



# The Historical Quarterly

of the St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.

Charles R. Croghan, Editor

Fall 2008

## *Journey into Wilderness*

*The Journal*

*Jacob Rhett Motte*

On the morning of the 2nd Janry 1838 we moved over to the west side of Indian river; to a spot four miles south of the Inlet, designated as "the bluff," *par excellence*; being the highest point of land on the whole river though only about ten or fifteen feet above the water. We there established ourselves; first by pitching our tents on a narrow esplanade between the river and the bluff, which rises perpendicularly behind us; next by erecting a block-house upon the top of the bluff. Being pretty much like all other block-houses in Florida, except that this one was built of palmetto logs, we deemed it worthy the title of fort, and the distinction of a name; it was therefore dubbed *Fort Pierce*, after our worthy commander. My tent was located with its front but a few feet from the water edge, and but a few inches above the river's surface. Here was a luxury! To lie upon my blanket, and have the water constantly in view, and almost within reach of my hand. The spot upon which we were encamped bore traces of having not long previous been the site of an Indian camp; and at a point jutting into the river, a few hundred yards south of us, were still left standing the poles and palmetto leaves of some of their lodges. A dense forest, in which the palmetto tree held a conspicuous place, bounded the view immediately in our rear. The formation of the ground ad joining the bluff presented strong indications of its having been thrown up in a regular manner of a fortification; but when, or by whom made, will probably forever remain a secret; the antiquity only of its date made known by the enormous trees growing out of the embankments and entrenchments, which were easily to be distinguished. It may possibly have been the retreat in olden times of the Buccaneers; for, to quote the words of history, "The coast of Florida was long the favorite resort, and her bays and inlets, but little known to the rest of the world, long continued to be the safe retreat of that bold, desperate, and reckless race of beings, who, during the seventeenth century, so much infested the Southern Seas. It was from this coast that they drew their main supplies; and when driven from the ocean, it was here in these unknown regions that they sought safety. And according to tradition, it was to the Spanish forts and settlements along the coast, that they carried much of the blood-stained wealth, which they had gathered by piracy from the four corners of the earth." Or perchance it is the work of the adventurous Spaniards; whose traces are to be found at almost every step in Florida, where two hundred years ago they made their settlements. Inadequate are words to express the quantity and quality of the fish that abounded in those waters. In one hour one may take as many *Bonetas*, *Redfish*, *Groupers*, *Sheephead*, *Bass*, *Trout*, and myriads of other kinds, unknown elsewhere, of the

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## *Journey into*

**ST. LUCIE COUNTY  
HISTORICAL MUSEUM**

**Happy 40th Birthday**

The current St. Lucie County Historical Museum building at 414 Seaway Drive had been built by the U.S. government as a Motor Pool for the Amphibious Base which was located in Fort Pierce during World War II. When no longer needed for that purpose, it was turned over to the county. The county used it as the Mosquito Control Center. When the new Mosquito Control Center was built, the Historical Commission signed a five-year lease with the county in June of 1968.

The cleaning and moving of artifacts into the building was accomplished by many volunteers, including the Sea Scouts. Mrs. Vivian Davis painted murals to serve as background for the various exhibition areas depicting the life of the early community. The St. Lucie County Historical Museum officially opened on September 17, 1968.

Mrs. Addie Emerson was the first Museum Director, serving from 1968-1980. She was followed by Iva Jean Sherman (Maddox) from 1980-82. Iva Jean recalls that at that time there were no screen doors, and the main doors were propped open to ease the heat. Visitors included all the little creatures that lived in the area. Part of the daily activities included chasing

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finest flavour, and of large dimensions, generally from two to three feet in length, as will feast a regiment. The finest kind of Sheephead we very soon discarded from our mess tables as noisome things, in comparison with the other fish caught there, and which are peculiar to these latitudes. As for the oysters; six are a comfortable meal for one person, indeed, without exaggeration, the greatest abundance may be easily obtained, which after removal from the shell, measure six or seven inches in length, and two or three inches in breadth. A whole Army might be subsisted here upon the produce of this river, if fish diet agreed with them, and not fear an exhaustion of supplies. We all of us began to grow so fat upon this good living, that we were afraid unless something turned up very soon to produce a change in our felicitous mode of life, that we should have had to borrow from our neighbours, the Indians their style of dress, for our clothes every day became tighter.

A few days after settling on our new ground, Lt. Powell followed us with his command, and encamped a few hundred yards distant on the river shore. He, however, remained but a day or two, when he again pulled up stakes, and embarked his detachment to prosecute the object of his expedition. From here, he was to proceed first to explore the St. Lucie, one of the tributary streams of Indian river twenty miles south of our position. His boats having proved insufficient for the comfortable accommodation of his whole party, the Washington Volunteers were left with us.

Soon after the departure of Powell, Gen. Hernandez and mounted force arrived; having threaded their way with difficulty, through an unknown and never before visited tract of country. They, however, had the advantage of carrying but little baggage; only what could be packed upon the backs of mules.

In consequence of this accession to our numbers, and of the non-arrival of the vessel expected from St. Augustine with forage for the horses; orders were issued for part of the 1st Artillery to return to the Haulover in the Mackinaw boats, and bring back with all possible despatch a supply of horse food. Consequently, on the 8th Janry Col. Pierce and the greater part of his regiment departed on their voyage up Indian river; Major Kirby remaining in command of that part of the Regt. which was left, to take care of camp, and defend the sick.

On the 14th Janry our remote and quiet little post presented quite a scene of bustle; occasioned by the arrival of Gen. Jesup and Staff, accompanied by part of the 2d Dragoons under the command of Col. Twiggs, amounting to four hundred men, and about six hundred mounted volunteers from Alabama and Tennessee. They had left a part of their detachment encamped about thirty miles from us in the interior, at a place called Camp Lloyd;<sup>4</sup> and had come seeking this post through the wilderness in quest of provisions for themselves and horses; and where Gen. Jesup concluded to remain and recruit his troops on the fine oysters and other fish until Gen. Eustis with his division should arrive at Camp Lloyd. The general had with him as guide an Indian recently captured personally by Lt. Searle of his staff. They had passed many heavy trails, which were recent and all tending to the south. The Indians were therefore thought to be in force in that direction, and as the whole of that part of Florida was represented by our Indian guides as uninhabitable, except a very narrow strip of land between the Atlantic ocean, and the *Okechobee*

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them out before closing. In the mid-70s, Bob Gladwin installed a photographic dark room, and a decade later, a costume room and photo lab were created.

Ed McCarron served as Museum Director from 1982-84. He was succeeded by Scott Loehr, who occupied that seat from 1985-1988. In June 1985, the much needed air conditioning was installed. That same summer, the Treasure Room was set up, and the Register/Gardner house was moved to the Museum property.

In 1987, the gift shop, "Pineapple Patch" was built. Ed Swanson became Superintendent of Museums (the Historical and the UDT-Seal Museums) just in time to oversee the massive building program of 1989.

The addition of the Train Room and the Vehicle sheds, along with the renovation of the main Museum were completed in 1991.

Also, in 1991, the "Bob" Gladwin Memorial Garden was dedicated, and the long-stored Backus "cowboy" paintings were exhibited. The paintings were on loan from Alfred Lisk, owner of Ranchland, a specialty store in Fort Pierce, which carried all merchandise necessary to the cowboy (both professional and dude). They were a part of the store's decor.

The largest painting (6' 9" x 5' 11"), oil on canvas, and unframed is titled "Working Cattle on the Ranch" and was completed in 1947.

The two smaller paintings (62" x 72"), oil on canvas and framed are titled "Runaway Steer" and "Steer Wrestling," completed in 1947.

In 1998, the Justin Havee Collection was added to the Museum Library.

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lake, our troops were expecting soon to give a very good account of the enemy, it being impossible for them to escape unobserved; or retreat much farther south, without being stopped by the water.

By the arrival of Capt. H. [Harvey] Brown we first learnt the particulars of a disastrous victory, which the division under Col. Taylor had gained over the Indians,—disastrous, inasmuch as he lost five officers, twenty five privates killed, and over a hundred wounded.

It seemed that on the evening of the 24th Decr, Col. Taylor captured an Indian on the Kissimmee river, from whom he learnt that *Alligator* with all the war spirits of the Seminoles, and *Sam Jones* or *Abiaka*, with a hundred and seventy five Mickasukies were encamped not many miles distant on the east side of the Kissimmee, and near the Lake *O-ke-cho-bee*. The Colonel consequently under the reluctant guidance of the captured Indian, who had no taste for being hung, went in search of the enemy; and after passing several cypress swamps and dense hammocks, reached the vicinity of their encampment on Christmas morning.<sup>6</sup>

The Indians in expectation of an attack, had selected one of the most difficult places to approach in Florida; having a swamp nearly a mile wide in front, which was unpassable for horses, and almost for foot. They had also cleared away the palmetto from before the hammock in which they were stationed within rifle range of the skirts; and as the Army charged, received them with a deadly fire, which brought nearly one tenth to the ground.<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding the warm and destructive fire which was kept up, the sixth and part of the fourth Infantry pressed forward; gained the hammock; and after fighting severely for more than an hour, completely routed the enemy;<sup>8</sup> who were driven in every direction; leaving the field with ten of their number dead upon it, in possession of our troops, and innumerable traces of blood where they had dragged others off.<sup>9</sup>

The sixth Infantry suffered most severely. It lost its Lt. Col. R. Thompson,<sup>10</sup>—Adjutant J. P. Center,<sup>11</sup>—Capt. Van Swearingen,<sup>12</sup>—and 1st Lt. F. J. Brooke,<sup>13</sup>—its Sergt. Major, and nineteen rank and file. It had wounded Capt. G. Andrews,<sup>14</sup>—Lt. W. H. T. Walker,<sup>15</sup> and seventy six rank and file. It must have been a hard contested struggle, in which every officer of four companies of one regiment, including the orderly sergeants, were either killed or wounded, while its commander and staff fell where they fought, in the hottest of the action.<sup>16</sup>

The Missouri Volunteers, who were with Col. Taylor, met with a serious loss in the death of their commander, Col. Gentry.<sup>17</sup> He fell mortally wounded at the head of his regiment—while gallantly encouraging his men to the charge.

Thus did our gallant little army once more prove its intrepidity and invincibility, though at so great a sacrifice; but I trust not greater than was counterbalanced by the advantageous results that no doubt accrued from this victory.<sup>18</sup> And it only remained for Congress to show a nation's gratitude by providing for the families of those martyrs in their common country's cause.<sup>19</sup>

## Museum News

This past summer (2008), the Museum featured a number of exhibits which celebrate the approaching fortieth birthday of its location on Seaway Drive in Fort Pierce. Two of the exhibits are especially noteworthy.

One is "A Walk on the Wild Side of St. Lucie County," a collection of photographs taken by Alto L. "Bud" Adams, "cattle rancher, environmentalist, photographer, and author of several Florida Wildlife photography books." (Museum brochure).

Most of the photographs in this exhibit were taken on the Adams Ranch in western St. Lucie County. Oak hammocks, grasslands, and cypress swamps provide an idyllic setting for depicting the beauty and wonders of Florida's backcountry.

The second exhibit features Florida fossils. Here one can discover fossils "from Florida's earliest found inhabitants, including mammals, reptiles, and sea creatures.

Magalodon, Mastodont, along with prehistoric whale, buffalo, camel, and rhinoceros remains are among the dozens of fossils featured in the exhibit." (St. Lucie Co. Employee Newsletter, "Spotlight," July 2008).

## Another Milestone

On August 1, 1968, the last passenger train to stop at Fort Pierce left the station on its way north. The first railway train to arrive at Fort Pierce did so on 29 January, 1894. (St. Lucie County Almanac, 2007).

**Membership Dues: Don't forget to renew annual membership dues! Renewing memberships and giving gift memberships are easy ways to increase membership and expand our mission of preservation. Any membership not renewed by January 1 will be dropped.**

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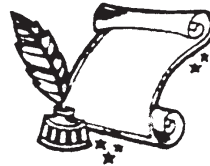
Quarterly Editor: Charles Croghan

The Centennial Year (2005) exhibit, "Black, White and Read All Over," offered twelve exhibits dealing with life in St. Lucie County in 1905. In that by-gone day, your friendly pharmacist advised, "Heroin clears the complexion, gives bouyancy to the mind, regulates the stomach, and is, in fact, a perfect guardian of health."

On January 21, 2006, for the first time in its exhibits presentations, the Museum incorporated bilingual texts, English and Spanish, in the commentary for patrons who viewed the Exhibit, "Spanish Pathways in Paradise."

\* \* \* \*

A.E. "Bean" Backus (1906-1990), the celebrated painter of Florida landscapes, was born in Fort Pierce. After W.W. II, his paintings became greatly sought after by private collectors and museums, alike.



## *Desk of the President*

The Society has made great strides – but now we must do more.

In the last three years, the Society has more than doubled its membership, published two books, become owner of real property in Ft. Pierce and partnered with the White City Improvement Club to save white City's historic Jorgensen House from the developer's wrecking ball. Now, the Society has the opportunity to raise money from the community in order to partner with cash strapped agencies of our County government to insure the preservation and celebration of our area's rich history. This is a challenge that I believe the Society must accept and master and I invite every member of the Society to join in this fund raising campaign.

Brad Culverhouse  
*President*