyed nearly everything in the city. One of the few things still intact was a boat belonging to H.D. Pierce which had been moored in the harbor. H.D., Margaretta, Will, and the boy Charles boarded the boat and headed down the Illinois River toward the Mississippi River. But before they reached the Mississippi, they found themselves frozen in for the winter on the Illinois River. After they were able to free their boat, they progressed south, entering the Gulf of Mexico and following the coast east to Cedar Key which at that time was an important Gulf port and railroad terminal.

They considered sailing around the Florida Keys, but experienced sailors warned them of the danger of storms during the summer months, so they took the railroad to Jacksonville. Here they boarded a steamer for river transport south on the St. Johns. When they reached a spot about where Enterprise is now located, they changed to a horse drawn vehicle for transportation to Titusville. Here they boarded another boat to travel to Fort Pierce where they planned to live in the house Will Moore had bought on his earlier trip. Unfortunately they had been there only a short time when the house caught fire and burned to the ground. One person who befriended them in Fort Pierce was a former slave known in memory only as "Aunt Betsy." Later "Aunt Betsy" was to come to their aid more than once.

H.D. had heard that a job for an assistant lighthouse keeper was available at Jupiter. He had sent word of his interest to Captain Armour, the keeper of the lighthouse. When H.D. was offered the job, the family borrowed a leaky little boat from Aunt Betsy and set out for Jupiter. Captain Armour himself decided to sail his boat up to meet them, which was most fortunate because Aunt Betsy's boat sank.

After several months in Jupiter, H.D. and Margaretta decided to move farther south to homestead property of their own. They planned to go to the northern shore of a landlocked fresh water lake we call Lake Worth. From Jupiter they took a little boat down a branch of the Loxahatchee toward Juno. Unfortunately the branch ran out and they had to move across sawgrass to get to the northern end of the lake. A man named Charlie Moore (no relation) had a small shack or lean-to on the northern end of the Lake about where Palm Beach is now located. The Pierces and Will Moore did not want to crowd their neighbors, so they moved still farther south to Hypoluxo Island which was surrounded by Lake Worth. H.D. homesteaded the south half of Hypoluxo Island while Will Moore took the north half. They subsisted primarily as beachcombers and farmers, but their farm products had a very limited market because at that time there was no railroad for shipping, and shipment by boat was very slow for perishable goods which were inclined to spoil in transit (c. 1873-1875). [continued on page 5] Page 4

H.D. accepted a job as keeper of the Orange Grove House of Refuge located on the beach of what is now Delray Beach. He salary was probably at most about \$600 per year.



Orange Grove Refuge House #3

During this time H.D. and Margaretta had their second child, Lillie Elder Pierce, who was born in 1876. Before her birth they sent to Fort Pierce for "Aunt Betsy" who came down to live with them as a midwife for Margaretta.



Lillie Elder Pierce, 1880, age 4 years,  
Lake Worth, Florida with her doll named  
"Nellie Key West"

Lillie Pierce went to school for only a few days. The early school building which now sits at Phipps Park in the southern part of Palm Beach was located at Juno, much too far away to travel to on a daily basis. H.D. and Margaretta tried sending her to a school in North Florida when she was older, but she came home very soon. She said she missed fishing, hunting, and boating; but she added that most of the other students were Southerners, and her family was from Illinois and Maine. Too few years had passed since the Civil War for her to be comfortable in that setting. Her parents instructed her at home, especially her mother, and she read extensively. Some of her journals and letters have provided information about early life in what is now Palm Beach County.

Later after Lillie married Captain Frederick Voss some of her love for boating and fishing was passed on to several of her sons who became fishing captains. Her only daughter was Freda Voss Oyer.



Captain Frederick C. Voss the day before  
His 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in February 1955

After Henry Flagler brought his railroad south from Juno, Lillie's brother, Charles Pierce, moved to Boynton. His home, no longer standing, was located where the City placed "Kiddie Park" a few years ago. The site is across from the Schoolhouse Children's Museum and just east of the Civic Center.

Charles' son, Charles Leon "Chuck" Pierce was born in 1896 and may have been the first boy of European ancestry born in Boynton. The elder Charles served as postmaster until his death in 1939 when he was succeeded as postmaster by his second wife, Ethel Sims Pierce. His first wife, Yallis, was Chuck's mother and she had died years earlier.

Chuck graduated from Palm Beach High School the same year as his cousin Freda Voss in 1915. He became a Navy ensign during World War I, but he returned to Boynton after the war where he lived during the childhood of his two daughters, Peggy and Celia. They later moved to West Palm Beach where the girls attended Palm Beach High School.

Chuck returned to service in 1941 and was later involved in the planning stages for the loading for the D-Day invasion in June 1944. After the war, he became president of the First National Bank of Fort Lauderdale.

In the "In Memoriam" section we noted that Chuck's daughters, Peggy and Celia had both died within the past two years. Their passing ends the line of those actually named Pierce from that pioneer family in this area; but descendants from both Lillie Voss' children and the children of Peggy and Celia continue to recall with pride the accounts of their Pierce ancestors' struggles as pioneers in South Florida.



# BOYNTON ROTARY CLUB, DECEMBER 9, 1940



Whom do you recognize? Those identified at the time of this printing are: Kneeling, L to R, Walter Lyman, Roy Myers, Fred Benson, Jean Merkel, the other six are unidentified. Standing, L to R, first 3 not identified, beginning 4<sup>th</sup> from left-Reverend Ware, Curtis Wright, Leslie Crane (school principal), A.V. Peterson, Dr. Nat Weems, Paul Mercer, Howard Hood, M.A. Weaver, remaining two unidentified.

[Photo courtesy Cindy Lyman Jamieson]



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*The Nickonian*