

HISTORY CENTER TIMES

A NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2023

PUBLISHED BY
FRIENDS OF THE
SARASOTA
COUNTY HISTORY
CENTER

FOSCHC
P. O. Box 91
Venice, FL 34284

941-275-2810



FRIENDS OF THE SARASOTA COUNTY HISTORY CENTER

Note from the President

This is our second newsletter of the year. The swift pace of events has kept everyone associated with FOSCHC very busy. Among those events was History Day for Sarasota County school students held at the School Administration Center at the Landings. History Day is actually a national event where students undertake various types of projects on a historical topic. The theme this year was “Frontiers.” Students submitted research papers, videos, and displays exploring the topic. This is a competition, so volunteer judges are needed to select winners at the local, state, and national levels. I volunteered and so did History Center Manager Josh Goodman, FOSCHC Director David Harper, and FOSCHC member John Manning. It was a great experience to meet and talk with these talented students who love to study history.



On Monday, March 13, FOSCHC held its annual meeting at the Fruitville Library. Besides electing officers and one new Director (Kathryn Chesley), attendees received a gift book and enjoyed refreshment provided by Directors Kim Patton Manning and Peggy Gates. There were two highlights of the program. First, Josh

Goodman gave us an update on planning for the new History Center building as well as the schedule for the temporary move of the staff and collections to the Old Osprey School House at Historic Spanish Point and several county storage facilities. Josh assured everyone that all collections would still be available to the public, but some prior notification would be necessary to see materials in storage. The second highlight was FOSCHC member John Manning’s talk on interesting characters in Sarasota history. John entertained the group with remarkable stories of largely unknown early residents.

**FRIENDS OF THE
SARASOTA
COUNTY HISTORY
CENTER**

Frank Cassell,
President

Betty Intagliata,
Vice President

Don Bayley,
Treasurer

Kathryn Chesley
Secretary

Board Members:

Margaret Gates

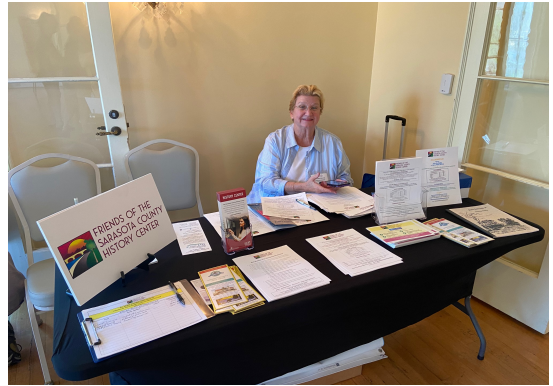
David Harper

Kim Patton
Manning

Betty Nugent

Vic Romano

FOSCHC Directors were also very active in putting together a display for the History Day in the Park event held March 26 at the Phillippi Estate Park. Hundreds of families came to the event to learn more about the county's history as well as the earlier epochs of the region's evolution. Some of the Directors added to the



atmosphere of the event by coming in costume. Kathryn Chesley appeared as Nettie Keith, first mistress of the Edson Keith mansion. Paul and Betty Intagliata dressed as circus tycoon John Ringling and his spouse Mabel. Other Directors including Kim Manning, Peggy Gates, Betty Nugent, and Don Bayley manned the FOCHC table, which was adjacent to an extensive display of historical artifacts and photos prepared by Josh Goodman and his able staff. The area was full of people all day and at least four of them signed up as new members.



PHOTOS

Above: Kim Manning at our booth at History Day in the Park.

Left: Kathryn Chesley as Nettie Keith in front of the Keith Mansion at Phillippi Park

I close with a tribute to Don Bayley, a former FOSCHC President who is now our Treasurer and Communications Director. Don was recently named as the 2023 recipient of the Lilian Burns Individual Achievement Award, a recognition of a lifetime of service to history and preservation in Sarasota County. The Award is given by the Heritage Awards Program which is managed by the Sarasota Alliance for Historic Preservation. It is the highest award of its kind in Sarasota County. I am delighted Don has received this honor for his many contributions. Significantly, Don is the third FOSCHC Director to be so recognized. The others are Betty Intagliata of Venice and Betty Nugent of Englewood. I believe it is a measure of the excellence of our organization generally that we count these three outstanding individuals among our members.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue.
Dr. Frank A. Cassell, President

Friends' Photos

Thanks to our Photographer, Peggy Gates



Membership Director Kim Manning addresses visitors from Sarasota's Classroom on Wheels at the History Center



Dr. Josh Goodman, History Center Manager leads a tour for the Classroom on Wheels



Treasurer and Communications Director Don Bayley at a Membership Meeting

Membership Committee Report

I am pleased to report that since March 2022 with 42 members, we have increased our membership by over 35% including 9 renewals without the benefit of our new membership renewal notice. As of this writing we have 57 members of the Friends of the Sarasota County History Center.

Our three events have been a success. The two Classroom on Wheels events held at the History Center and conducted by Drs. Goodman & Cassell were very well received by the attendees. Unfortunately, at the time we didn't have the ability on site to accept credit/debit cards. While some attendees joined with cash & check payments, I feel confident that we could have had more.



Kim Manning with historian & author
Jeff LaHurd at our History Day table

The third event was our participation with History Day in the Park at the Phillippi Estate which was held on March 25, 2023. Many interested people stopped by our table in the mansion during the day. We wound up signing 6 new members; and we could process their credit cards on site! We are smoothing out some of the glitches with our new membership email communication system (Constant Contact). We expect it to be running smoothly very soon. If any members are experienced with Constant Contact & would like to assist, please let me know.

We are planning more events & activities throughout the year. Especially, at the History Center's new and temporary home at the Osprey School (337 N. Tamiami Trail, Osprey, FL 34229).

I would like to particularly thank Peggy Gates for her help and participation at our events. She has been so helpful and always willing to make our events better with her extra touches. This should be a fun and exciting year. I look forward to having your participation with the Friends; and seeing you at our activities & events.

Kim Patton Manning
FOSCHC Membership Chair

For Information on Becoming a Member VISIT OUR WEBSITE

What is a Cyanotype?



Learn all about the Friends' "cyanotype" venture in the next edition of *History Center Times*.

The Whimsical History Corner

A place where curious aspects of Sarasota County history are explored

"We got the money for a pier! What do you mean we don't own any bayfront?"

*The story of Sarasota's Municipal Pier, Bayfront Park and Marina Jack
By John Manning - 04 April 2023*

When you first come to Sarasota it usually doesn't take long before you've seen the City of Sarasota's Municipal Pier, Bayfront Park & Marina, and Marina Jack restaurant. Scenic, upscale, people- and dog-friendly are all adjectives you can use to describe the area. But it wasn't always this way. A little history is in order.



Hamilton Disston

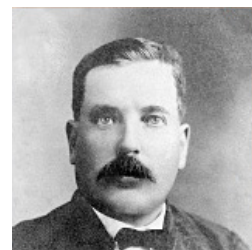
Hamilton Disston (Philadelphia, PA) created the Florida Land and Improvement Company (FLIC); and struck a deal with the State of Florida beginning in 1881 to acquire 4 million acres for 25 cents an acre. He wanted to start selling large tracts of land to speculators. One of those tracts (246,052 acres titled to FLIC on June 12, 1883) included our area. But there was a problem. The tract was land-locked. Disston needed access to the bayfront to sell his land at a profit. So, Disston sent John J. Dunne to quietly acquire an outlet to the bayfront. On January 10, 1884

Dunne purchased 94 acres from A.E. Willard for \$1,500 in what is now downtown Sarasota. Disston got his outlet to the bayfront.

Then he sold 50,000 acres to the Florida Mortgage & Investment Company (FMIC), a Scottish speculator, in early 1885. In turn FMIC surveyed, laid out and ultimately platted what is now downtown Sarasota. FMIC then sold packages of "a 40-acre farm estate & downtown lot in Sarasota" to mostly Scottish merchants with no experience as farmers for 100 pounds sterling. But there was a problem. None of the "Sarasota package" that the Scots bought into actually existed when they arrived here (December 28, 1885). There wasn't even a pier to step onto from the ship. But that's a story for another time.

Meanwhile, the deathly ill, on-site "Sarasota" manager for FMIC, A.C. Acton, went about building a boarding house ("Sarasota House") & a wooden pier at the end of "Main Street." By the end of March 1886, those projects were completed. Just in time for Acton to be replaced by the son of the president of FMIC (J. Hamilton Gillespie) in April 1886. Acton died six months later.

Sarasota got its first dependable, regular connection with the outside world with the arrival of the Mistletoe steamer out of Tampa (October 7, 1895). The U.S. government had completed dredging channels directly from Tampa to Sarasota (1895) allowing for profitable runs between them. Future commissioner and mayor Harry Higel bought the pier from FMIC for \$1,500; and became the Mistletoe's first local agent.



Harry Higel
CREDIT:
simplysarasota.com

In 1905, Higel offered to sell the pier to the town for what he originally paid. He was turned down. Five years later (1910) Higel again offered to sell the pier to the town for \$5,000. Again, he was turned down. Higel then sold the pier to the Hover brothers (Lima, OH) in 1911 for \$12,500. The Hovers made improvements to the pier and built the two-story Hover Arcade at the pier's entrance.



Postcard showing the Hover Arcade. In 1916 the city of Sarasota acquired the arcade building for \$40,000. When Sarasota County was founded in 1921 its first offices were in the Arcade.

After the Sara de Soto pageant (March 22-26, 1916) the citizens of Sarasota wanted a pier for entertainment uses. So, a bond referendum for \$18,000 was passed (September 5, 1916) to build a pier. But there was a problem. The city only had 20 feet of bayfront which wasn't large enough to build a pier. So, another bond referendum for \$40,000 was passed (March 6, 1917) to buy the Hovers' pier and arcade. Sarasota finally had a municipal pier!

Four years later the hurricane of October 24-25, 1921 wrecked the bayfront and the wooden pier. Yet another bond referendum in 1924 for \$75,000 for a concrete pier. C'est la "very expensive" vie.

In September 1950 the Sarasota Chamber of Commerce proposed that Broadway Ave. (now North Tamiami Trail) be connected to Gulfstream Avenue. The Sarasota city commissioners wanted to beautify and show off the bayfront hoping to impress visitors to return and/or become property owners. The plan was to take a piece of the Luke Wood Park and reroute the expanded, 4-lane US 41 from Main Street through a new Bayfront Drive. Many, including world respected architects, voiced their disapproval to the plan citing it would cut off the city from Sarasota Bay. But to no avail. The city commission pushed ahead. Property owners along Gulfstream Ave. sued the city claiming they had riparian rights to the land. Dredge and fill work began in late 1957 and continued through litigation. The property owners' litigation failed. Bayfront Drive was opened on February 1, 1959.

Next the Sarasota city commissioners wanted a public (city as lessor) – private (business as lessee) arrangement creating a "world-class marina" that would include a restaurant, shops, snack bar and 143 boat slips. A marina basin was created by dredging & filling a "rabbit-legged", 11-acre peninsula which connected to the newly expanded mainland south of the pier. The peninsula was called Island Park; and finished in February 1964. The restaurant, shops, snack bar (now O'Leary's Tiki Bar & Grill), updated pier, and marine facilities were leased to Marina Mar, Inc. on July 23, 1964. The Hover Arcade was demolished in 1967. But there was a problem. Marina Mar, Inc. defaulted on its lease on September 1967; and the property fell into a state of disrepair.

Enter car dealer and Holiday Inn owner Jack Graham from Effingham, IL to the rescue. Jack Graham, Inc. (JGI) made a deal with the city and assumed tenancy (from temporary tenant Gulf Oil Co.) on October 28, 1968. The deal was that Jack Graham, Inc. would not pay any taxes on the property (tax exemption) because Marina Jack was designated “a public good for the city.” Those city commissioners knew how to drive a hard bargain.

In early January 2009 the city and Marina Jack’s signed a new lease. Marina Jack would pay 3% of what it earns in rent – still no taxes. Yes, those city commissioners really knew how to drive a hard bargain.

On July 25, 2012 the Sarasota County Property Appraiser (Bill Furst) announced it had reached a settlement with Jack Graham, Inc. & the City of Sarasota over the tax exemption. The settlement had Jack Graham Inc. paying 50% of any future tax assessments and \$250,00 in back taxes. Masterful negotiations.

On September 27, 2016 Marina Jack merged with Suntex Marinas (Dallas, TX).

And that’s the short story of Sarasota’s Municipal Pier, Bayfront Park and Marina Jack.

**Interested in volunteering to help preserve and share local history?
Contact History Center Manager Dr. Josh Goodman at jgoodman@scgov.net
or give him a call at 941-861-6883.**

LINKS:

**Friends of the Sarasota County History Center
Friends Facebook Page
Friends YouTube Page
Sarasota County History Center**