



WEST PASCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

December 2016

Message from our President – Bob Langford

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all!

As 2016 comes to an end we are getting wrapped up in the holiday season and all of the happenings that go along with it. There are many exciting events coming up in the park, and the West Pasco Historical Society (WPHS) is central to most of them. We have had a large amount of visitors these past summer months at the museum, which in the past would have been closed. Some weekends we were just packed, and we have begun to enjoy giving tours to large groups, as well as being involved in other groups' events.

The WPHS has quite a bit lined up for the coming Holiday months. On November 27th we decorated the museum and grounds for the holidays and are ready for the upcoming events about to happen that we hope that you'll take advantage of.

The first weekend, on December 2nd, is the Christmas lights and trees in Sims Park, followed the next day by a joint venture with the Friends of the Hacienda Hotel and Historical New Port Richey group. The tours of the Hacienda will begin at 10:00. The WPHS will have a table set up and the Friendly Kia Trolley taking folks back and forth between the museum and the hotel. The WPHS will be selling hot chocolate and other drinks and snacks in the yard of the museum before the boat parade that begins at about 7 pm on Saturday the 3rd. We did this joint venture with the Friends of the Hacienda on October 22nd and it was very successful for us. You won't want to miss this one!

We will also be selling hot chocolate and snacks again on December 10th before the holiday street parade until it starts going by the museum at about 7:30 or 8:00 pm. And, do not forget, SANTA will be on the Bandstand between 3 and 5 pm.

And, by all means, don't forget our annual fundraiser on January 22nd at the Spartan Manor. It will be the same theme as last year, "**A 1940s USO Show**" that will promise to entertain anyone. It is presented, again this year, by the Dr. Musunuru family. We will once again have the gals that sing all of the wartime hits backed up by the big band. **Wow, what a show!** There is more entertainment than last year. We

actually will have some dancers from the 40's from Arthur Murray to get people up and dancing. We also lowered the ticket price to make it more affordable for everyone.

Just contact our treasurer, by phone or text, Ann Rusaw James at 727-777-2217 for tickets. You can also email her at treasurer.wphs@gmail.com. **You really don't want to miss this one.** If you enjoyed last year's show you'll love this one even more. Also there will be many more prizes!!

We are always looking for volunteers, docents and greeters at the museum. If you like history, especially local history, you may want to give us a try. I know you'd like doing it. It's very rewarding and I know that I learn something every time I'm in there.

On a final note, the museum will be closed from December 18 thru January 5, reopening on January 6, 2017, giving our volunteers the benefit of celebrating the holidays with their families. We look forward to seeing you again on January 6 when we will resume our regular hours and days of opening.

Christmas ornament showcases our historic building



For the second year in a row, Kelly Hackman, owner of The White Heron Tea & Gifts, has created a beautiful Christmas ornament, and this year the ornament depicts our Rao Musunuru M. D. Museum and Library in Sims Park.

Last year's ornament depicted the Richey Suncoast Theatre.

About 150 visitors to the White Heron voted for their choice of subject, among the museum, the Hacienda Hotel, and the New Port Richey Public Library. The museum won by 15 votes.

The museum was built in 1915 as the Seven Springs schoolhouse. It operated until 1925 when the county school board decided to close most of the one- and two-room schools. The building then became a

private residence. It was moved to Sims Park in 1981.

The ornament is made of cut brass and comes in both gold and silver finishes. It ranges in price from \$14.95 (plain box) to \$16.95 (gold gift box). A portion of the proceeds of each ornament will be donated to the West Pasco Historical Society to support their many programs.

"I am very excited about this year's ornament, and am already looking forward to continuing this project for many years to come so that everyone can have a symbolic piece of New Port Richey in their home," Hackman said. The White Heron Tea & Gifts is located at 6228 Grand Blvd. Last year's ornament is also still available there.

Member Profile: Jeff Cannon



Jeff Cannon, a life member of the West Pasco Historical Society, is an author and a local historian.

In 2010 he did an outstanding presentation on the history of Hudson at a WPHS meeting. (Video of the presentation can be found on the WPHS web site. Click on Pictures/Video and then Video Clips.) In 2014, he conducted a tour of the older local cemeteries for our interested members. We visited the Hudson, West Elfers, and East Elfers Cemeteries. Video clips from the tour are also on our web site.

Jeff's interest in local history stems in part from the fact that he is a fifth generation resident of Hudson. His family first settled in the late 1870s near today's Hudson Avenue and Hays Road. Here his great-great-grandfather, Randall Daniel Rewis, helped to establish the Bethlehem church and school (1886), which later became known as Bee Tree Pond. Jeff's family also shares genealogical ties to many of Florida's pioneer families who also pre-date statehood.

Jeff began his research into the histories of Pasco and Hernando counties more than ten years ago. He has concentrated his efforts into the areas of historic land records and cemeteries. Jeff has documented and located 66 known cemeteries in Pasco County and recorded more than 30,000 burials. Not only has his research documented several sites destroyed by development, but he has also called attention to others being taken away from us every day.

In 2005, he fought controversial planning for Fivay High School, while attempting to find the location of the old Fivay cemetery.

In 2009, Jeff wrote his first book, *Images of America: Hudson*, published by Arcadia Publishing. In his book Jeff preserves the past of Hudson's history through text and more than 200 historic images gathered from numerous private collections.

According to his research, the first permanent white settlers came to Hudson after the Civil War. Among the first settlers were the Hay, Fillman, Arnold, Lang, and Frierson families. These families relocated from areas near Brooksville and Dade City. Most settled near what is now the Sea Pines subdivision.

Jeff's second book, published in 2011, is *New Port Richey: Then and Now*. In this series he takes us back in time to show the early development of our historic city and many buildings that still remain.

That same year, Jeff became a local contributor to the New Port Richey and Land O' Lakes *Patch* where he wrote a weekly historical column highlighting Pasco County's history.

Jeff has also submitted research materials to nationally recognized organizations such as Discover Black Florida, University of South Florida Africana Heritage Project, Civil War Florida, and the African-American Historical and Genealogical Society. He has also served on a number of local boards and committees.

THE
**WEST PASCO
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**
PRESENTS

1940's USO SHOW

Presenting Sponsor: **THE MUSUNURU FAMILY**

Featuring: **THE PARAMOUNT
SWING ORCHESTRA
& THE SWING SISTERS**



JANUARY 22, 2017

DOORS OPEN 1:00PM • DINNER SERVED 1:30PM • SHOW & DANCING 2:30PM

TICKETS
\$40.00 Donation

FOR TICKETS CALL
ANN RUSAW JAMES TERRY KLINE
(727) 777-2217 (727) 237-3148
TREASURER.WPHS@GMAIL.COM

LOCATION
SPARTAN MANOR
6121 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE
NEW PORT RICHEY



1940's ATTIRE ENCOURAGED

BENEFIT
WEST PASCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
RAO MUSUNURU M.D. MUSEUM & LIBRARY

Two legal hangings took place in Pasco County history

Before 1923, legal executions in Florida were carried out in the county where the crime was committed, by the local sheriff. Normally, the criminal was hanged, and the public was allowed to view the event.

Two hangings have occurred in Pasco County history, one in 1913 and the other in 1917. Both were carried out at the jail in Dade City. Both persons executed were African-American men.

The 1913 hanging

Not much is known about the first hanging, as no newspaper account of the hanging has been found, although several newspaper articles have been found that allude to the hanging.

Tom Bush, who was alleged to have killed an African-American couple apparently in early 1913, was arrested about 17 miles from Tampa by Deputy Will Woodward. Deputy Sturkie, son of Sheriff Bartow Daniel Sturkie, traveled from Dade City to Tampa to take Bush back for trial.

Bush was hanged by Sheriff Sturkie on May 21, 1913.

Among the residents of San Antonio (near Dade City) who attended the hanging were Joseph M. Clawson and Miss Agnes Goshens. Shortly after the hanging and while they were still in Dade City, they were married. The *Tampa Morning Tribune* reported that "immediately after the feature event of the day, the pair in some way managed to meet at Judge Williamson's office" so that the marriage ceremony could be performed.

The 1917 hanging

On Dec. 28, 1917, the second and final public hanging took place. Edgar London, convicted of murdering his wife at Ehren in 1917, was executed by Sheriff I. W. Hudson, who sprang the trap door.

This article appeared in the *Dade City Banner* on Jan. 4, 1918.

The second legal hanging to be carried out in Pasco county was performed Friday afternoon in the jail yard, when Edgar London, a negro convicted of murdering his wife, was hanged by Sheriff I. W. Hudson. The execution took place at ten minutes past one in the presence of a large crowd of whites and blacks who had come in for miles around to witness the affair.

The negro was led to the platform by Sheriff Hudson and Deputy Osburn. He was accompanied by Rev. Father Francis, who had been with him all during the day, preparing him for his death. While the noose was being adjusted about his neck by Deputy Osburn, the negro displayed the utmost composure, never flinching once during the nerve-racking ordeal. He had the side of his face to the crowd and his lips could be seen moving in prayer. He never offered to say anything to the crowd, but kept his head well up and an erect position to the last, exhibiting a wonderful nerve. The black cap was placed over his head and the trap was sprung by Sheriff Hudson at 1:10. His neck was broken by the fall, and in six minutes he was pronounced dead by Dr. E. L. Reigle, the attending physician.

The body was prepared for shipment and sent to his mother at Hawthorne.

Two legal hangings - continued

It will be remembered that London killed his wife at Ehren sometime last summer. He was tried and convicted in the October term of Circuit court and sentenced by Judge Reaves to be hung. The first legal hanging ever to take place in this county was performed by Sheriff Sturkie in 1913, when a negro named Tom Bush was hung for a similar crime.

A photograph from the 1917 hanging is supposed to exist. One person who has not seen the photo but says it was described to him says that it shows a wooden gallows at the western side of the jail and the perpetrator at the gallows, with an array of picnickers positioned on the grounds surrounding the gallows area.

In 1923 the Florida Legislature passed a law replacing hanging with the electric chair and requiring that all future executions would be performed under state jurisdiction inside prisons.

There were also several lynchings in the early history of Pasco County. They will be described in a later article.

Contact the WPHS : Telephone : (727) 847-0680 Web site: westpascohistoricalsociety.org
Email : westpascohistoricalsociety@gmail.com

WEST PASCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY
6431 CIRCLE BOULEVARD
NEW PORT RICHEY, FLORIDA 34652