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Skip Moss leans in for a look at B.T. Cooksey's vintage photos of Vero Beach at the Heritage Center.



Vero Beach's fascinating history draws crowd to Heritage Center

By Mary Schenkel - Friday, Jan 14, 2011 08:40 AM

VERO BEACH -- From prehistoric relics to memorabilia from a more recent past, Vero Beach's history was on display at A Heritage Celebration, to benefit the Heritage Center and the Indian River Citrus Museum. In its promotional materials, event organizers had posed the question, "Do you know where you live?"

And, by the end of the evening, it was clear that people wanted to know.

Organizers estimated that more than 250 people wandered through Landmark Building to peruse the cherished historical collections of local residents.

"The idea was to showcase our local history," explained Elizabeth Graves Bass, Heritage Center Board President. "This is part of what the Heritage Center is all about; preserving our history."

A native of Vero Beach, Bass said that although people are always surprised that she was actually born here, her family has lived and worked in Indian River County since the late 1800s, dealing in everything from lumber to citrus.

TOP STORIES

Lane closures to accompany drainage work on Mockingbird Dr.

Vero Beach Art Club Art by the Sea Exhibition

Vero Beach council meetings on the move - shifting to Wednesdays

Vero Beach High narrows field to 4 for head football post

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RECENT UPDATES

Indian River County Crime Blotter: Jan. 13

Hibiscus Festival Juried Fine Art Show accepting registrations

Restaurants help By the River and Sunshine Physical Therapy

Seuss by Night to spotlight Seuss statues

Fellsmere Council approves new water, ice dispensary in town



LOCAL EVENTS

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Her son Jeff Bass currently serves as CEO of the family business, Graves Brothers.

Pam Cooper, Supervisor of the Indian River County Main Library's Archive Center and Genealogy Department presided over a lovely display of Marian Fell paintings.

The daughter of Edward Nelson Fell, founder of Fellsmere, Marian Fell was an accomplished translator, poet and painter, and in 1915 organized the area's first library.

On display were prints painted when she was in her early teens to accompany the stanzas of her poem, *The Origin of the Camel*.

"She was a fascinating woman and a terrific artist," said Cooper.

Cooper also pointed out a display on the architectural works of Frederick Tremble, who designed many of the buildings along 14th Street in downtown Vero Beach.

"In a 15-year period, he designed 150 buildings all over Florida," said Cooper.

Author and Vero native Rody Johnson has written books about two very different stories related to Vero Beach's history, which both had a profound influence on the area.

Johnson was 8 years old in 1942 when the Java Arrow tanker was torpedoed by a German U-Boat, and his father used his own 30-foot boat to rescue 22 of the survivors.

Years later, after Johnson went to Germany and found the U-Boat commander, he wrote the book, *Different Battles: The Search for a World War II Hero*. And his experiences growing up in Vero Beach during the heyday of the Dodgers later prompted the writing of his book, *The Rise and Fall of Dodgertown*.

His display also included an enormous molar from a Woolly Mammoth.

"My father dug it up in about 1955 when digging a pond across from Tripson's Dairy," explained Johnson. "He had a brother in West Virginia who had it encased in Lucite, which has protected it over the years."

Later in the evening, Carol Fennell remembered that the street where she grew up used to be called Mastodon Road after Johnson's find, but then added, "Now it's just called 10th street."

Dressed in period costume, Ellen Stanley explained that she was thrust in the area's history while working in the Archive Center of the Main Library.

She was part of a committee that published an initial compilation of postcards, and later wrote the book *Images of America: Indian River County* on her own, featuring photos and a local history of the area from the 1800's to 1930.

Some of the area's oldest neighborhoods were represented, including Osceola, an early residential area, Original Town, then more of a business district, and Oslo, home to the Helseth siblings from Norway.

The younger generation was also present; Nicole Perlestein, an 11th grade student at Vero Beach High School had made a PowerPoint Presentation for her TV production class about the old Diesel Power Plant.

VERO BEACH - SPOTLIGHT

- [Margaret Anne Simpson Wickel, 80, Vero Beach](#)
- [Peter Palazzo, 85, Vero Beach](#)
- [Joshua Adam Goodson, 27, Vero Beach](#)
- [Robert Esteves, 70, Vero Beach](#)
- [Frederick Alexander Miller, 93, Vero Beach](#)

VERO BEACH - SOCIETY

- [Soup Bowl draws record numbers on a rainy day](#)
- [Save the Chimps fundraiser touches hearts](#)
- [Creativity abounds at Scarecrows in the Park in Vero Beach](#)
- [Sweet success in Vero Beach raises funds for Team Fox](#)
- [Battle for Best Chef raises \\$4,000 for The Samaritan Fund](#)

VERO BEACH - GOVERNMENT

- [Vero Council trudges through another long, tedious meeting](#)
- [Vero Beach councilwoman hopes new form will resolve agenda disputes](#)
- [FPL seeking Vero Beach Council's blessing to perform in-depth study](#)
- [Council interested in golf, plans for youth baseball at Sports Village on hold](#)
- [Heady casts lone vote against sale to FP&L](#)

"I've always been interested in it," said Perlstein. "It powered the whole city from 1926 until 1959 when it was eventually turned off."

Vero Beach natives, Nancy Hopwood and Charlotte Terry, famed for their fascinating *Cracker Tales*, are currently finishing a Sexton Cattle Ranch documentary.

"We're working on that and collecting information for others on the citrus history, cattle ranching and Blue Cyprus Lake," said Terry.

A partial selection from George Hamner's extensive collection of colorful and unique citrus packing labels had been hand-picked for the display.

"I told Rebecca [Rickey, Heritage Center Executive Director] and Elizabeth [Graves-Bass] they could help themselves, as long as they put them back up where they were," said Hamner, who began collecting the labels about 65 years ago.

"The labels used to be stacked at the bottom of the conveyer, and a guy would dip a brush into a pail of paste, brush it on the house label and slap it on the end of the box," explained Hamner.

"We were friendly competitors in those days," said Lee Johnston, whose family ran Deerfield Groves in Wabasso.

B.T. Cooksey's extensive collection of vintage postcards and photos continued to draw quite a crowd throughout the evening, as people perused numerous books filled with colorful postcard invitations to visit beautiful, sunny Florida.

Representatives of the Amtrak/FEC Corridor Coalition used a model train set to remind visitors of its long history in the area. Trains transported riders from 1910 to 1968, and the group hopes to garner support to have a passenger line running again by 2014.

Other displays included Billy W. Harp, author of the book *Lydia*, which recounts the story of his grandmother Lydia Hamilton Mathis raising a family in early 20th century Florida;

Janie Gould of WQCS, who promotes history through the radio as an assistant producer and major contributor to Florida Frontiers, historical interview segments; the Indian River County Historical Society, located inside the historic Vero Train Station building; the Indian River Genealogical Society, which hosts monthly meetings at the Vero Beach Main Library to help people research their own histories; McKee Botanical Garden, which originally opened in 1929 as McKee Jungle Gardens and was a major tourist attraction to the area; and the Old Vero Ice Age Sites Committee, which is working to preserve and further explore the Vero Man site and other archeological/paleontological sites in Indian River County.

A Heritage Celebration at the Heritage Center



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