

THE HISTORIAN

The Newsletter of THE BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Serving Boynton Beach, Ocean Ridge, Manalapan, Gulfstream, Lantana, Hypoluxo, and all areas of West Boynton to US Hwy 441

Post Office Box 12 Boynton Beach FL 33435-0012

Voncile Smith, President

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Voncile Smith, Editor

NOVEMBER MEETING TO HONOR BOYNTON BEACH VETERANS

A special Veterans' Day program for the Boynton Beach Historical Society is scheduled for Monday, November 11, at 7:00 at the Boynton Woman's Club, 1010 South Federal Highway. Two Vietnam veterans, **Randy Coup** who is a Reference Librarian for the Boynton Beach City Library and **John Wilder**, Head of the Boynton Beach Parks Division, will present a proposal for audience discussion about a Veterans' Roll of Honor computer database to be established in the City to recognize veterans of all wars, hot or cold, from the Boynton Beach community.

Several years ago, **Harvey Oyer** in a speech during another Veterans' Day celebration urged that some means be instituted to recognize those citizens of Boynton Beach who had served in the military. At one time the City had erected a signboard where the public parking lot is located at Ocean Avenue and Southeast Fifth Street. This sign listed the names of those Boynton Beach residents who had served in World War II and the Korean War. The sign disappeared some time ago, and to date nothing has been done of a similar nature to recognize the service by the men and women in the armed forces.

Just what should the proposed database contain? Should it represent only those people who are currently living in Boynton Beach? Should it aspire to include all who have left from here to go into service at any time? What about those who have moved here permanently after being discharged or retired? How much information should be included for each entry? These and other questions may arise during the discussion. The former serviceperson or the family would have to indicate that he or she should be included. Inclusion would be voluntary.

As a sample, **Bill Coup** has provided the following details about himself. Presumably other entries would be similar:

Bill Coup, Master Sergeant, U.S. Air Force (Retired)
Enlisted 5 January 1960, retired 1 September 1980.
Vietnam veteran,

Tan Son Nhut Air Base November 1965 –

November 1966 in the 460th Tactical
Reconnaissance Wing.

Bien Hoa Air Base September 1970 – May 1971 in
the 823rd Civil Engineering Squadron (REDHORSE).

Tan Son Nhut Air Base May 1971 – September
1971 in the 377th Civil Engineering Squadron.

Also served the United States at the following Air
Force bases: Lackland AFB, Texas; Truax Field,
Wisconsin; Selfridge AFB, Michigan; Lockbourne
AFB, Ohio; Sheppard AFB, Texas, Randolph AFB,
Texas; and Fairchild AFB, Washington.

Other overseas base: Sembach Air Base, Germany.

We invite all local veterans to attend in
military dress, or if this is not feasible, come anyway
and share in the discussion. Bring your questions
and recommendations. Everyone is asked to bring
an item to show (pictures, insignia, news clippings,
etc.) that has a special story or meaning concerning
a past military experience.

As with all our program meetings, this
meeting is open to the general public.

ONE AUTHOR AMONG US

As those of you who are regular readers
know, your editor asks in each issue that you help
me obtain material for future issues of *The
Historian* by calling, emailing, or snail mailing me
facts from your knowledge, recollections, or sources
of information about Boynton Beach history.

One person who replied, and who has sent
me some detailed history about the Weaver family
which I will publish in a later issue, is **Melvin
Weaver**. I was delighted to learn that Melvin is
the author of two novels about South Florida and
Cuba which are currently in print and available for
purchase through Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble,
or some other book distributor. These are *Rising
Tide*, originally published in 1985, and modified and
reissued in 2000, and *Waste Places*, 2000.

Further information is available from
iUniverse.com, Inc., 620 North 48th Street, Suite 201,
Lincoln, NE 68504-3467. On line check
www.iuniverse.com

And, please don't forget, tell me what you
know – 561-734-5653, vms317@bellsouth.net
or to P.O. Box 12, Boynton Beach, FL 33435-0012.

HISTORY OF BOYNTON

Boynton Beach Historical Society Executive Committee

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<u>PROGRAMS</u>	Vacant
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Marion Weems	2004
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Barbara Harrison	2004
Gloria Partin Turner	2004
Lucile Dickinson	2005
Fain Weems	2005

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[The article "History of Boynton" reprinted on this page and the pictures shown on page 3 (Boynton Hotel and Main Street) are cut from a bicentennial publication (1976) and were made available to The Historian by **Edythe Hood.**]

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MEMBERS 2003

[Memberships in the Historical Society are valid from January 1 to December 31. The following people have paid in advance for 2003.]

Patron Membership:

Harvey Oyer
Voncile Smith
Dorian Trauger

Family Membership:

Robert S. and Dorthea Benson
Clarke
Bob and Jeanne Gayler
Leonard J. and Katherine Foy
Thompson
John Tuite and Frances McKeral
Raleigh Weeks, Gregory Weeks and
Constance Lofley

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Christine Edward
Jim Edward
Margaret K. Guyder
Frances Haenny
James I. Lacey
Helen L. McGregor
James H. Pitts
Jay Rowley

Thank all of you for your support!

This year all Americans will proudly participate in our country's Bicentennial celebration. Many cities along our eastern seaboard are much older than that, and have to look back quite a ways to remember when they were "just" 200 years old. With all of the accent on age, it may be a bit hard for some to realize that the City of Boynton Beach is a mere youngster of only 55 years. In fact, it wasn't until about 80 years ago that any serious settling of the area was undertaken!

During the 1880's and early 1890's a few hardy settlers were scattered along the edge of the waters of Lake Worth working their homesteads. The soil and climate combined to allow several harvests a year. The woods were full of wild game and the waters teemed with fish. Life wasn't easy by any means, it was at least a three week trip by boat up the coast just to secure supplies you couldn't raise or make yourself. However, in 1895 there were two major developments that changed things from a frontier type condition to an area much sought after by farming interests and those seeking a warm climate during the winter. First the Florida East Coast Railroad pushed their rails south on the way to Miami and right behind them came the East Coast Canal (Intracoastal Canal) digging an inland waterway to Miami.

Promoters had been interested in this part of the country for some time. Now it was finally accessible for tourists, plus having a reliable method of shipping perishable farm products to distant markets, their interest knew no bounds.

TOWNSITE IS FORMED

In 1897 Major Nathan S. Boynton, a veteran of the Civil War, arrived on the scene from his home state of Michigan. Realizing the potential of the area, he purchased a large tract of land on the west side of the canal and had it laid out as a townsite, which he named "Boynton." In addition, he purchased land between the canal and the ocean for a special use. Knowing that the well-to-do of the north would welcome a comfortable place to stay during the winter months while enjoying the wonderful climate, he proceeded to build a great rambling structure of some 50 rooms on the oceanfront, which he named the "Boynton Hotel."

Finding that the hotel would occupy all of his time, he sold his townsite holding to Fred and "Birdie" Dewey. The Deweys then made the plat and recorded the new town in 1898. They found a ready market for their sites among the employees of the hotel and those wishing to farm the land outside the boundaries of the plat.

TOWN STARTS TO GROW

The year 1900 saw the beginning of formal education in Boynton. After only two years there were enough families living in the area that the need for a school and general meeting hall was decided upon. So a one room building was erected — and school was in session.

Land along the East Coast Canal was very fertile and vegetable farms lined its banks as far south as Delray. In 1912 a tract of land covering 40,000 acres west of the present cities of Lake Worth, Boynton Beach, Delray Beach and Boca Raton was purchased and prepared for farming. Drainage canals were dug and a veritable Vegetable Garden of Eden was created. Imagine — three crops a year, with little or no cover needed during the winter!

Between the vegetables along the canal and the large vegetable farms to the west, in what is now the residential sections of our city, pineapples were the principal crop. These farms continued to prosper until the land boom of the 20's, when the value of the land increased to a point that it was no longer profitable to farm it.

Being in the center of all of this farming activity, Boynton became the rail shipping center to New York and other eastern markets. Commercially, the Bank of Boynton was formed and the town itself had grown to the extent that a new six room school was needed.

LAND BOOM

Early in the year 1920, the qualified voters living within an area extending 2¾ miles along the Atlantic Ocean and 1½ miles inland, decided there was a need for a closer and better organized management in the affairs of the community. Consequently all were called to a town meeting and the proper forms voted upon and duly filed. And the Town of Boynton came into being. This prosperous little town could now boast as having two Banks, four Hotels, 3 Churches and 12 very very busy Real Estate offices.

Boynton played its part in the Florida Land Boom of the early twenties. Property was sold and re-sold. Prices soared and fantastic schemes were hatched. Steel was placed to build a six story hotel in the downtown section and curbs were poured and streets put down for new residential sections. And then it happened — the bubble burst on the land speculation and then the depression of the thirties. A low point was reached, but a new and brighter day was yet to come.

A GIFT TO THE SOCIETY

Through another kind and thoughtful action to the Boynton Beach Historical Society, **Margaret Garnett Harris (Mrs. Clyde)** has given us the rights to re-publish for the benefit of the Society her book, *Pioneer Daughter*, which she wrote while she was still living in Palm Beach County.

She writes about her family life and her father **Andrew W. Garnett** who came to Florida when he was 20 with **James W. Porter** and **James E. (Ed) Hamilton**. All purchased land in Hypoluxo on the west shore of Lake Worth in 1885. Ed Hamilton is perhaps best known as the mail carrier who lost his life while serving as the legendary "Barefoot Mailman." Andrew Garnett "was a postmaster, mail carrier, weather reporter, Dade County treasurer, Dade County School Board Member, but primarily a citrus grower and winter vegetable farmer."

Palm Beach County did not exist in those early days. Until 1909, Palm Beach County was a part of Dade County.

Margaret Harris has given *The Historian* permission to publish portions of her book from time to time provided we credit the work to her.

This is a wonderful gift, and we are investigating who might publish the work, and how we might fund the project.

The members of the Society are most grateful to Mrs. Harris and extend our heartfelt thanks to her.

RECOLLECTIONS

Think about how much daily life has changed in the past 50 years. In 1950 a few stores extended credit on an individual basis, but most people had not heard of "Credit Cards." Ironing clothes was a fact of life since few wrinkle-free fabrics existed. Laundry went from the washing machine to the outdoor clothesline. Television was on its way, but in black and white with limited programming. Read about more changes in future issues of *The Historian*.



MAIN STREET - BOYNTON, FLORIDA A FEW YEARS AGO



BOYNTON HOTEL - 1895

FLETCHER LUMBER COMPANY

[The following is a recollection of the Editor, a Florida native born in Fort Myers, who moved with her family into the Boynton Beach area in 1937.]

Driving through rural areas in various states, I have realized that the little sawmills that served many communities seem to have disappeared. Of course, much timber has been cut and the forests have been decimated; and other timber reserves, even in publicly held parklands, have become the province of the large lumber industries.

I miss the piney smell of the sawmill I knew as a child and the huge inverted cone that was the sawdust pile. I am thankful, however, that the hard core poverty that afflicted so many families during that period has been alleviated. I remember most vividly the primitive conditions under which the mill workers lived and the pervasive discrimination that kept our social institutions segregated. My grandparents were good people who unfortunately represented social patterns that were commonplace in Southern communities in their lifetimes.

In early 1937, at the height of the Great Depression, **Richard M. Fletcher** bought land west of Boynton and set up a sawmill and a planing mill on the west side of Military Trail about a mile north of the Boynton Canal. **Grover Bell's** pasture land essentially surrounded the mill grounds. Most of the lumber he produced was Dade County pine (which he called "South Florida Pine, Stands the Storm") cut primarily from land controlled by the Lake Worth Drainage District.

[Continued on page 4]

This was Fletcher's fifty-ninth mill. At one time, when oil derricks were built of lumber, he had six or seven mills operating simultaneously in the Texas oil fields. He knew lumber and he could calculate in his head within a few minutes the footage needed to build a frame house. Most working people at that time did not build fancy houses and seldom used an architect who would be cost prohibitive. Houses were made up of a series of one or more square or rectangular rooms, built up off the ground with wooden floors and eight foot ceilings.

I remember the mill grounds quite vividly. Since I was very young, I was perhaps most impressed by the sawdust pile which rose 25 or 30 feet from the ground and was probably 50 or more yards in circumference. I played on it sometimes in company of the children of some of the mill workers. It was splintery, and the sawdust was quite wet and hot if one dug down even a few inches. Playing in it was somewhat unpleasant because the "dust" stuck to my skin and clothes and made me itch.

The mill hands were all of African descent [most were African American, but some were from the Bahamas or Jamaica]. They lived in a circle of about eight or ten shacks on a little road which wound around through the grounds. The houses were built mostly of rough (unplaned) lumber and consisted of one or two small rooms. The only windows were open with wooden shutters propped up by small poles. Most had wooden floors, but there was no plumbing. The shacks were the only homes the families had. Water for drinking, cooking, bathing, and laundry had to be carried in buckets from a single hand pump which had been drilled close to the boiler which provided steam to run the carriage to convey the logs to the saw and for the saw itself. The water for the boiler was actually drawn with large buckets from open wells beside the boiler.

There were one or two outhouses that served the entire community which was made up of the men and their wives and children. The outhouses were moved from time to time as the trenches under them became full and the contents were covered over with soil.

When the children went to school, they were bussed to the black school at Lake Osborne. Most did not go to high school. Dental and medical care was minimal, and midwives delivered the babies.

I have wondered what happened to the people living there when the mill closed in 1943. My grandfather had built sufficient resources to retire that year. I cannot remember the names of all of the workers and their children. Some are etched in my memory. The foreman was **Lige (for Elijah) Bradshaw**, who had asthma, a wife named

Marguerite, and many children. **Melvin Washington** was a handsome man whose youth and good looks made the young women eager for his attention. And **Sam Bell** was the main man in the woods, selecting the trees, supervising the cutting, and loading the trimmed logs onto the logging trucks.

My mother, **Maurine Fletcher Marshall**, ran the office. Like her father, she was a whiz with numbers and kept all the books. She could not type, nor could my grandfather, but until well after World War II, much business correspondence was written in long hand.

In museums I sometimes encounter tools such as cant hooks or cross-cut saws. Their names and others associated with the mill operation, such as dressed or rough lumber, heart wood, slabs, strips, and shavings, seem to be fading into obscurity.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

The next program meeting will be January 13, 2003 at 7:30, at the Boynton Woman's Club. As we prepare to mail out the November notice, we are still negotiating for the speaker, but watch for more information as the day approaches. Meanwhile, mark the date on your new calendars for 2003.

Mark your calendars also for February 10 and March 10 when we will feature the two programs scheduled from the Florida Humanities Council. First, actor **LeRoy Mitchell** will be James Weldon Johnson; then in March, **Gary Monroe** will discuss his research and book on the Florida Highwaymen. Both the programs will begin at 6:30 and will be presented at the Boynton Beach Public Library. These programs are presented as cooperative programs with Friends of the Library.

Virginia Farace, Director of the Library, has offered space for a small exhibit of paintings by the Highwaymen. The paintings are to be hung in the room where the speaker is scheduled, and should be available for viewing for approximately two weeks. If any of the members or friends of the Historical Society has paintings by these artists they would be willing to loan the Library for this period, please call Voncile at 561-734-5653. The loaner will be acknowledged on a placard displayed beside the painting. The room will be secured.

The program in May will honor another artist, **Bernard Thomas**, a well-known muralist and painter who lived in Boynton Beach for many years. Program participants will be his wife, **Betty Thomas**, and their daughter, **Sarah Bollenbacher**, both members of the Boynton Beach Historical Society. Other details will be announced later. This program is scheduled to be presented at the Boynton Beach Woman's Club.

THE BUTLER FAMILY



Reverend James Butler, Sr. was one of Boynton's early settlers. The top left photo was taken between 1949-1950. Butler owned and operated the first known minority general store in the black community, named "The Community Store." In addition to groceries, the store was stocked with fresh produce, clothing, and all types of housewares.

Irene Curry Butler was the wife of Rev. James Butler. Utilizing skills learned in her native Bahamas, Mrs. Butler owned and operated the first known restaurant in the black community. The top left photo was taken in early 1920.

The Butler's had four daughters and one son. As the caption by the lower



ORIGINAL PHOTO TAKEN
IN THE EARLY 1920'S

CHILDREN OF JAMES AND IRENE BUTLER

THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN IN THE
EARLY 1920'S.

THE ONLY MALE CHILD IN THE
PHOTO GREW UP TO BECOME THE
FIRST BLACK TO JOIN THE BOYNTON
BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT.
JAMES WILLIS (BILL) BUTLER STILL
RESIDES IN BOYNTON.

STANDING LEFT TO RIGHT
MILLIS (JAMES WILLIS' TWIN SISTER)
HAZEL (FIRST BORN)
YVONNE (SEATED WITH HAT)
BLONEVA (YOUNGEST)
JAMES WILLIS

photo above taken in the early 1920s indicates, the only male child **James Willis "Bill" Butler** became the first black to join the Boynton Beach Police Department. The four girls are Millis, Hazel, Yvonne, and Bloneva. (Photos and captions courtesy of Bob Katz with permission from Bill Butler.)

HELP WITH BLACK HISTORY

Odessa Holt and **David Harp** are currently doing research and compiling historical data about the black community. Let's hope that with our combined efforts we can preserve more of the Boynton Beach heritage.

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Boynton Beach Historical Society
P. O. Box 12
Boynton Beach, FL 33435-0012

Special Thanks to Don and Sean Fenton, Investment Representatives, EDWARD JONES, 901 N. Congress Av., Boynton Beach 33426 for the mailing of this Newsletter.

Boynton Beach Historical Society memberships are for the calendar year, January 1 to December 31. We will soon be sending dues notices for 2003. Won't you consider joining now and your dues will be effective through December 31, 2003 (and you will save us duplication, labor, and postage costs involved in mailing a separate dues notice). Complete the form below and return it with your check for the type of membership you desire payable to The Boynton Beach Historical Society, P. O. Box 12, Boynton Beach, Florida 33435-0012.

**BOYNTON BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM, CALENDAR YEAR 2003
WORKING TOGETHER TO PRESERVE BOYNTON BEACH'S HERITAGE**

NAME _____			
STREET _____		CITY _____	STATE _____ ZIP _____
TELEPHONE _____	FAX _____	E-MAIL _____	
TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP	INDIVIDUAL (\$25.00) _____	FAMILY (\$35.00) _____	
	PATRON (\$50.00) _____	CORPORATE (\$100.00) _____	