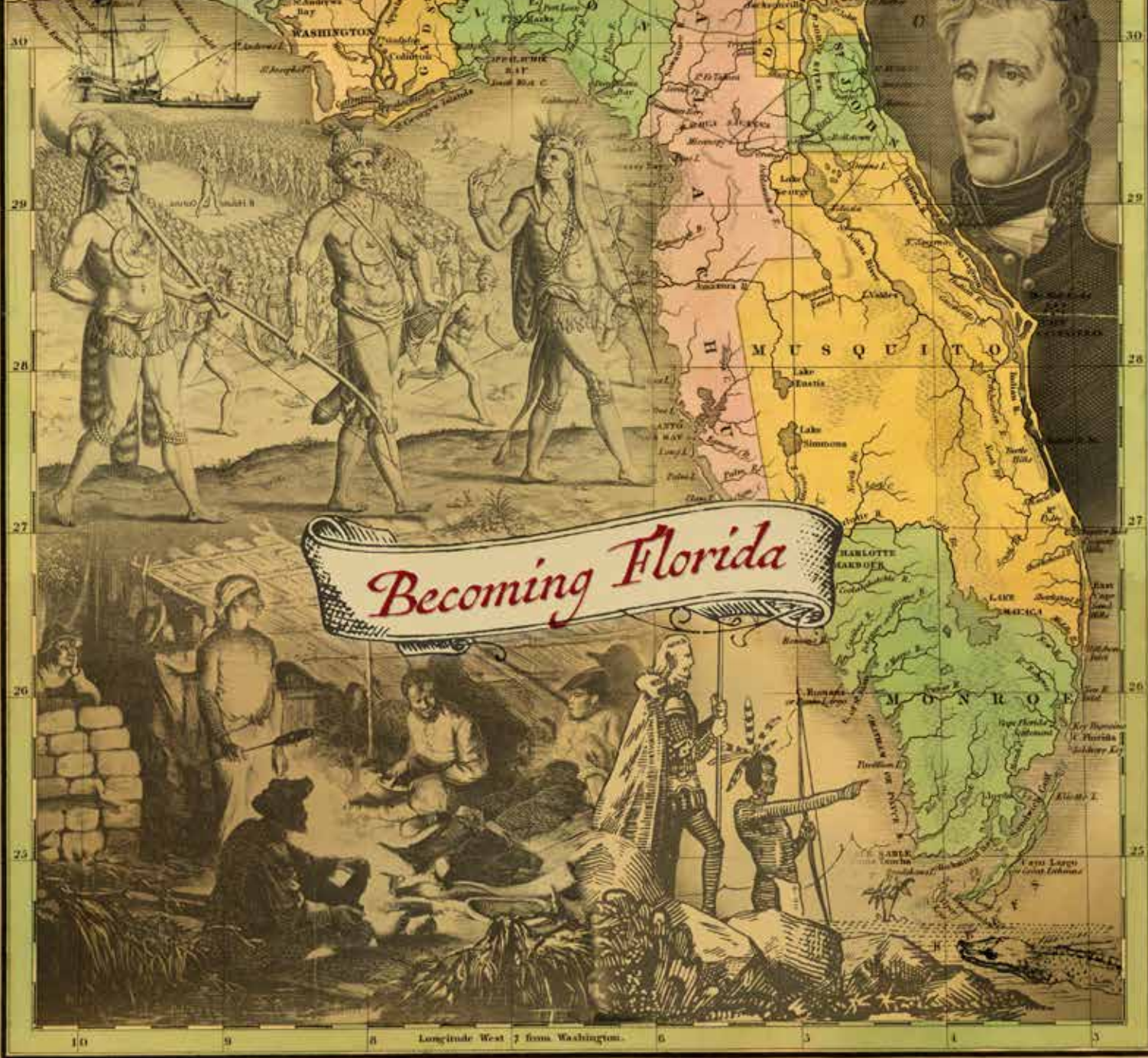


THE MAGAZINE OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

REFLECTIONS

FROM CENTRAL FLORIDA



ISSN 1543-5423

1821

COMMEMORATING THE BICENTENNIAL OF THE YEAR
THAT FLORIDA BECAME A UNITED STATES TERRITORY

SPRING 2021
VOL. 19 NO. 1



The Historical Society's mission is to serve as the gateway for community engagement, education, and inspiration by preserving and sharing Central Florida's continually unfolding story.

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Unless otherwise noted, all archival images in this issue are from the Historical Society's collection at the History Center.



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The History Center is accessible with elevators on every floor.

Welcome to our new executive director, Pamela Schwartz!

Please join us in congratulating Pamela Schwartz, the new executive director of the History Center and Historical Society of Central Florida! Orange County's Board of County Commissioners announced Pam's appointment in late February, following the January retirement of Michael Perkins.

Pam has worked in museums since 2002 and joined the History Center in 2016 as its chief curator and senior program manager. In her role as chief curator, she helped increase diversity and inclusion, leading our talented exhibitions and collections staff as they created regional and national award-winning exhibitions.

She received a master of arts in Museum Professions from Seton Hall University in New Jersey and a bachelor of arts in Public Relations from the University of Northern Iowa.



RIPPLES THROUGH TIME

History doesn't happen in the blink of an eye. It feels like I've seen the word "historic" used more by the media in the past two years than I have in my lifetime. What is it that makes an event historic? Often, we don't know until much later. Time elapses, giving us greater perspective about what does, or does not, rise to the occasion of becoming history. Events linger; even those that only last a moment cause ripples that continue in often unrealized ways.

Certain events, such as great wars or movements of people, become monumental markers in this passage of time that serve as reference points for measuring both progress and, unfortunately, regress. November 2020 marked the 100th-year remembrance of the Ocoee Massacre of 1920, and our institution responded with our most significant research endeavor to date, culminating in a landmark exhibition. We were able to increase awareness of a significant event in our own region's past and to share context for how such events happen and what legacies they leave behind for those of us living here today.

This year also brings other important markers in Central Florida's history. June 12, 2021, will be five years since the Pulse nightclub tragedy, an event that forever changed our community and this institution. The impacts of that day continue to ripple across space and time, and we continue to be committed to serving as a resource for healing, understanding, and conversation in its aftermath.

Further back in time, 1821 marks the year the Spanish ceded control of Florida to the United States, making it an American territory through the final ratification of the Adams-Onís treaty. That moment in time also had a profound effect on the people living here – from our native cultures to the enslaved individuals who had for a time found freedom in Florida under Spain, as well as the American settlers coming to claim this land as their own.

A direct and painful line can be drawn from the establishment of slavery on Florida's coast in the 1500s through the events of 1821, Florida's 1861 entrance into the Civil War as a Confederate state, the Ocoee Massacre in 1920, and on up through today.

We take the 2021 bicentennial of Florida's American era as an opportunity to raise up the narratives of people who lived here before 1821, from the indigenous people who carefully buried their deceased at Windover thousands of years ago to the Seminoles, an American Indian tribe of varied individuals who came together to face challenging circumstances. Our history is long, it is fraught, and the ripples continue in a series of peaks and valleys representing moments of profound trauma – but also ample reasons for celebration. ■

*– Pamela Schwartz, Executive Director,
Orange County Regional History Center*

UPCOMING EVENTS

ORANGE COUNTY REGIONAL HISTORY CENTER

DOWNTOWN ORLANDO



On the first Friday of each month at noon, History Center staff lead an interesting virtual program about the museum, Central Florida history, and more. Members free; non-members \$5.

- Friday, April 2 – Collecting a Pandemic
- Friday, May 7 – World War II Through Its Witnesses
- Friday, June 4 – Pulse: Looking Back Over the Past Five Years
- Friday, July 2 – Significant Florida Artists and Why They're Important

FOR MORE EVENTS, VISIT THEHISTORYCENTER.ORG

(All events are subject to change.)



HISTORY IN A GLASS

Each month our friends at The Woods craft-cocktail bar will create a special libation based on a story from Orlando's past. Our online gathering will feature a demo about how to make the drink, plus a dive into the history that inspired it! We'll send you the recipe, so you can create your craft cocktail beforehand to enjoy with the presentation, or follow along at home! Attendees to this virtual event receive \$2 off admission to the History Center and a 25 percent discount at The Woods, in the heart of downtown Orlando.

- Tuesday, March 23 – Rosy Orlando
- Tuesday, April 27 – To Pajama or Not to Pajama?
- Tuesday, May 25 – The Queen Kumquat Sashay
- Tuesday, June 22 – Bootlegger's Paradise

DON'T MISS FAMILY DAYS

Fun, family activities, and free admission from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

- Saturday, April 17 – History on the High Seas
- Saturday, August 7 – Community



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Reflections from Central Florida

The magazine of the Historical Society of
Central Florida Inc. focuses on the Florida
counties included within the History
Center's mission: Orange, Osceola, Seminole,
Volusia, Lake, Brevard, and Polk. The
History Center is located at 65 East Central
Boulevard, Orlando, FL 32801. Visit our
website at TheHistoryCenter.org

Design by Kilby Creative. Printing by Curtis
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of Central Florida, Inc. ISSN 1543-5423

The Orange County Regional History
Center is financed in part by Orange County
through its Community and Family Services
Department under Mayor Jerry L. Demings
and the Board of County Commissioners. The
contents, views, and opinions of contributors
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The Joseph L. Brechner Research Center

The Brechner Research Center houses the
special collections of the Historical Society
of Central Florida, documenting 14,000
years of Central Florida history. The center
includes a research library, an archive,
and space for researching items from the
collection. The Research Center was created
through a donation from the late Marion
Brody Brechner in honor of her husband,
Joseph (1915-1990), an award-winning
journalist, community leader, and freedom-of-
information advocate.

CONTRIBUTORS



WHITNEY BARRETT

Whitney Barrett, a native of Alberta, Canada, has a master's in Library Science from Florida State University. She worked in Bethune-Cookman University's archives and the Mary McLeod Bethune Foundation House before becoming the History Center's archivist.



LESLEYANNE DRAKE

Lesleyanne Drake is a Clearwater native and Florida Gator. She holds an M.A. in museum anthropology and worked in the archives of The Revs Institute for Automotive Research in Naples before becoming the History Center's curator of collections.



JEREMY HILEMAN

Jeremy Hileman is a native of Dayton, Ohio and an alumni of Florida State University. He worked as a volunteer in the History Center's Collections Department before becoming the One Orlando registrar in 2018.



GEORGE KOTLIK

George Kotlik studied British Colonial North American History at Oxford University. His interests include loyalists, the eighteenth-century North American frontier, the Great War for Empire, the Imperial Crisis, and the American Revolutionary War.



TANA MOSIER PORTER

Orlando historian Tana Mosier Porter believes history matters because the present can be understood only in the context of the past. The beginning is the best place to start.

FROM THE COLLECTION



These Orange County vehicle-registration tags from 1915 and 1916 are the oldest license plates in the History Center's collection. Do you have a license plate that's older? Send a snapshot to Whitney.Broadaway@ocfl.net, and we'll share it on social media!

Five Years Since Pulse

2021 Remembrance Exhibition Focuses on Community
by Jeremy Hileman, One Orlando registrar

Each summer since 2017, the Orange County Regional History Center has created an exhibition for the annual remembrance of the Pulse nightclub shooting. As we approach five years since the event, the museum is designing our latest exhibition, *Community: Five Years After the Pulse Tragedy*, in an effort to memorialize the victims and shine a light on the immense outpouring of love following the events of June 12, 2016.

With the concept of community as the underlying theme of the exhibition, it must be remembered that this word means many things to many people. We often imagine community to mean those closest to us geographically, the people we see at work or school or the grocery store. The sense of community felt in Orlando and the greater Central Florida region after Pulse is a vital component to this story, with residents coming together in an overwhelming show of support and unity. We'll explore what the club represented to our local community before the shooting and how its influence is still felt today.

But community can mean more than just where you live. The LGBTQ and Latinx communities beyond Central Florida were profoundly affected by the tragedy, because the majority of victims belonged to one or both of these groups. The close-knit community that surrounded Pulse itself was also forever changed, as both employees and patrons faced the loss of a cherished safe space in addition to grieving the death of loved ones. Other communities, too, would also feel the

effects, both locally and globally – so many groups that intersect and relate to one another in beautiful and compelling ways.

The exhibition will feature material selected from the One Orlando Collection, which consists of more than 12,500 physical artifacts, archives, photographs, and oral histories preserved by the History Center. Many of the items that will be on display were collected from memorial sites in

area have vivid memories from the weekend of the Pulse shooting, much can change over the course of five years. Those who have recently moved to town, or children too young at the time (or perhaps not even born), may not yet have any strong connection to the tragedy. Additionally, those who remember far too well may only just now be able to revisit that time emotionally, having been absent for the various tributes and memorials in the years since. The History Center strives to preserve this story for these individuals, and for future generations, through projects like this one.

Community is scheduled to open on May 29, 2021. Pulse remembrance exhibitions from previous years, including *The Stories They Could Tell* (2020), *Love Speaks* (2019), and *Another Year Passes* (2018), can each be viewed virtually at the museum's website, TheHistoryCenter.org. The website also features information to help you plan your trip to the museum, as well as details on special programming that will accompany

this year's exhibition. We hope you will make the time to visit, as we come together once again as a community to mark the somber occasion and remember the lives of the 49 who are no longer with us. ■



HISTORY CENTER STAFF



MICHAEL MAGUIRE

the weeks and months following Pulse, the tangible representation of the local community's response. Additional pieces have been obtained in the ensuing years, with collecting efforts still active to this very day. Some of the items shown in the exhibition will be on display for the very first time.

Though many who live in the

COMMUNITY
Five Years After the Pulse Tragedy



THROUGH THE CAMERA LENS

From the photo archives of the Historical Society of Central Florida

If you have photos you would like to donate to our collection, please contact our collections manager and photo archivist, Whitney Broadaway, at 407-836-8587 or Whitney.Broadaway@ocfl.net.

Crowdsourced Care in the 1950s

On October 11, 1951, 18-month-old Rodney Lynn Berkheimer slid off his tricycle and cut his lip. This typical toddler injury revealed a case of hemophilia, a rare blood disease and a parent's nightmare. Hemophilia prevents blood from clotting normally, causing excessive

bleeding even from minor injuries. By November 1, three weeks and several transfusions later, the child was still bleeding at Orange Memorial Hospital.

To save Rodney's life, doctors sought to transfer him to the nationally recognized hematologist Dr. Carl Smith at New York City Hospital, but the Berkheimer family was still financially crippled after the father's motorcycle accident the previous year.

A trip to New York seemed out of the question until an Orlando radio station, WORZ, began a campaign to raise funds for Rodney's treatment. By the time Rodney and his parents boarded a plane, as seen on the left, the effort had raised \$2,956, and contributions were still flowing in, including donations of blood for transfusions.

Rodney and his parents returned to Orlando after three weeks of treatment in New York. The following year Rodney had to make another emergency trip to the New York hospital, and again WORZ sent out a call for help. Rodney's childhood was full of blood transfusions at Orange Memorial, but thanks to many generous Orlandoans, his hemophilia did not stop him from having a happy childhood and a family of his own as an adult. ■



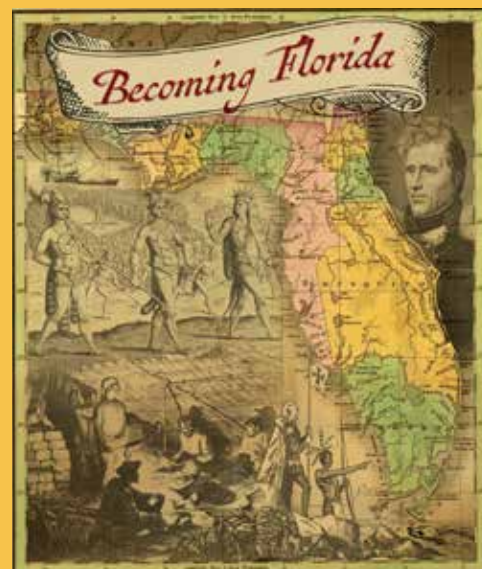
We Salute Twenty-Six Years of Museum Service

An Homage to Our Former Director, Michael Perkins

In the midst of the pandemic, museum staff, volunteers, and friends weren't able to give Michael Perkins the heartfelt huzzahs and hugs we would like to have bestowed on him when he retired as executive director in January. Mike worked hard to build the History Center for 26 years, including leading the museum for six years during challenging times. Here's a look back at many memories made with Mike, with many thanks! ■



Above and left: Michael Perkins through the years. Below: On January 15, 2021, Pam Schwartz presents Perkins with a gift from staff members as Lenny Bendo, president of the Historical Society Board, looks on.



DISCOVERING THE PEOPLE OF OUR STATE'S PAST

The year 2021 will mark 200 years since Florida's American era began. Join us as we explore the histories of the people who inhabited Florida before it became a United States territory.

People likely first arrived in what is now known as Florida more than 14,000 years ago. Native people hunted, fished, and developed communities. By the time of the Spaniard Ponce de León's arrival in 1513, Florida was home to numerous indigenous groups, each with their own culture and way of life.

BECOMING FLORIDA PROGRAMS

LIFE AND DEATH AT WINDOVER

[View on our website](#)

THE HISPANIC HERITAGE OF FLORIDA

[View on our website](#)

THE BRITISH ERA IN FLORIDA HISTORY

[View on our website](#)

SEMINOLE FLORIDA

Sunday, April 18, 2 p.m.

AFRICAN AMERICAN FLORIDA

Sunday, May 30, 2 p.m.

TERRITORIAL FLORIDA

Sunday, July 11, 2 p.m.

A WORLD APART

TWO BLACK COMMUNITIES IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

BY WHITNEY BARRETT, ARCHIVIST

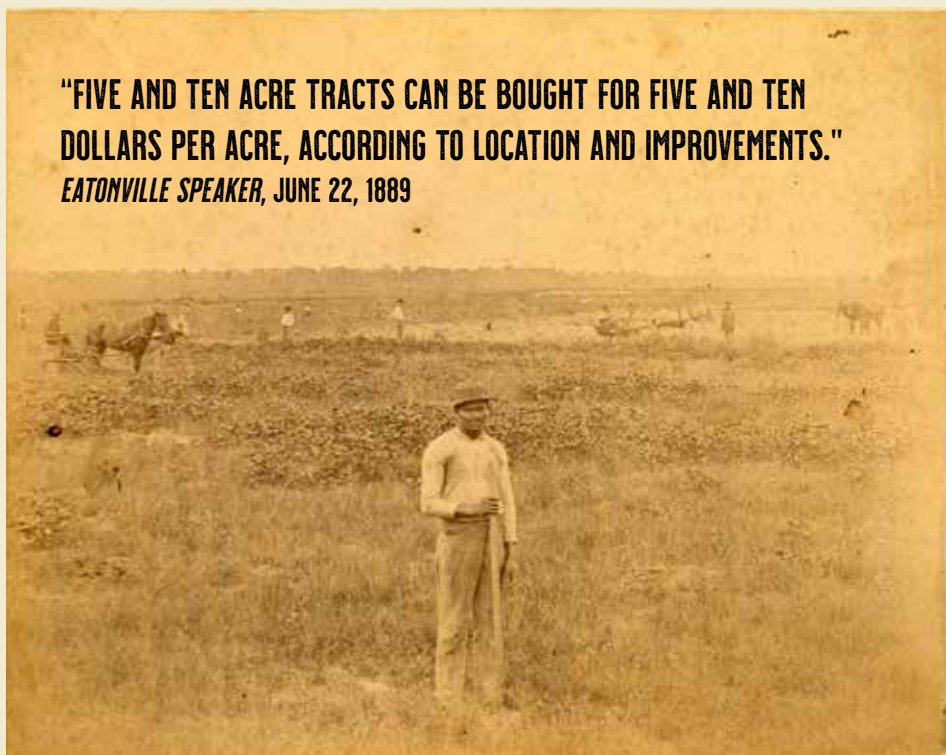
IN EATONVILLE AND GOLDSBORO, BLACK RESIDENTS CHOSE VOLUNTARY SEGREGATION SO THAT THEY COULD CONTROL THEIR OWN FATE.

As the Reconstruction era came to an end in the South in 1877, the Jim Crow era was ushered in. This period of legalized segregation would soon impact the lives of almost all Americans, whether they realized it or not.

In Central Florida during these years, the growth of the railroad, citrus, turpentine, and celery industries attracted more Black residents in their quest for jobs and opportunity. In 1870, the Black population in Orange County was 198. By 1880, it had risen to 1,023 and by 1890, to 3,545, out of a total of 12,584. Orange County then was much larger than it is today – several surrounding counties were yet to be carved from it, including Seminole, Central Florida’s youngest county, created in 1913. As their numbers continued to rise, Black residents worked to increase their social and economic power while also resisting the oppression of white supremacy.

Although the Supreme Court’s “separate but equal” ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* would not occur until 1896, residents of Central Florida were already creating separate communities based on race. In some instances, forced segregation was the main factor, as white employers who relied on Black laborers had to find a place for their employees to live that was close by. Such decisions led to the creation of communities and neighborhoods that were specifically

“FIVE AND TEN ACRE TRACTS CAN BE BOUGHT FOR FIVE AND TEN DOLLARS PER ACRE, ACCORDING TO LOCATION AND IMPROVEMENTS.”
EATONVILLE SPEAKER, JUNE 22, 1889



A Black field worker in 1893.

chosen by white people as places of residence for Black people. This type of planned segregation could be seen in the Black communities of Georgetown and Tuckertown in Sanford, Mead’s Bottom and Johnson Town in Apopka, and Hannibal Square in Winter Park, as well as others. In two instances, however, local Black residents chose voluntary segregation so that they could control their own fate. Their bold actions enabled them to incorporate their own towns, where they were able to live and govern themselves.

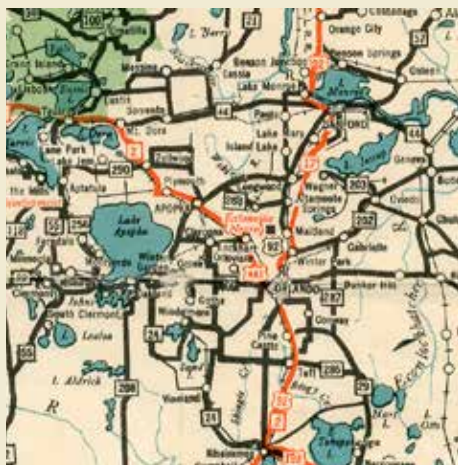
EATONVILLE: THE TOWN THAT FREEDOM BUILT

Located six miles north of Orlando, Eatonville has the distinct honor of being the first all-Black municipality to be incorporated in the United States (not to be mistaken for Fort Mose, near St. Augustine, which is the first free Black settlement in the United States). The founding of Eatonville is closely tied to the small neighboring city of Maitland, which was incorporated in 1884.

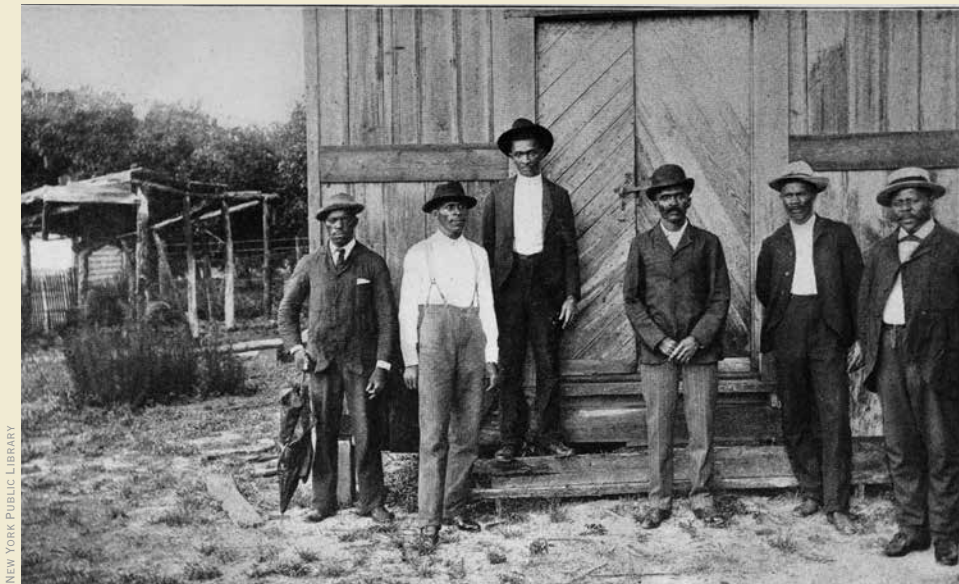
Although the Black residents of Maitland had experienced success in the community as leaders, businessmen, and elected officials, they soon wanted a town for themselves. However, they faced a major obstacle: finding a white landowner who would sell land to Black residents for the purpose of creating their own community. They had tried about 10 years earlier but could find no one who was willing to sell them land. Joseph Clark, who is known as the founder of Eatonville, soon found a solution to the problem. A white philanthropist named Lewis Lawrence, who had moved to Maitland from Utica, New York, agreed to purchase land from Josiah Eaton, another white Maitland resident, and then deed the land to Clark.



Tuckertown and Georgetown Survey Area.



A 1939 Florida map added the designation “Negro” under the label for Eatonville (at center).



NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

On August 15, 1887, a group of 27 Black men voted in favor of incorporating the newly acquired 112 acres of land to create the town of Eatonville. It was proposed that the town should be named after Josiah Eaton. Columbus H. Boger was elected as the first mayor. Within a few years, Eatonville had an established newspaper and several churches, as well as the Robert Hungerford Normal and Industrial School. In 1889, the editors

of the *Eatonville Speaker* newspaper, wanting to attract new residents, described Eatonville as, “a full-fledged city, all colored, and NOT A WHITE FAMILY in the whole city.” In 1900, Eatonville’s population was 125; in 2020 it was about 2,300. Its most famous former resident, the author Zora Neale Hurston, is celebrated annually at the Zora Neale Hurston Festival of the Arts and Humanities, an event with an international reach.

GOLDSBORO: A STOLEN TOWN

On December 1, 1891, a group of 19 Black men gathered in William Clark’s store in Goldsboro to hold a vote on incorporating the town. (Clark was a brother of Eatonville leader Joseph Clark.) Walter Williams was soon elected as the first mayor. Like Eatonville, Goldsboro was a fully functioning town with elected officials, businesses, and churches. Residents were able to own their own houses and land and took great pride in what they had been able to create for themselves. This town, founded by Black citizens for Black citizens, had almost reached its 20th anniversary when the neighboring city of Sanford decided to seize an opportunity.

Seeking to expand Sanford’s city limits, its leaders decided that two smaller towns, Sanford Heights and Goldsboro, were in the way. Due to an error in the original incorporation document of Sanford Heights, dissolution was achievable without issue. However, the Goldsboro town charter, which had existed without any problem for years, was perfectly legal, and despite urgings from Sanford, Goldsboro refused to give



NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Top of page: Eatonville City Council members in 1907, at the city’s jail. Above, top left, Mayor S.M. Mosley’s residence in Eatonville, 1907; bottom left, Zora Neale Hurston, Rochelle French, and Gabriel Brown in Eatonville, 1935. Above, right: Goldsboro Survey Area.

up its charter voluntarily. Forrest Lake, former mayor of Sanford and then state senator for Orange County, introduced the legislation that allowed for the town's charter to be revoked.

The residents of Goldsboro were staunchly against being forcibly annexed into Sanford. An excerpt from a letter by Goldsboro officials to the people of Sanford, published April 14,

To the People of Sanford

The undersigned officials of the town of Goldsboro, and representing its citizens, appeal to the citizens of the city of Sanford for aid and sympathy in protecting our town from spoliation or destruction as the result of a plan on the part of your city officials to procure from the present legislature an amended charter, whereby the corporate limits will be so extended as to include the town of Goldsboro and thus destroy our corporate existence.

This town was duly incorporated about twenty years ago and it has ever since regularly maintained its official corporate existence, performing all the duties of a municipality.

We have always been and we are now a peaceable, orderly and law-abiding community. We appealed to your council, protesting against the proposed action so far as it affected the interests of this town but our appeal was unheeded. We now appeal to you, citizens of Sanford, for your help in this matter. We are proud of the prosperity and development of your city; but it is no good reason that, because you are big, you should swallow up our town just because we are little. There can be no just charge brought against us to justify the abolishment or overthrow of our corporate existence. If it is done in the way proposed it will be an instance of the tyrannical use of might, of power, and because we are few and feeble. Surely you will not justify and uphold such a proceeding?

We have acquired some property as a town. We own our own house, school and other corporate property. We feel a pride in our town organization and earnestly wish to preserve it. To swallow us up in the corporate limits of Sanford will add very little to Sanford and take a great deal from us. It will impose upon us a part of the burden of your bonded and other indebtedness and add heavily to our burden of taxation while we reap no material benefit thereby. We shall make our appeal to the legislature in this behalf and beg that you, the justice loving citizens of Sanford, will give us such support as you can and we shall be ever grateful to you.

G. W. BENTON, President Council
M. D. BELLAMY, Mayor Goldsboro
T. T. GREEN, Town Clerk. 35-4tc

1911, in the *Sanford Herald*, reads, "We are proud of the prosperity and development of your city, but it is no good reason that because you are big, you should swallow up our town just because we are little. There can be no charge brought against us to justify the abolishment or overthrow of our corporate existence. If it done in the way proposed it will be an instance of the tyrannical use of might, of power, and because we are few and feeble. Surely you will not justify and uphold such a proceeding?"

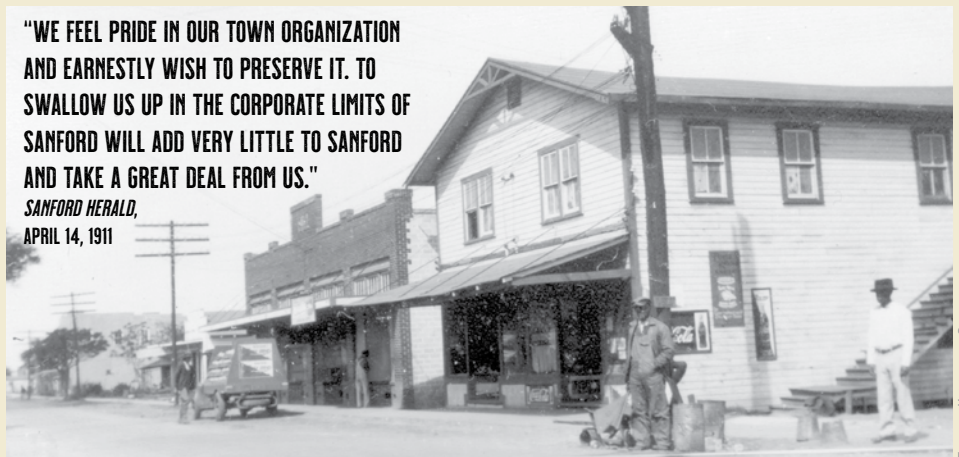
Despite this plea, repeatedly printed in the *Sanford Herald*, state officials in Tallahassee elected to abolish both the towns of Goldsboro and Sanford Heights so that they could be included in the newly incorporated City of Sanford. This was made official on April 26, 1911. To add further insult,

the streets of Goldsboro were renamed to reflect the numerical system already implemented in Sanford. Clark Street – named for William Clark, who had lived in Goldsboro since 1866 when it was just a village – was renamed Lake Avenue after Forrest Lake, the man who brought about the end of the second incorporated Black town in Florida. It wasn't until 2012 that this wrong was rectified when Lake Avenue was renamed Clark Avenue.

While Eatonville and Goldsboro had very similar beginnings, Goldsboro was unfortunately unable to maintain its independence. However, it was not Goldsboro's lack of determination to survive, but the power of white greed, that caused the town to be stolen from its Black residents. Goldsboro survives as a historic Black community, located on the west side of Sanford. ■

"WE FEEL PRIDE IN OUR TOWN ORGANIZATION AND EARNESTLY WISH TO PRESERVE IT. TO SWALLOW US UP IN THE CORPORATE LIMITS OF SANFORD WILL ADD VERY LITTLE TO SANFORD AND TAKE A GREAT DEAL FROM US."

SANFORD HERALD,
APRIL 14, 1911



Left: Clipping from *Sanford Herald*, April 14, 1911. Above, top: Goldsboro street scene, circa 1930. Above, bottom: Goldsboro postmaster William Boykin with his wife, Rosa. He was the fourth and last postmaster of the town.

EARLY ROOTS OF OPPRESSION

Since the first day people of African descent arrived in Florida, more than 500 years ago, they have significantly shaped its history. From 1513 to 1865, freedom for these individuals varied as control over Florida changed among the French, Spanish, British, and American governments. By the early 1800s, most Black people in Florida were held in bondage as part of an economic system that relied on slavery.

In 1513, free Africans joined explorer Ponce de León and helped establish Florida as a Spanish colony. The earliest known record of enslaved Africans in the United States was during the 1526 expedition of Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón to Florida. By 1565, Africans enslaved by the Spanish would begin to build St. Augustine, the first permanent European settlement in North America. For the next 300 years, millions of people of African descent lived under the violence and oppression of slavery.

In 1693, King Charles II of Spain

declared that slaves who escaped to Florida were to be given asylum as long as they converted to Roman Catholicism and pledged allegiance to Spain. Florida became a sanctuary for free Black people and those who had escaped slavery, and news of this spread to the southern British colonies.

In 1784, Florida's newly appointed Spanish governor, Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes y Velasco, ordered a survey of its Black inhabitants, which was approximately one-third of its population. Over time, the freedoms of the Black population were cut away, and "no free black [was] permitted to cultivate lands, or live in the country side [sic], unless it is with a white man, and with a formal contract and my approval of the conditions." By the spring of 1790, Florida's Spanish government decided to return enslaved people who had escaped back to their holders. But people fleeing bondage in other states continued to come to Florida.

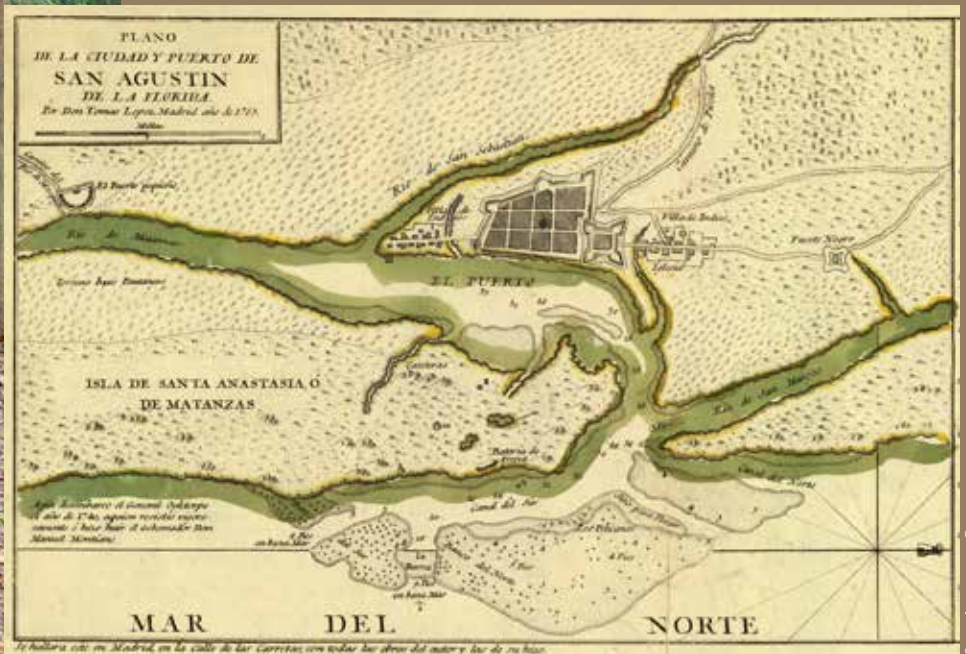
Between 1513 and 1821, control of Florida was contested among Spain,

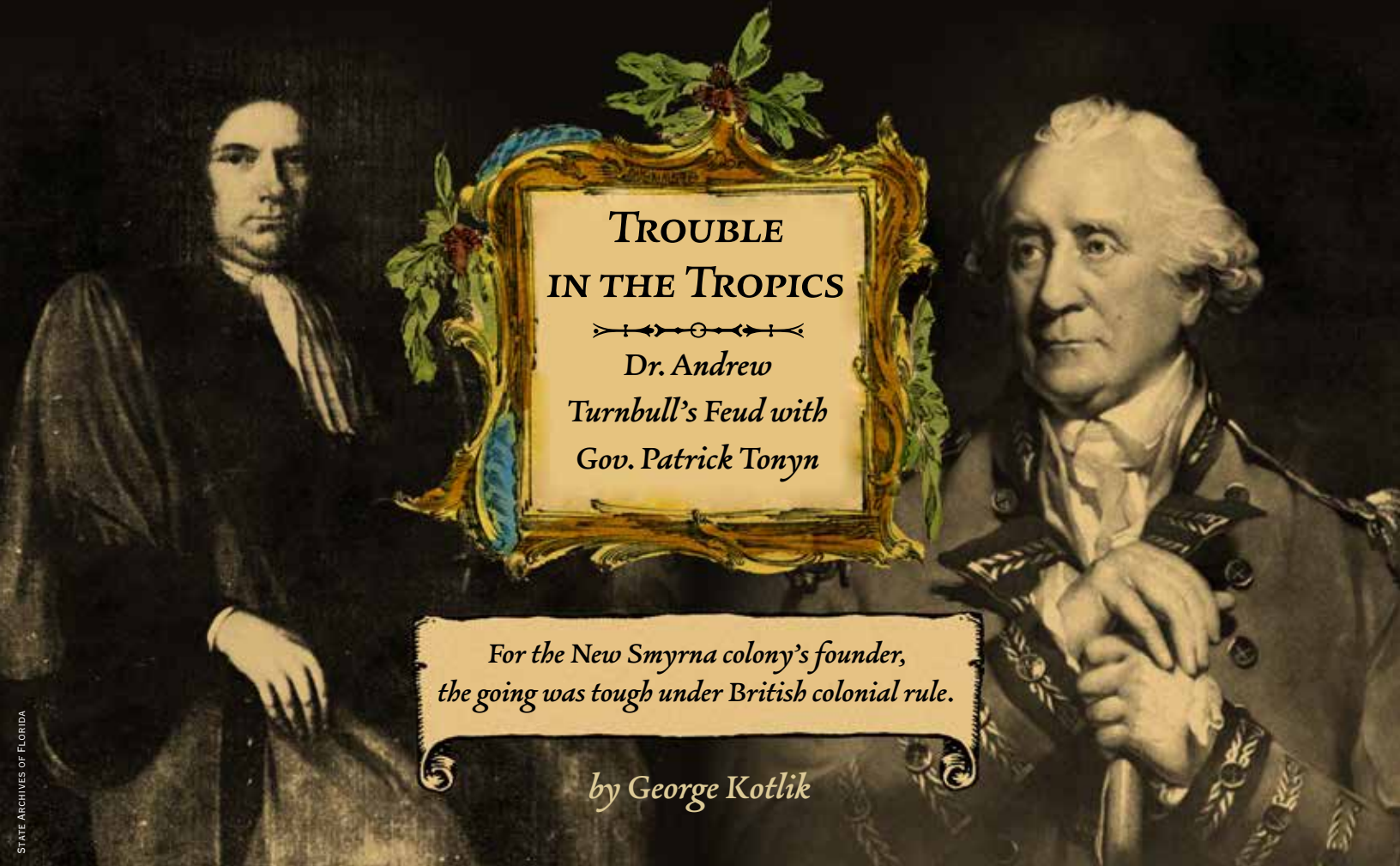
France, Great Britain, and the United States, and the freedoms and status of its Black population shifted with it. With just the stroke of a quill in 1821, the Adams-Onís Treaty was signed, and Spain ceded control of Florida to the United States. Its inhabitants became subject to American law and white southern attitudes on race. Some free Black people remained, but under heavy restriction. Between the time Florida became a territory and its official statehood, in 1845, lawmakers passed additional limitations for Black people, both free and enslaved.

Florida was declared the 27th state on March 3, 1845. In 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court case *Dred Scott v. Sandford* ruled that Black people were not and could not be citizens. This fateful ruling defined enslaved individuals as property and disenfranchised Black people in Florida and across the country. At the time this ruling was handed down, 44 percent of Florida's 140,400 residents were enslaved. ■



Left: James Bullock portrays Capt. Francisco Menendez at Fort Mose State Park near St. Augustine. Fort Mose was the first legally sanctioned free Black community in what is now the United States. Founded by free Black people as *Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose* in 1739, the settlement containing Fort Mose was an important part of the fortifications of the Spanish capital of Florida. After the Treaty of Paris transferred Florida from the Spanish to the British in 1763, most of the residents of Fort Mose fled to Cuba rather than return to slavery. Below: Map of Port St. Augustine, 1783, showing Fort Mose, described on the map as "Fuerte Negro."





Dr. Andrew Turnbull, left, and Gov. Patrick Tonyn, right.

East Florida was established in 1763 after the British acquired *La Florida* from the Spanish at the conclusion of the Seven Years' War. It would be turned back over to Spain in 1783 after the American Revolution. During East Florida's British colonial period, Dr. Andrew Turnbull founded the settlement of New Smyrna in 1768 in the southeastern section of modern-day Volusia County. Made up of transplanted indentured settlers, mostly from Minorca, New Smyrna became the home of roughly 1,200 to 1,400 people who carved out a plantation on the Florida frontier.

HARD TIMES IN NEW SMYRNA

Life in New Smyrna was hard for Turnbull's settlers. More than half of them died from disease, malnutrition, and poor treatment at the hands of the plantation's overseers, some of whom were former noncommissioned officers in the British army. Conditions became so bad that an unsuccessful revolt took place at New Smyrna in 1768 – an episode that resulted in the execution of two men.

Despite New Smyrna's troubles, during its years under Gov. James Grant's governorship, Turnbull's settlement experienced good relations with East Florida's administration. But after Grant departed in 1771, relations deteriorated between Turnbull and the newly appointed governor, John Moultrie, and New Smyrna's downfall began.

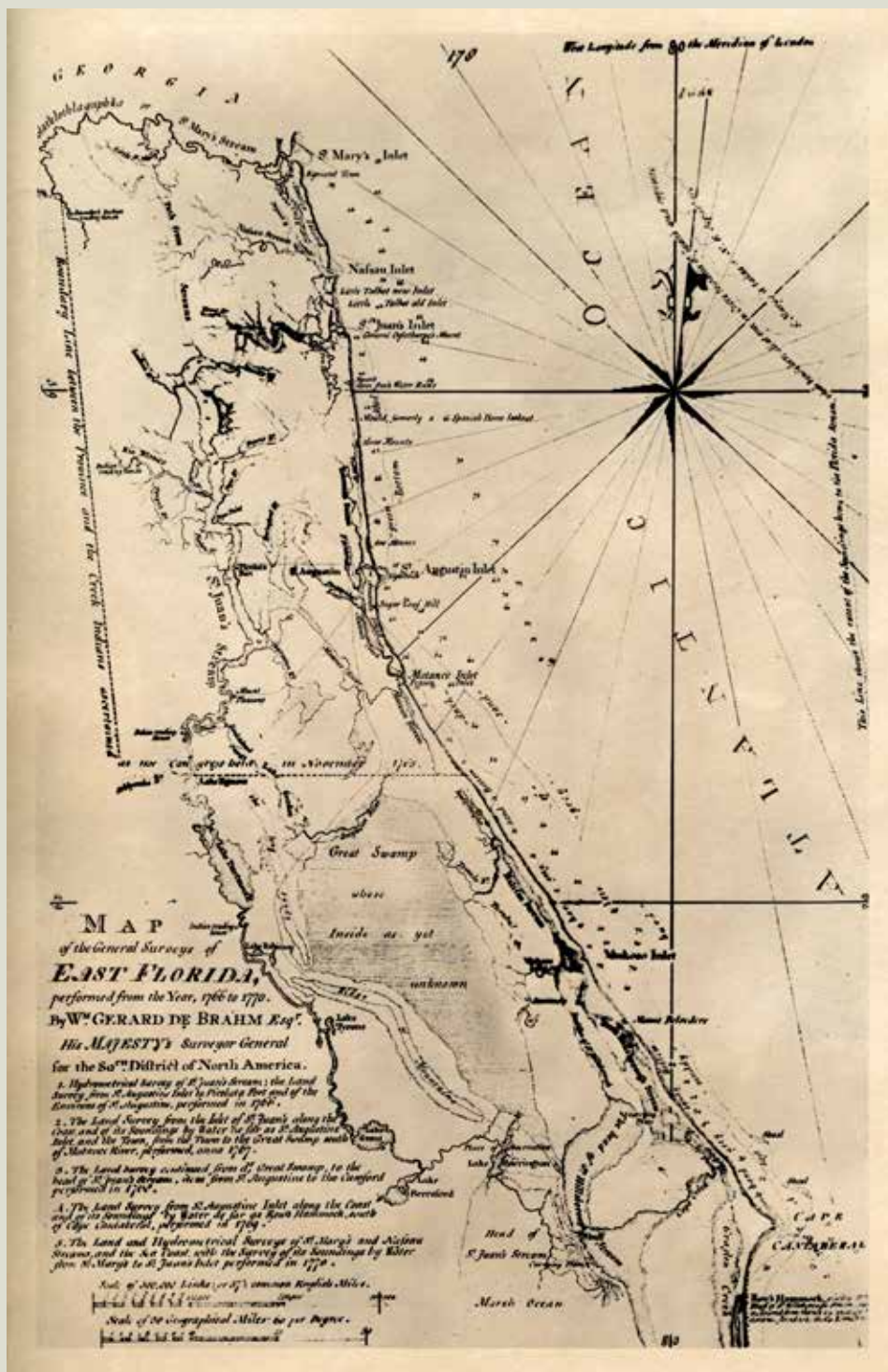
It all started when wealthy landowners in East Florida sought to establish an elected assembly made up of men like themselves. They had begun the push, without success, when Grant was governor.

Because of anti-British demonstrations in the northern North American colonies, British leaders discouraged a representative form of government in East Florida so that the Crown could exercise greater control over the region. When Moultrie continued to refuse to establish a lower house, like Grant before him, landowners protested, including the chief justice of East Florida, William Drayton.

GUBERNATORIAL SQUABBLES

Drayton just so happened to be a good friend of New Smyrna's founder, Turnbull, and the two men bonded over their dislike of Gov. Moultrie, whose job Turnbull had wanted. In time, Drayton's protests grew, and his relationship with Moultrie crumbled, setting off explosive disagreements between the men. The situation grew even worse in March 1774, when Moultrie was replaced by a military man, Col. Patrick Tonyn, who was instructed to stamp out any resistance to British control in East Florida.

Under Tonyn's leadership, tensions erupted between Turnbull and Drayton and East Florida's administrators over private land deals the two men were making with Native Americans. For the British, land deals were solidified by treaties with Native Americans and had to be approved by government officials. Drayton and Turnbull both wanted to seek treaty approval from the home government in London and chose not to report their deals to the colonial authorities. When



A 1770 map of East Florida, based on a survey by John Gerard William De Brahm, shows Florida's east coast from the Georgia border to Cape Canaveral.

their pending treaty was discovered before anyone had been made aware of it, they and their deal fell on ill favor with the colonial governments. Tonyn moved to punish Drayton, eventually suspending him from his office in 1776. Turnbull was firmly in Drayton's camp and quickly defended his friend.

Tonyn believed that Turnbull, Drayton, and their allies were not loyal subjects of the British Crown. In response to this startling accusation,

Turnbull and Drayton called a meeting at Woods Tavern in St. Augustine on Feb. 27, 1776, at which they prepared a written address to the king, affirming their loyalty. They had it signed by 78 men and attached a pledge of loyalty from 200 New Smyrna families that was signed by Turnbull, who delivered the address to Tonyn the next day – although the governor's copy did not include the names of the men who signed it. Turnbull would personally

deliver that copy, Tonyn was told, to His Majesty's representatives in London. Offended, Tonyn drafted his own address of loyalty to the king and got his friends to sign it, too. After this encounter, letters between Tonyn and Turnbull became quite heated.

ESCAPE TO ENGLAND

Tonyn was so mad that he decided to imprison both Turnbull and Drayton on vague charges. Fearful of rotting in a damp prison cell, the two men escaped to England, further enraging Tonyn because they had fled without receiving written permission. In response, he suspended Turnbull from his position as secretary of the province and clerk of the council, but not before submitting complaints about Turnbull's behavior to Lord George Germain, the British secretary of state for the colonies.

Upon Turnbull and Drayton's arrival in England, they secured an audience with Germain and offered their own assessment of the dissolving situation between them and Tonyn in East Florida. Germain ordered Tonyn to bury the hatchet, reinstate Turnbull and Drayton to their former posts, and continue to do everything in his power to promote the growth and prosperity of Turnbull's New Smyrna settlement. Tonyn was livid but adhered to Germain's orders.

After the meeting with Germain, Drayton and Turnbull remained in England, and Turnbull filed various charges against Tonyn that culminated in a request to remove Tonyn from office. It fell upon deaf ears, however – the Board of Trade was so preoccupied with the worsening situation in the rebelling colonies that it did not have the time or resources to look into Turnbull's charges. From their perspective, a royal governor's small-scale squabbles were of little consequence if he managed to hold his post and keep Florida a British province. The American Revolution, after all, drove many royal governors out of office.

During the remainder of their stay in England, Drayton and Turnbull were exonerated for their part in the Native American land dealings.

Determined to get rid of the whole situation between Tonym and the East Florida landowners, Germain told Turnbull it was his duty as a Crown subject to cooperate with the royal governor. He persuaded Turnbull to withdraw his formal complaint against Tonym and, at the same time, also took the liberty of withdrawing Tonym's charges against Turnbull. He wanted the two men to settle their differences and work together to better East Florida. As Turnbull and Drayton left to return to East Florida, they were satisfied that their quarrels would produce no ill effects for their estates.

VANISHED

When Turnbull arrived, though, he found New Smyrna virtually unpopulated. While he was away, some Minorcans had fled to St. Augustine and confessed to Tonym the struggles they had endured under Turnbull's overseers (including deaths at the hands of New Smyrna's neglectful managers). Worried about the possibility of an invasion against East Florida, Tonym seized the opportunity to bolster his loyalist militia ranks by persuading many of Turnbull's settlers to abandon their posts and come to St. Augustine, where he promised to protect them from Turnbull. And just like that, New Smyrna was abandoned.

When Germain learned of New Smyrna's collapse, he did nothing to indict Tonym. Adding insult to injury, Turnbull learned that Tonym had allegedly sent his wife threats while Turnbull was away and had encouraged her to leave. After all that, Turnbull's relations with Tonym did not improve. Finding his settlement in disorder and its former workers living in St. Augustine, Turnbull publicly accused Tonym of causing New Smyrna's ruin. He also expressed his displeasure at Tonym's attempt to undermine New Smyrna for the purpose of bolstering the ranks of his loyalist militia. Tonym reported Turnbull's emotionally charged accusation to Germain and accused Turnbull of disloyalty to the Crown. Germain did nothing.

TROUBLES FOR TURNBULL

His settlement in ruins, Turnbull

decided to take up his now reinstated post as East Florida's secretary and clerk of the council. Tonym informed him, however, that he could enjoy the position's salary but could not carry out the duties of its office. The governor had barred Turnbull's ability to perform his job, rationalizing this decision on Turnbull's conduct prior to leaving for England.

Turnbull also faced challenges from the British heirs of two partners who had shared stakes in the New Smyrna settlement and had died. With the plantation now abandoned, the heirs wanted to divvy up their portion of the property, and Tonym was placed in charge of managing a division of the land – a decision Turnbull found infuriating. When he expressed his displeasure to Germain, though, once again, Britain's leaders did nothing to resolve a dispute in East Florida – they were far too preoccupied with the American Revolution.

Taking aim at Turnbull's friend Drayton, Tonym removed him from office for "negligence of his duties," and Drayton moved to Charleston, South Carolina. Tonym suspected that Turnbull, too, would flee East Florida and avoid paying debts on his estate, so he arrested Turnbull and locked him up in jail. Incarcerated for a year and seven months, Turnbull was finally let go after legal settlements were reached, and his estate was divided up. In the end, he was left with little to show for his efforts in New Smyrna. Tonym robbed what was left of his Florida land by refusing to release Turnbull until he surrendered claims to the remainder his Florida estate. Turnbull conceded and was finally released.

Relieved he was no longer tied to New Smyrna, a now almost penniless Turnbull planned to follow Drayton's example and move to Charleston. He did not depart without harassment. Tonym tried persuading the captain of Turnbull's vessel not to take the doctor and his family to Charleston. Failing that end, the governor wrote to Sir Henry Clinton, who was stationed in Charleston, warning him of Turnbull and Drayton's plans to secure jobs with the army departments there. Desperate men like Drayton and Turnbull should not be hired, Tonym warned.

He also accused Turnbull of disloyalty; when the Americans had attempted to invade East Florida, he wrote, Turnbull had not offered to help defend the colony.

POWERFUL FRIENDS

Luckily, Turnbull had powerful friends in the British government. He asked Lord Shelburne to write to Lord Cornwallis on his behalf, informing the British general of Turnbull's sufferings and mistreatment by Tonym. In the end, British leaders paid little heed to Tonym's allegations against Turnbull's character.

When Turnbull reached Charleston on May 13, 1782, his Florida adventure was at an end. After the American Revolution, he secured permission from South Carolina's leaders to remain in the state as a British subject. They obliged him, and he remained there for the rest of his life – another 10 years. When the British government offered former Florida landowners compensation for their losses after East Florida was given back to Spain, Turnbull received 916 pounds. He died on March 13, 1792.

As for Tonym, he left East Florida at the end of the American Revolution. Loyalists, including some of Turnbull's colonists, went with him. Life for New Smyrna's former settlers improved. Some of them resettled in Europe, the Bahamas, and Dominica. The rest remained behind, converted to Catholicism, and became Spanish subjects. Minorcan descendants of New Smyrna still live in Florida to this day. As for the plantation, remnants of Turnbull's ill-fated settlement can be found in New Smyrna Beach, where the memory of this small episode in North American history lives on. ■

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ORLOZOO:

Delmar Nicholson's Wild Journey to Create the Orlando Municipal Zoo

*by Lesleyanne Drake,
Curator of Collections*

Above: Delmar Nicholson feeds bread to his pet sandhill crane, Jim (a female). Opposite: A page from Nicholson's scrapbook.

The first modern zoos in the United States opened in the 1870s. Unlike private menageries, modern zoological parks were intended to educate the public about the natural world and also to provide a source of entertainment. Like museums and botanical gardens, zoos became symbols of civic pride as well as regional attractions.

By 1932, there was serious discussion in Orlando about creating a city zoo, which residents believed would attract thousands of families and tourists. Both Sanford and Kissimmee already had successful zoos; why shouldn't their city have one, too?

By attracting visitors, a zoo would also spur business development for Orlando, supporters maintained. But despite inspiring a passionate

grassroots movement, the quest for a zoo in the City Beautiful was fraught with challenges from the beginning.

Radio Nick Leads the Charge

Although the first reported discussions about an Orlando zoo came from the Junior Chamber of Commerce, the most vocal supporter quickly became Delmar "Radio Nick" Nicholson. Born in 1899 to Augustus and Alice Nicholson, he and his four siblings grew up surrounded by animals. Their father was a taxidermist who frequently brought home wild animals, turning the Nicholson household into its own kind of zoo. According to one family story, visiting relatives were surprised to discover an alligator living in the bathtub!

From his father, Delmar Nicholson

acquired an appreciation for nature and a lifelong love of animals. Even as he pursued a career in radio engineering, earning the moniker "Radio Nick," he advocated for wildlife conservation, educated others about Florida animals, and became widely respected as a herpetologist, despite a lack of formal education in the subject. He wrote educational articles, gave wildly popular presentations featuring live snakes, and helped spearhead local conservation initiatives.

In 1933, Nicholson began advocating for a zoo, calling it a "necessity . . . for a city of Orlando's caliber" (*Orlando Sentinel*, June 30, 1933). The project couldn't have had a better spokesperson. Not only was he passionate about animals, but he was also well known and well liked in the

community, partly through his business selling and repairing radios. Every Christmas Eve he would fill a large porcelain duck with whiskey and pour drinks for folks on Orange Avenue, wishing them a Merry Christmas. He seemed to know everyone and had a voice that could rally people to a cause.

With Nicholson as its champion, it wasn't long before Orlando's zoo started to become a reality. In October 1934, the Orlando Lions Club and City Commissioner Jack Sparling agreed to sponsor the project. With their backing, Nicholson presented architect Maurice Kressly's concept sketch of a "flower-bedecked aviary, monkey house, and lion cage" to

the City Council, which designated \$1,500 to build it and \$1,000 more for ongoing maintenance (*Sentinel*, Nov. 15, 1934).

Nicholson and others immediately began hosting fundraisers and collecting donations, including construction materials from Orlando business owners. In December 1934, the Lions Club incorporated the Orlando Zoological Society as a nonprofit to manage the zoo, with Nicholson as its curator and president, and Orlandoans from politicians to high schoolers voiced eager anticipation for the opening of the city's new attraction. However, concerns about the zoo arose

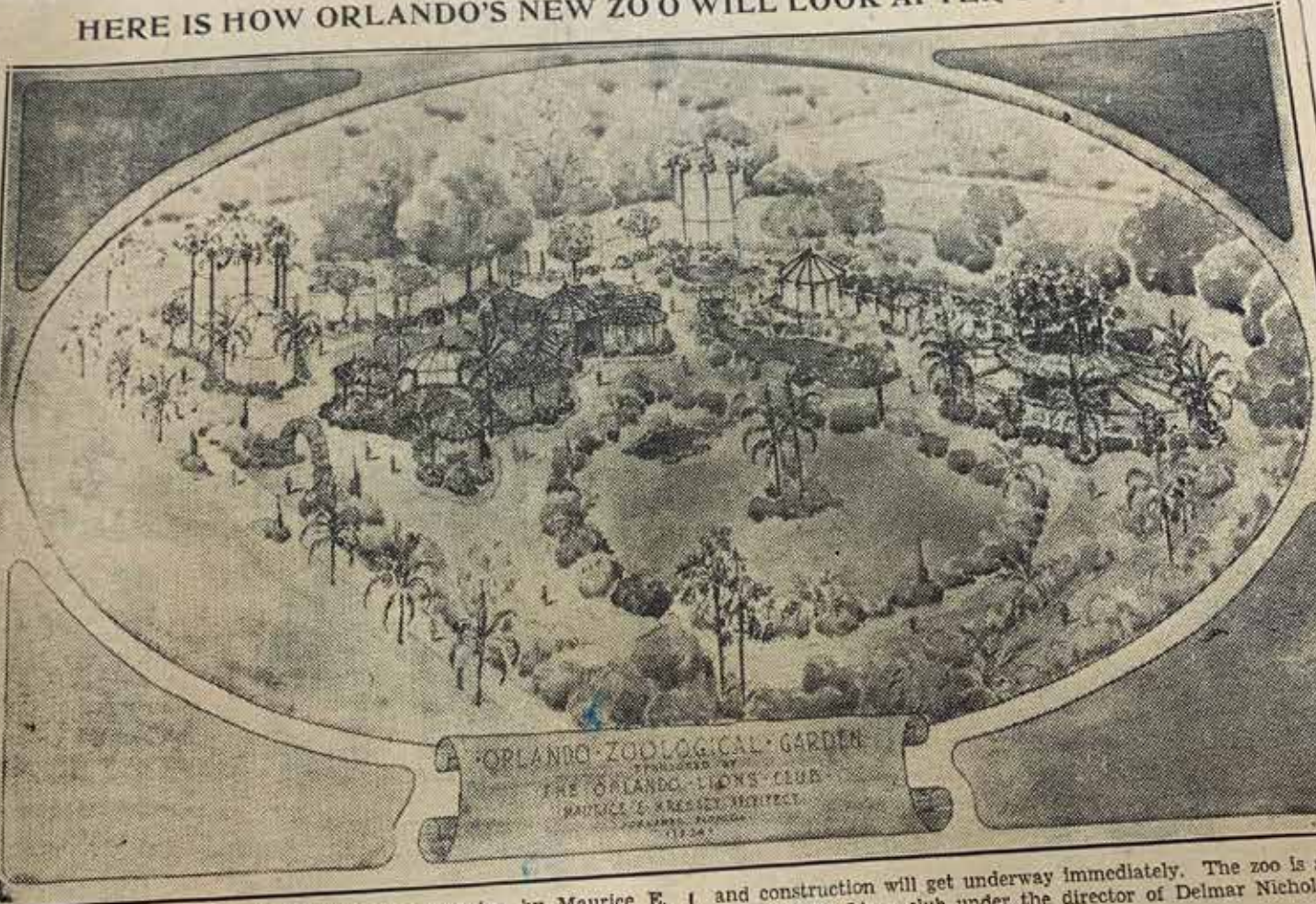
as quickly as the outpouring of community support.

So Many Animals, Too Little Time

The first challenge was finding an appropriate location. The proposed site was tiny – about 300 by 290 feet on West Livingston Avenue, between Garland Street and the railroad tracks – and members of the Greater Orlando Chamber of Commerce argued against it before the City Council, proposing a move to the spacious Loch Haven exposition grounds (now Loch Haven Park).

The Livingston location would be "obnoxious" to winter visitors, the

HERE IS HOW ORLANDO'S NEW ZOO WILL LOOK AFTER COMPLETION



Orlando's zoological garden is pictured in a drawing by Maurice E. Kressly, architect. The city has appropriated \$1,500 to start the fund

and construction will get underway immediately. The zoo is sponsored by the Lions club under the director of Delmar Nicholson.

Garden Is Feature

The zoo is not to be a zoo alone. It will be a beautiful park with tropical plants, shrubs and trees hiding the cages. Although on a limited amount of ground, it will be compact.

In beautification, an attempt will be made to make the park especially attractive from the Atlantic Coast Line railroad which borders the east side of the property. Visitors going to Mountain Lake, Se-

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
**WORK ON ZOO
GETS UNDERWAY**

We Get Ourselves a Zoo

ORLANDO LIONS ARE doing more than roaring about the municipal zoo pro-

Orlando Lawn Bowling Club declared in a news report on Nov. 21, 1934, and Harry P. Leu, whose business was across the street, warned that Orlandoans would undoubtedly be annoyed by insects, animal cries, and foul smells.

In contrast, Nicholson and other advocates envisioned a beautiful park and gardens that could be seen by passengers on the Atlantic Coast Line railroad. If the zoo outgrew its compact home, they would then consider a move. Except for a lion and monkeys, the zoo wouldn't have exotic animals that needed more space and more money to acquire and maintain, they argued.

Instead, Nicholson was preparing to capture Florida wildlife, including a bear, to fill the zoo even before it was funded, the *Sentinel* reported. He also planned to collect more than a dozen species of birds at his own expense, as well as deer, otters, and other animals, and both the Sanford and Kissimmee zoos had promised him animals.

Orlando residents also donated creatures they had caught (snakes, alligators, wild hogs, armadillos, birds, bullfrogs, wildcats, foxes, and more), raised (chickens and ducks), or kept as pets until they became too much to handle (monkeys, skunks, and raccoons). "Somebody is always trapping a wildcat or taming a raccoon and, growing tired of them, looking for an avenue of escape," a *Sentinel* article noted on Nov. 15, 1934.

One notable example was Sheriff Harry Hand's pet monkey, which was

let loose in the courthouse "to play around" for exercise and bit Hand's secretary, Ruth Wyrick, on the leg (*Sentinel*, Sept. 4, 1935). Wyrick's wound became infected, requiring medical attention, and Hand announced that his pet was destined for the zoo.

By February 1935, so many animals were being offered that Nicholson was running short on cages in the still-under-construction zoo. He housed animals anywhere he could – including in the Violet Dell Florist shop in the San Juan Hotel building and at a local animal hospital. By late 1935, "scores of animals" were temporary residents at the Kissimmee Municipal Zoo while waiting for their new home at the Orlozoo, as some members of the press dubbed it (*Sentinel*, Sept. 25, 1935).

More Zoo Than the City Can Chew?

The zoo turned out to be more of an undertaking than anyone had anticipated. At first, as donations came flooding in, Nicholson thought it would be ready in a mere 90 days. However, his vision of a modern zoo – with lush grounds, natural-looking enclosures, and an assembly room for classes – cost much more than he initially estimated. By February 1935, just months after getting started, the Zoological Society sought approval to dip into the maintenance funds, with warnings from the City Council that no additional money would be forthcoming.



Even so, Nicholson believed that donations and fundraisers would get the zoo to the finish line. He announced that it would open June 1, 1935, with Dr. Raymond L. Ditmars, curator of the Bronx Zoo in New York City, presiding over the opening ceremony, which would include welcoming a lion into its new home.

Thousands of Orlandoans contributed their time and resources to the zoo – but it was not enough. In May, Nicholson reported that \$18,000 had been spent, including both monetary and material donations, but that \$10,000 more was needed. Although dozens of truckloads of rock had been hauled from neighboring counties, he also estimated that 75 more truckloads would be needed to complete the enclosures. Still, he felt sure sufficient funds could be raised and the zoo would open by October 1.

Below: The Orlando municipal zoo under construction, February 23, 1935.



An open house in June drew about 400 people. The turnout reassured Nicholson he was on the way to producing “the finest little zoo in America” (*Sentinel*, June 17, 1935). Over the next months, the Lions Club divided into teams and competed to bring in donations, staged a circus, and held benefit shows including wrestling and boxing matches, auctions, and special screenings at the Beacham Theater. Meanwhile, the grand opening was postponed another month, to November 3.

Despite the delays, community members were excited about having



Central Florida news media found Delmar Nicholson a great source of copy and photos in the 1930s, from the papayas he examined while wearing a pith helmet (facing page, top) to his bottle-feeding of a fawn, above. Right: In a shot probably taken at the Orlando municipal zoo, he calmly holds a wildcat on a leash.

their own zoo. In September, another preview reportedly drew over 2,000 people. The star of the show was a fawn Nicholson had raised.

The crowds of visitors probably had no idea that work on the project had nearly crept to a halt. Laborers provided by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) at no cost to the Zoological Society were perpetually low on materials. By this time, Nicholson had quit his radio business and was working full time on the zoo. With only a month until the opening, he asked the City Council for an additional \$3,000, touching off

a storm of conflict that would spell the beginning of the end for Orlozoo.

Trouble in Paradise

Mayor V. W. Estes and the city commissioners, initially supportive of the zoo, were hesitant to commit more funds. Nicholson’s requested \$3,000 would not complete the project – more money would have to be raised, and, on top of that, funds would still be needed for ongoing maintenance.

One commissioner cited a laundry list of city projects that needed funding, including more police officers, another garbage truck, street widening and beautification, and welfare programs.

Mayor Estes suggested raising taxes. Although Nicholson was firmly against a tax increase, the mere idea seemed to derail negotiations.

Despite public concern over the possibility of higher taxes, the zoo still had many ardent supporters. Orlando Senior High



School students wrote that the zoo must be completed “to instill in students of all ages a knowledge, respect and love for all wild life in our state” (*Sentinel*, Nov. 10, 1935). A winter visitor chastised the city for not having finished the zoo, saying that it was a “disgrace” to leave it looking “like the ruins of Pompeii” (*Sentinel*, Nov. 2, 1935).

By the end of November, a plan had been reached to eke out another \$1,500 from the city through the collection of back taxes. Meanwhile, work on the zoo stopped. The lack of funds for construction materials meant

the WPA workers had nothing to do and were forced to leave the zoo unfinished.

In an attempt to inspire support, Nicholson put on a snake show at Tinker Field. Several hundred people watched him lecture about 35 snakes he had captured in Florida swamps as well as how to administer first aid for a snake bite. In the show’s highlight, he extracted venom from a large diamondback rattler and then injected the venom into a king snake to demonstrate its immunity. However, the fact that two live guinea pigs were fed to the rattlers drew criticism, and some even called for a new zoo manager who demonstrated greater compassion for animals.

As soon as negotiations with the city were finalized, Nicholson did resign as the zoo’s curator, because he could no longer afford to volunteer all his time and money. Less than two

weeks later, he took a job as a car salesman at J. C. Milligan Motors. He did promise to continue as president of the Zoological Society.

Enough enclosures were completed to have some animals on display, and the zoo continued to operate, but it never had its grand opening or fulfilled Nicholson’s vision. Still, he returned to run the zoo in June 1936, and it remained a popular attraction throughout the year. A 12-foot alligator lassoed

by Mayor Estes and four other men drew record crowds.

The End Is Nigh

Orlozoo struggled through the first half of 1937, but by September, a newspaper report described it as looking “seedy,” with an “air of deterioration, of neglect” (*Orlando Evening Star*, Sept. 29, 1937). There were few animals, and the enclosures appeared to be falling apart, with weeds, foul water, and debris. In October 1937, the president of the Lions Club appeared before the City Council and stated that the group

could no longer operate the zoo.

A months-long argument ensued, but everyone seemed to agree that the zoo had to be either refurbished or demolished. Nicholson, who had once again stepped away from day-to-day management of the zoo, believed that demolishing it would be a deep insult to the hundreds of residents, businesses, and schoolchildren who had donated to the project (more than \$19,000 in cash, materials, and labor). He acknowledged that thousands more would be needed to complete and maintain the project.

It did not help that animals kept escaping. A young buck reportedly chased two women down the street before being tackled and returned to its paddock. Later, another buck (or perhaps the same one) jumped through a fence when the Wilson and Toomer Fertilizer company across the street went up in flames. Then two monkeys and a 30-pound racoon made a jailbreak.

The tipping point came when four monkeys escaped through a rusted hole in the roof of their enclosure. The city's investigation into the incident threw the zoo's problems into even sharper relief. Not only were the metal enclosures rusting, but floorboards were deteriorating, and there was a foul odor from excess food left to rot. With funds from the city doled out in "dribbles," the zoo operated "hand to mouth" (*Evening Star*, Dec. 22, 1937).

Editorials appeared asking the City Council to save the zoo, and hundreds of schoolchildren participated in a letter-writing campaign. It wasn't enough. In April 1938, it was decided that rehabilitating the zoo would

be too expensive. Instead, the rock would be sold and most of the animals would be "sold or otherwise disposed of" (*Evening Star*, April 27, 1938). However, the remaining birds and bird enclosures would be maintained as an aviary, with pathways and shrubs added to create a simple park.

The Hidden Story

Little is known about what happened to the animals that lived in the Orlozoo. Some may have been transferred to other zoos, and some released into the wild. The bird enclosures remained as the "City Aviary" into the 1940s, even as the property was leased from the city for a pet shop and then used by the parks department to house plants. According to Eve Bacon's *Orlando: A Centennial History*, the remaining birds were transferred to Mead Botanical Gardens at some point before the sale of the property in 1945.

Nicholson went on to a successful career as a salesman and radio store owner. He also served on the Orlando

City Council and was a founder of Goodwill Industries of Central Florida. He later bought a small island on Bay Lake, where he raised award-winning orchids, a variety of seedless lime, and other plants. The property would eventually be purchased by Walt Disney World and turned into Treasure Island (later renamed Discovery Island).

Nicholson passed away in 1978, at the age of 79, never having seen his dream of a free public zoo in Orlando come true. Despite his initial idea of having a lion and potentially one or two other exotic animals, he maintained that the primary purpose of the zoo had always been to educate the public about Florida's native wildlife, a goal that may have been in conflict with others' desire for the zoo to be an exciting tourist attraction. ■

If you know more about the short-lived Orlando zoo or have any photos you'd like to share, we'd love to hear from you. Contact Lesleyanne Drake at Lesleyanne.Drake@ocfl.net.

The backlash to Delmar Nicholson's November 1935 show was not new; in the past, he had been criticized for trying to stage a fight between snakes. To Nicholson, this was an educational exercise, but others associated it with bullfighting or cockfighting. Although animal fighting was not taboo at the time, it was viewed as cruel and morally wrong by many, especially animal lovers. In the image at right, Nicholson extracts venom from a rattlesnake.





Mabel Norris Reese

Fearless Voice for Truth

by Tana Mosier Porter

On January 14, 2020, more than 400 people gathered at the Mount Dora Community Building to unveil a bust of a courageous woman who fought against racism and its injustices in an especially dangerous time and place. Throughout the 1950s, Mabel Norris Reese opposed segregation and exposed corruption in Central Florida in the pages of her newspaper, the *Mount Dora Topic*.

Reese, who died in 1995 at the age of 80, was inducted into the Lake County Women's Hall of Fame in 2018, in belated recognition for her heroic reporting. The bust resulted from a community effort that raised \$8,000 to pay sculptor Jim McNalis, who incorporated dirt from her yard and the "MR" key from her typewriter in creating his terracotta tribute to the crusading journalist. The community plans to install a bronze version near the Mount Dora Chamber of Commerce building in 2021.

Mabel Norris Reese began her lifelong career in journalism in Akron, Ohio, where she first worked as a reporter for the *Akron Times-Press* and, from 1935 to 1941, as a reporter for the *Akron Beacon-Journal*. In 1947, she and her husband, Paul, a former *Beacon-Journal* typesetter, bought the *Mount Dora Topic*, a small weekly newspaper supported by local advertising.

Reese had experienced segregation when she accompanied the Black winner of an Akron spelling bee to the national contest in Washington, D.C., in 1936, and in Florida she recognized

segregation as the law of the land. In Mount Dora, though, she clashed with Lake County's sheriff, Willis McCall, over issues of racism and corruption.

The Groveland Case

In 1949, Sheriff McCall arrested four young Black men, the "Groveland Four," and accused them of raping a white woman. Sentenced to death, two of the four won a retrial on appeal in 1951, and McCall went alone to Raiford State Prison to bring them back to Tavares. Instead, he pulled over on a dark road and shot the handcuffed prisoners, claiming he acted in self-defense after the prisoners tried to escape when he stopped to check a tire. One man died along the road; the other recovered.

Mabel Norris Reese became suspicious as tips came to her in the newspaper office that the sheriff's story did not match what the hospitalized shooting victim told police. She interviewed the victim and became convinced the sheriff had lied. After Reese printed an op-ed in her newspaper questioning the shooting, Sheriff McCall and other influential citizens threatened her.

Reese found dead fish dumped on her porch, her house was fire-bombed twice, and the Ku Klux Klan burned a cross in her yard and poisoned her dog. They painted "KKK" on her vandalized newspaper office.

Calling Reese a liar and a communist, the sheriff retaliated and started a rival paper and told her advertisers not to use her paper. Still, she reported the truth in defiance of

the threats to her life and livelihood. Two of the Groveland Four survived to be released from prison in 1962 and 1968, and in 2019 the State of Florida posthumously pardoned all of them for a crime they never committed. In 2020, relatives of the four men attended the Mount Dora tribute to Mabel Norris Reese and the bust unveiling.

Reese and the *Mount Dora Topic* won newspaper awards throughout the 1950s, even as Sheriff McCall and his allies tried to destroy her. The Florida Women's Press Club consistently recognized her work in several categories, including editorials and general excellence. Reese won 30 national newspaper awards for her stories attacking racial discrimination, including the first Elijah Parish Lovejoy Award for courage in journalism, presented in 1956 at the National Conference of Weekly Newspaper Editors. Named for Elijah P. Lovejoy, who was shot and killed by a pro-slavery mob in an 1837 attack on his printing press, Reese's Lovejoy Award resulted from her campaign, begun in 1954, to restore to the Platt family children the right to attend white public schools.

Other Battles for Justice

When the Platt family moved to Lake County, their four children were denied entrance to the whites-only public schools because Sheriff McCall decreed that their dark complexions identified them as "Negroes." The father, Alvin Platt, provided birth certificates and documentation

showing that the children were of Irish-Indian ancestry, but the sheriff insisted they were Black and that they could not attend school in Lake County. Mabel Reese's extensive coverage of the issue earned her a Pulitzer Prize nomination in the 1950s. The Mount Dora Bible School accepted the Platt children, enabling them to continue their education.

Mabel Norris Reese advocated for victims of injustice, whatever their race, including Jesse Daniels, a white teenager with a developmental disability, framed for a rape he did not commit. Reese wrote more than 100 newspaper stories urging justice for Daniels, who nevertheless was sent

without a trial to the Florida State Hospital for the Insane, where he stayed for 14 years – a story Gilbert King tells in his 2018 book, *Beneath A Ruthless Sun: A True Story of Violence, Race, and Justice Lost and Found*.

Her livelihood gone and her marriage foundering, Mabel Reese gave up Mount Dora and moved to Daytona Beach in 1958 with her daughter, Pat, where she eventually remarried. She spent 20 years as a reporter and associate editor for the *Daytona Beach News-Journal*, continuing her crusade for justice for people who had no voice. Her reporting and editorials led to her appointment to the Florida Advisory

Committee for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, investigating employment opportunities for Black people in the 1960s. She interviewed the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. in St. Augustine in 1963, and she never gave up on Jesse Daniels, filing stories from Daytona Beach until he was finally exonerated and released in 1971.

A fellow journalist at the *News-Journal* called Reese “a very fierce reporter in the face of physical and mental intimidation.” Mabel Norris Reese herself said, “I believe in journalists becoming advocates. If reporters won’t go out and investigate abuses, fight for causes, who will?” ■

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HISTORIC HAPPENINGS

JOHN YOUNG HISTORY MAKER CELEBRATION



During a virtual event in September 2020, the Historical Society presented the John Young History Maker Award to Dr. Sanford "Sandy" Shugart, longtime president of Valencia College. Watch it on our YouTube channel.

LEGACY OF OCOEE PANEL DISCUSSION



A panel including Florida state Sen. Randolph Bracy, state Rep. Geraldine Thompson, Dr. Paul Ortiz of the University of Florida's history faculty, and community historian Francina Boykin discussed the 1920 Ocoee Massacre.

DONALD A. CHENEY AWARD



On November 5, 2020, the Donald A. Cheney Award was awarded to Francina Boykin, president of the Apopka Historical Society, whose research has been crucial in unearthing local Black history and the story of the Ocoee Massacre.

ORANGE COUNTY HERITAGE DAY



Bennett Lloyd from the Seminole County History Museum engages Heritage Day visitors while wearing a Seminole War era soldier's uniform. Exhibitors from other local history museums also participated in this year's event.

FAMILY DAYS: GROWING A BETTER TOMORROW



These two family events were designed to help families contextualize some of the complex topics in our latest special exhibition, *Yesterday, This Was Home: The Ocoee Massacre of 1920*.

COURTHOUSE CUP GOLF TOURNAMENT



On Monday, March 8, 2021, golfers participated in the fifth annual Courthouse Cup Gold Scramble to raise funds for the nonprofit Historical Society of Central Florida, which supports the Orange County Regional History Center's mission.

ADVENTURES IN HISTORY SUMMER CAMP 2021

Monday, June 1 – Friday, August 6

History and fun collide at our Adventures in History summer camp program. We provide a safe and fun learning environment that combines cool historic facts with STEAM content through hands-on activities. Campers will discover the history that surrounds us every day!

We offer classes for ages 6-8 and ages 9-11. Register your child today at TheHistoryCenter.Org/education/summer-camp-2021/

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MICHAEL MAGUIRE

Community: Five Years After the Pulse Tragedy will memorialize the victims and shine a light on the immense outpouring of love following the events of June 12, 2016. The exhibition will feature material selected from the One Orlando Collection, which consists of over 12,500 physical artifacts, archives, photographs, and oral histories preserved by the History Center.