

The Historical Quarterly

of the St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.

Summer 2008

Charles R. Crogan, Jr.

Editor

AN EARLY REMEMBRANCE OF FLORIDA

Richard Reed

As most of us know, the economy of Florida was "booming" in the early and middle twenties. Many people wanted to take advantage of that "boom" so they moved into the state. Some had given up everything back home to finance transportation and a land purchase in sunny Florida. Some of the new arrivals built nice homes with their money. Some did not have enough money to build more than just a small cabin, looking to future prosperity to allow for something better.

My family, my grandparents and parents, were among the many West Virginians lured to Florida by the smell of money. My Dad and Granddad were carpenters and, of course, the new building required carpenters. We moved to White City in 1925 where we lived in a large two-and-a-half story house built by Peter Jenson in 1898. It still stands majestically on the east side of Oleander Avenue, not far south of White City School. At the north, front corner of the second floor was a sun porch with huge arched storm doors. That space was where Dad and Granddad installed the first indoor bathroom in the house at the insistence of my mother after she was accosted by a snake in the paper box in the outhouse.

In 1927, a building slump hit the Fort Pierce area. Fewer houses were built and fewer northerners came to the state. The economy really collapsed when Florida was hit by the terrible hurricane of 1928. Damage and loss of life was extensive and it discouraged the local people enough that a migration north began. My Dad was one of those who decided that a move to other places was prudent.

One of the things that I remember about living in Florida at that time was being in the above mentioned bathroom at the same time as my two uncles who were cleaning up for an evening on the town. One uncle was involved with the theater as a sort of all round kind of guy, like managing, selling refreshments, ushering and driving the owner, Mr. Kobelgard, around town in Mr. K.s car on special occasions. I don't remember what the other, slightly younger uncle did. Now back to the story. I happened to look out of the window in the front of the house which gave me a view to the west and over the tops of the trees. I remember, to this day, seeing two bright glows just over the tree tops. One glow, I seemed to sense was the sun as it was setting. The other glow mystified me so I asked my uncles what it was. Their casual answer must have affected me

greatly for I remember it vividly even now almost 80 years later. One of them said, "It's probably someone's house on fire".

Many families did not have the resources to pay their way back to wherever they came from. They resorted to dire measures to claim insurance money to finance their travel.

We have no idea how many such unfortunate people resorted to fire or just picked up their meager belongings and walked away from their holdings, going someplace else to find a living and security. I was fortunate since my father was willing and, most of all, able to move to seek a better life.



*Reed House (1925)
Oleander Avenue, White City*

DIXIE HIGHWAY

Ed Register

Because in the early days of St. Lucie County so many historical happenings focused on the business world and the economy, Dixie Highway played a major role in the development of the area. All along the two-lane east coast highway, running from Jacksonville to Miami, accommodating automobiles, trucks, and buses, many small towns and businesses sprang up.

Today, coming into Fort Pierce from the north, you may take the two-lane highway which runs parallel to the Florida East Coast Railway tracks and joins U.S. #1 near the Fort Pierce Riverview Cemetery, or you may take U.S. #1 all the way from Jacksonville. Eighty to ninety years ago, the two-lane road was the only highway along the east coast of Florida.

In the early years of the 20th century when Dixie Highway reached Avenue H in Fort Pierce, you could cross the tracks and move along North 2nd Street into a small village known as Edgartown. However, most vehicles continued south on Dixie, passed a main east-west Avenue D to Avenue C, where they would turn left and soon pass under the FEC tracks. (This underpass was the only one on the FEC route.) Going beyond the underpass, Avenue C continued to North 2nd Street, just as it does today.

However, as you continued south on Dixie to Avenue A, turning left here brought you, in less than one block, to Cobb's store and downtown Fort Pierce. Southward along the river were a number of intersecting roads and streets with still more stores.

The area between the railroad tracks and the river also boasted a number of hotels. Among them were the Sunrise Hotel at Avenue C and Moore's Creek operated by the Kicliter family and the Stetson Hotel on Avenue A between the railroad tracks and North 2nd Street. On the Drive, along the banks of the river was the New Fort Pierce Hotel, built on newly pumped in land fill.

Located along Dixie Highway and its arteries could

*Gas — only one grade —
sold for five to nine cents a
gallon in those days*

be found automobile repair shops, service stations, and dealerships. In downtown Fort Pierce, you would find Mike Schoeller's Service Station at Depot Drive on Avenue A, east of the FEC freight station. Back on Dixie,

Francis Richards operated a Texaco Station at the southwest corner of Orange Avenue and Dixie. In addition were Tyndale Ford Sales and Services, Scharfschwerdt Brothers' Dodge and truck dealership, and Arch Taylor's Service Station and Repair Shop.

A small Texaco Station was located on "Dead Man's Curve," about half-way between Ft. Pierce and Jensen. It sold only gas and oil and made tire repairs. One gas pump, hand-operated, supplied the traveler's needs. I passed this station frequently when I rode with my Dad to deliver fish barrels to the Ricou Brothers in Jensen Beach. (Nota bene: Gas — only one grade — sold for five to nine cents a gallon in those days.) As the 1910s became the 1930s, most of these businesses moved west to be on or near U.S. #1. Many of these wonderful places with five cent drinks simply faded away, as did much of Dixie Highway.

WORLD WAR II IN FORT PIERCE

Jean Ellen Wilson

What do I remember about the war and Fort Pierce? Men in uniform everywhere. We lived in the country and did not go to town often, but when we did, the downtown area was crowded with them, in twos and threes, even in formation. I remember a squad of sailors marching down Second Street one Saturday. Suddenly, they turned eyes right and began a chorus of whistles directed at my mother encumbered by her five children. I was more puzzled than shocked that my mother was the object of their admiration.

At school we were drilled several times a week. The older girls led us in learning how to march in step, about face, left hup and all that. We had some instruction as to what to do if there was an invasion and some demonstrations of how to use a gas mask. We had many an admonition to shush. "Loose lips sink ships." There was a lady named Toby who lived with us in exchange for helping my mother when my baby sister was about to arrive. So many females were in Fort Pierce because their husbands or boyfriends were stationed here that rental space in Fort Pierce was scarce to non-existent and this mother's helper arrangement was just one type of barter necessary to find shelter. Anyhow, when Toby, in tears, told me the boyfriend was shipping out, I felt a great responsibility knowing that secret and very nobly told no one-not even my best girl friend.

We had bond drives at school and we would buy stamps to put in a book until we got enough to exchange a stamp book for a bond. Recycling was a patriotic duty and we saved the tinfoil off chewing gum. There were scrap metal drives. One assembly in the auditorium of the yellow brick school, I was

happily surprised to hear my name called out to get an award for the most metal scrap collected. It turned out that my father had salvaged odds and ends from Minton Equipment and donated it in my name. I felt wonderful about that.

Convoys of army vehicles carrying manpower and equipment were constantly rolling by our house, east and west. One of our pleasures was to station ourselves at the end of the driveway and wave at the men. I felt it was my contribution to the war effort, sending them off to the "front." I would pick a face and imagine him struggling through the jungle or getting shot by a German sniper and remembering the last wave from home.

*Convoys of army vehicles
carrying manpower and
equipment were constantly
rolling by our house*

We dug fox holes and built gun emplacements in the palmetto and pine surrounds; we had desperate shootouts with Evil Germans and tossed grenades upon hordes of Dirty Japs.

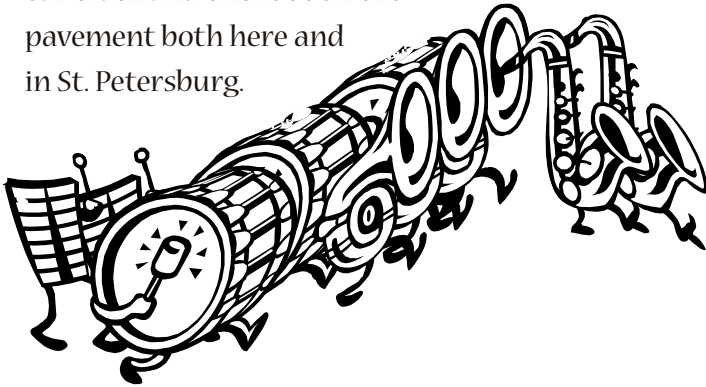
All of this drama was informed by the movies we saw on

Saturday afternoon at the Sunrise Theater. Of course, war movies were the order of the day. I cried at army nurse Veronica Lake bravely facing death, at Mrs. Miniver's bombed out church, at Claudette Colbert keeping the old chin up nobly while her husband was overseas, at poor dead Spencer Tracy looking after his pilot replacement and vowed to hold my tongue under torture as the celluloid heroes did. Even after learning, as an adult, the planning behind the propaganda efforts of the film industry, I have never been able to get rid of the prejudices I learned then. Many years later, the train I was on stopped at the border between Hungary and Germany and an official in a uniform said to me in that film-familiar guttural voice, "Your papers, please," and I felt the alarm of the hunted.

THE FORT PIERCE HIGH SCHOOL BAND (1940s)

June Saine Level

Being a member of the Ft. Pierce High Band was hard work and lots of fun. You could begin learning an instrument in 4th grade, and by the time you were in high school, you could play and march full time. We were at all the football games, usually getting there by our main method of transportation, the big orange-yellow school buses. Some kids had parents who took them in the family car. Living in Orlando today, I often remember marching with one foot on the street-car track and one foot on the pavement both here and in St. Petersburg.



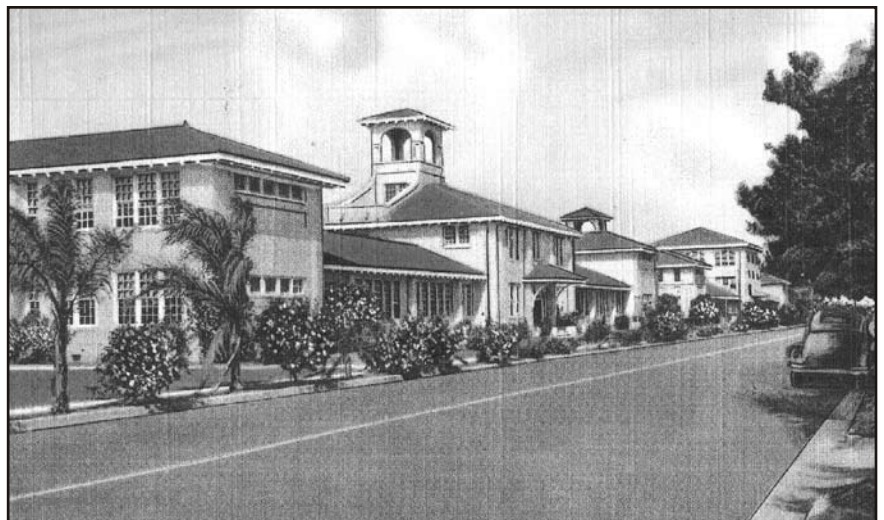
We also marched in the Orange Bowl Parades. One cold New Year's Eve, I remember, the University of Texas came to our dorm and played "The Eyes of Texas Are Upon You." The band was in full dress, including cap guns on their hips. Twenty-two years later, I wasn't so impressed when that song was played at a Texas football game with the University of Arkansas, where I was a faculty wife and mother of two UA students. Being a band member meant you had marching practice on the high school football field no later than 7 a.m. Harvey Zuver, a W.W. I drill instructor made sure we marched in straight lines and in step. Mosquitoes at that early hour were our greatest problem. Somehow I became the band librarian and learned

how to file band music so you could find all the music to one piece together;

Major James O'Neal, a W.W. I veteran, was a memorable figure of the school for many years. Under his direction, students from all backgrounds received a music background. We also learned a sense of teamwork and group pride. Our white shoes were always polished as well as our instruments, and we had our marching music memorized. Heavy green wool uniforms for band members and white uniforms and tall hats for drum majors gave us the military look Major wanted.

Every year we competed in band contests in areas of concert band, sight reading, and drill. I remember Harold Supank marched as the bass drummer, and when the lights went out for one of our lighted hat drills, he pulled his piccolo from his pocket and played it.

I think any former band member still taps a foot when hearing a Sousa March or "The Star Spangled Banner!"



*Yellow Brick School (1930s)
Delaware Avenue, Fort Pierce*

STRENGTHENING THE CAPRON STRINGS

"Mom, you're crying just like a girl!" my two young sons reproached me as we stood in our back yard in St. Lucie Village in 1990 examining the 1850s brass military button they had just found underneath their favorite oak "climbing tree." The thought that U.S. soldiers stationed at the military post Fort Capron (1850-1859) might also have enjoyed the shade of this same tree tenderly tugged at my heartstrings.

My sons' simple little find forever altered my life, and not since then has a day gone by that I am not on the lookout for Fort artifacts or I am imagining the early military, pioneer, or Seminole influence on this small historic district in which I live. So when the phone rang recently and a neighbor announced that he may have found a bottle dump from old Fort Capron, (no, I didn't cry like a girl) I was delighted to learn that more of the Fort's history was being uncovered and documented.

While other Seminole War forts in this area attract attention, such as Fort Pierce (1838-1842), which has a city named after it, and the large lighthouse which stands as a reminder of Fort Jupiter (1838-1858), Fort Capron is the obscure and often forgotten fort of our local history. Yet the historical significance and impact of Fort Capron deserves recognition. In fact, the prominent people, events, lifestyles, and the not-so-famous firsts of the Fort provide great fodder for the imagination.

Though it has now been almost 150 years since the Fort closed, I sometimes imagine myself living at the Fort as did some of the officers' families such as the Joseph Haskins family, who relocated from disease-ridden Fort Jupiter north to Fort Capron, considered the 'healthiest post in Florida.' Or, I envision myself assisting the Fort's surgeon, Doctor Asa Wall, with distributions of quinine to soldiers here who had contracted malaria.

Of course it would have been fascinating hobnobbing with the colorful settlers who sought protection from Seminole raids by residing in the safety of the military compound. I know I would not have cared for characters like William

Anne Sinnott, St. Lucie County Historical Museum educator

Russell, who in earlier years had been attacked by Seminoles for his shady business dealings and who greatly profited through the Army and created bothersome property disputes with his tenant troops at Fort Capron. However, the hearty settler Captain William Davis, who delivered mail up and down Florida's east coast to the various forts, appears to be a likeable fellow. His knowledge as the "wisest weather wizard" would have come in handy in threatening weather. I also wonder what he thought of the Fort Capron troops' use of some of the first small metal boats for combat and if Capt. Davis realized that the use of these durable and transportable metal boats was setting a precedent for future warfare.

The daily activity of the depot and supply headquarters, the arrival of supplies by boat through the Indian River Inlet and the departure of Dragoon troops for surveying, road construction or reconnaissance would have all been remarkable to me. According to the mid 19th century surveyor W.L. Perry, "The barracks, commissary, hospital, officers' buildings, and dwellings of citizens formed quite a little village."

Of course, the soldiers themselves would have made an interesting mix of class and sass. In my mind I can hear the soldiers hopelessly grumbling "if the heat don't kill us, the gators, bugs, or rattlers will." In contrast, I imagine my awe in meeting Ambrose Powell Hill, the famous Civil War hero and one of the Confederacy's greatest generals, who spent his early military life at Fort Capron.

Lastly, I envision my encounter with Captain Abner Doubleday, who is popularly known as the founder of baseball, and who served at Fort Capron in the late 1850s mapping and repairing military roads. Since, historical accounts show Doubleday created the game of baseball in 1835 before his military career had begun, I like to imagine that he has brought a baseball along on his tour of duty and I am tossing a baseball back and forth with him. Then suddenly this scene is interrupted by the image of my sons scolding me, "Mom, you throw just like a girl!"

MEMORIES OF FORT PIERCE

Richard Lee Wilson

St. Lucie County was an agricultural community until the 90's. Ft. Pierce was the center of the vast agricultural area which included Martin, Okeechobee and Indian River Counties. Ft. Pierce was also the primary source of labor to till and pick the citrus and vegetable crops. Trucks would line Avenue D each morning and pick up the agricultural labor needed for that day. Some were part time and some were regulars. Our family has an agricultural heritage and it is one of the reasons we came to Ft. Pierce for the first time in about 1937.

Our father was employed by O. C. Minton as the parts manager for his International Harvester (FARMALL) tractor dealership which was located at U. S. I and Delaware Avenue. The dealership also sold NACO fertilizer, so lots of vegetable farmers, flower growers, ranchers, and grove people were their customers. Most of the farms and groves were small and were managed by the families. Many of the farms were in close and would be "in town" today.

Our "supermarket" was Mr. Merritt's store on N. 9th St. Mr. Merritt would go to Georgia and North Florida and bring back the staples for his store. He would buy locally when he could, but most of the time he would truck his products in. He was a life saver because we could charge stuff there when we ran short of cash. It was a good way of life. Just around the corner was a church, and sometimes we would sit outside and listen to the "gospel" being sung and praised. Those people sang with great enthusiasm.

There were a lot of dirt streets in Ft. Pierce. Okeechobee Road was paved and Orange Ave. was paved to 33rd Street. Of course 2nd St. was the

main shopping area with some shops in the Arcade Building. Car dealerships, service stations and restaurants were along 4th St. (U.S. I). The town was busy; but it was not the hyped up kind of busy we think of today.

There were several machine shops in town that built farm machinery and pumps to support the ag business. One of them is Turner Machine which is still in business today. Other employers here were citrus packing houses, tomato packing houses, and Holsum Bread Bakery. There was an ice plant and Ft. Pierce Electric. The Sunshine canning plant canned tomatoes and green beans. Coca Cola had a bottling plant here too.

*When a farmer made a
good crop and got a
good price, he was king*

The farmers market was a big deal too. There was the auction shed. Tomato growers would bring truck loads of tomatoes to the auction and buyers would inspect them right on the truck and bid for the lot. If a grower had more than one lot the buyer could buy the days picking or just

the truck in the auction shed. After the sale, the tomatoes would be unloaded at the buyers shed to be graded, sized, and repacked in his containers. The farmer would pick up his field crates the following day to take back to the field for the next picking.

The tomato buyers were the big spenders in town. They would be here in October and November for the fall crop and again in April and May for the spring crop. Most of them drove big cars and spent lots of money at the restaurants and clothing stores. Some of them lived here and went to see crops in other areas. The farmers loved them too. When a farmer made a good crop and got a good price, he was king. In a couple of years he might be broke again but when he had money he spent it.

"GONE ARE THE DAYS ... "

Charles R. Croghan, Jr.

Today the talk is about the youth of the 1960s and their pleasures and problems in a somewhat affluent world. The generation that grew up in the 1920s and 30s was of a far different ilk. Their parents had enjoyed plenty following the War (1914-1918), but when the Great Depression overtook the world in 1928, the children found themselves no longer in a land of plenty for all, but in one of great scarcity for the many.

The smaller towns probably best survived the hardships of the Depression and its aftermath, and Fort Pierce was no exception. By the time of the Depression, it had been electrified (1913), though many private dwellings were still fueled by kerosene and candlepower; indoor plumbing had reached a number of homes, but many still featured out-houses and the Sears and Roebuck Catalog; fishing as a livelihood was as important as farming; and, small businesses (grocery, hardware, lumber), along with lawyers, doctors, teachers, accountants and investment bankers provided the town with the basic necessities of life.

*With the Great Depression
came the threat to survival*

their unskilled labor in exchange for a plate of hash or a slice of bread. Long-time neighbors helped one another by proffering the other a bowl of soup or an occasional piece of fruit from the backyard citrus or mango tree.

In 1933, the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the presidency of the United States marked the movement toward recovery, and the onset of the Second World War in 1936, sealed that recovery. By late 1941, the United States was at war in Europe, Asia, and the Pacific, on land, on sea, and in the air. The economy had never been better, and hardly an

able-bodied man or woman was idle — the services, the factories, the bureaucracies demanded twenty-four hour attention.

In 1943, Fort Pierce's Hutchinson Island was attached by the United States Navy, which established amphibious training there for young men preparing to land on the islands of the Pacific in the fight against the Axis. (Some of them landed on the beaches of Normandy, Italy, and Africa).

With the Great Depression came the threat to survival. By 1929, the economy had foundered on the rocks of optimism. Like most other small towns across the nation, Fort Pierce had its breadlines and door-to-door beggars offering

At the war's conclusion (1945), gone was the small, sleepy fishing village. Thrice its pre-war size in population, sights were focussed on housing development and industrial opportunity. "Gone are the days. ... "

Looking Back

The 1960s

- 1960:** Woolworth Lunch Counter Sit-in (Greensboro, NC) Blacks protesting non-service at Counter.
- 1961:** Peace Corps created by executive order.
- 1962:** James Meredith, first black to attend University of Mississippi.
- 1963:** President Kennedy assassinated in Dallas on Nov. 22nd.
- 1964:** Beatles arrive in the United States and appear on the Ed Sullivan Show.
Murder of 3 civil rights workers in Mississippi.
- 1965:** Medicare established by Congress.
Immigration quota system abolished.
- 1966:** U.S. planes bomb Hanoi; U.S. troop build up in Viet Nam.
- 1967:** First Super Bowl.
Blacks riot in Newark and Detroit, burning and looting black neighborhoods.
- 1968:** Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated.
Robert Kennedy assassinated.
USS Pueblo seized in Sea of Japan by North Koreans.
- 1969:** United States astronaut Neil Armstrong, commander of Apollo II mission,
first person to set foot on the moon.

In Appreciation of...

Many thanks to contributors to the Historical Quarterly, Summer 2008. Their memories tell us much about Fort Pierce from the early days of the military Fort to its infant and adolescent years of development into a city of some renown. Fort Pierce in its adulthood is, of course, very different today. Perhaps a future edition of the Quarterly can deal with what happened to bring "our town" to where it is today.

The Summer 2008 issue of the Historical Quarterly is devoted to remembrances of Fort Pierce and St. Lucie County submitted by members of the Historical Society and others in response to a call for papers in the Spring Edition of the Quarterly. Subjects range from Dixie Highway to life in Fort Pierce during World War II. Enjoy! CRc

A SUMMER IMPROVEMENT SURVEY

(Tell us what you like and didn't like:

September: Dr Nick Wynne; "History is Change"
Pork loin, scalloped potato, mixed vegetables, apple pie

Comments: _____

October: Hispanic Heritage Month; speaker and musical program
Roast beef, au gratin potato, green beans, banana pudding

Comments: _____

November: Willie Johns, "Seminole history from a Seminole"
Turkey, mashed potato, peas, pumpkin pie

Comments: _____

December: No dinner program - Santa Lucia Day celebration in downtown Fort Pierce

Comments: _____

January: Tommy Gore, "Pirates, alligators and plunder"
Pork loin, au gratin potato, broccoli, key lime pie

Comments: _____

February: Larry Lee, "Black and White Issues in Fort Pierce" - Avenue D Boys Choir
Meatloaf, mashed potato, green beans, Valentine cupcakes

Comments: _____

March: Dorothy Weir Smiljanich, "Then Sings my Soul: The Scott Kelly Story"
- Donna Dee, music program
Corned beef and cabbage, red potato, carrots, ice cream cups

Comments: _____

April: Jon Bell, "Earth from Space"
Baked chicken, mashed potato, peas, carrot cake

Comments: _____

May: "Show - n - Tell"
Roast beef, baked potato, mixed vegetables, celebration cake

Comments: _____

Please rate each program/meal and offer suggestions for the upcoming dinner programs.

Please sign up for committees to better serve the monthly meetings and the many other activities the Society offers to the community. All ideas are welcomed to improve *YOUR* participation in the St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.

- Pineapple Patch Gift Shop
- Monthly Dinner Programs
- History Fair
- Zora Fest
- Santa Lucia Day
- Sandy Shoes Festival
- Party in the Park
- FL Cracker Trail Day
- Pioneer Brunch
- Christmas parade
- Outdoor events set up/take down
- Decorations
- Archival research and filing
- Calendar
- Quarterly newsletter
- Monthly e-newsletter
- Fundraising
- Search for permanent office facility
- Website
- Book promotion and delivery

THANK YOU!

Please complete quickly, cut on the dotted line, place in an envelope, and mail To:

St. Lucie Historical Society
P.O. Box 578, Fort Pierce, FL 34954

NAME _____ PHONE NUMBER _____



*AT THE
ST. LUCIE COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM*

**A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE
OF ST LUCIE COUNTY**

Special Exhibit opens Tuesday, June 17th

Take "A Walk on the Wild Side" this summer at the St. Lucie County Historical Museum. This special natural history exhibit featuring the Florida wildlife photographs of local cattle rancher and environmentalist Bud Adams, opens Tuesday, June 17th at the Museum, 414 Seaway Drive in Fort Pierce. An open house and reception, with a slide show program presented by Mr. Adams, will be Sunday, June 22nd from 2-4 pm at the Museum.



"A Walk on the Wild Side of St. Lucie County" comprises 30 of Mr. Adams' large color photographs depicting the native wildlife thriving in harmony with the cattle being raised on the Adams Ranch. The Museum's collections of mounted animal specimens and fossil remains of

Florida's prehistoric past will also be highlighted. The exhibit runs through Sunday, August 17th, and will be complemented by special Florida wildlife programs.

The St. Lucie County Historical Museum also features 16 permanent exhibits depicting the history of the people, places, lifestyles, and livelihoods of St. Lucie County. The 1908 Gardner House is also featured. Museum hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10am-4pm and Sunday from noon-4pm. A modest admission is charged: \$4 for adults, \$3.50 for seniors over 65, and \$1.50 for children 6-17 years. St. Lucie Historical Society members and children under 6 are free. Group rates and guided tours are also available by appointment.

For further information, please contact Anne Sinnott, museum educator at (772) 462-1891.

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2008 - 2009

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St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.

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We wish to join the society at the level indicated:

New Renewal Individual (\$15)

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Yes, I'm interested in volunteer activities.

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