

TRACKS OF TIME

Monthly Publication from the Zephyrhills Historical Association

Volume 13 – Number 10

October 2011

The next Zephyrhills Historical Association meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 1 at the Zephyrhills Depot Museum at 39110 South Avenue. Business meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. and program at 7 p.m. Refreshments will be served.



Speakers

Our speaker at the October meeting was Steve Van Gorden, principal of Zephyrhills High School. He talked about his impressions as an outsider coming into a school with such a rich heritage. He had high praise for the support from the community that ZHS has, and seemed genuinely thankful for his assignment here. There was also a discussion of the dedication of those who worked on the ZHS 100 committee and how impressive the results were. Those in attendance enjoyed his presentation.

Our speaker for November will be Dr. Daniel McBath. He will talk about Medicine in Florida, and particularly West Pasco. Dan is a Dade City product, a graduate of Pasco High, but he has close ties with many in the Zephyrhills community. One of his coaches from high school, Tom Fisher, was head football coach at ZHS for twenty years, and only had one losing season in all that time. It is hoped that Tom will be in attendance when Dan comes to speak. We look forward to this.

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ZHA Mission Statement

The mission of the Zephyrhills Historical Association is to research, gather, and share local historical information with all generations, through our literature, programs, and scholarships, and to volunteer assistance to the Zephyrhills Depot Museum and WWII Barracks Museum.

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**The Zephyrhills News Celebrates 100 Years
- October 2011 -**

Information found from the Zephyrhills News website in 2005
and History of Pasco County website at www.fivay.org

An act of heroism during the Civil War led to the birth of the *Zephyrhills News*. Capt. H.B. Jefferies, owner of the Colony Co. and one of Zephyrhills' founding fathers, witnessed an act of heroism during the Civil War in which his adjutant's life was saved by Pvt. G.H. Gibson.

In 1911 the Colony Co. decided to start a newspaper as a vehicle for local real estate investors to advertise land for sale, Jefferies remembered the hero was a printer by trade. Jefferies began an extensive search for the man finally locating Gibson in Nebraska. Jefferies made a lucrative offer to lure Gibson to the rolling hills of east Pasco County. Gibson, publisher of the weekly Loup City, Nebraska newspaper, *The Standard Gauge*, jumped at the offer and had his entire plant shipped by rail to Zephyrhills.

Gibson's printing equipment arrived before the plant was completed - only the floor slab was in place. The original installment of the *Zephyrhills Colonist* was in October of 1911 with a whopping 3,000 copies. George's brother, Floyd A. Gibson joined the operation as foreman and later became mayor of the town as well. The first several months, *The Zephyrhills Colonist* were written, composed and printed outside. The equipment was covered with canvas each night, while staff members took turns standing guard until the roof and walls were built.

The newspaper was initially located where First Baptist Church on Fifth Avenue now stands. The original building served the staff well until growth forced a move in 1926. In 1947 the News moved to a location on Sixth Avenue, between Sixth Street and Highway 301. Another move came March 18, 1955, when the News moved back to Fifth Avenue where there is currently a children's consignment shop. The News made its final move next door into its current plant at 38333 Fifth Avenue on February 22, 1959.

The Zephyrhills Colonist became the *Zephyrhills News* in the 1920s under owner Sam Lovett who sold the paper to a coalition of Zephyrhills businessmen in 1930. The principal owner was Dr. Bernard A. Thomas, a local dentist. When Thomas died, ownership went to Walter Gall, a prominent Zephyrhills businessman. Gall sold the News in 1948 to Howard Berg, who published the paper just two years before selling it to George Johnson, formerly of The Lakeland Ledger and owner of papers in Kentucky, Tennessee and Florida. Johnson died shortly after purchasing the paper and his widow sold the publication back to the Gibson family.

Before the 1950s the News was an eight-page publication. Four pages carried local news and the remainder carried syndicated material. It was during the second move that the newspaper expanded significantly.

(Story continues on Page 5)

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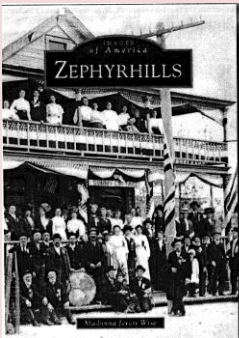
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Madonna Jervis Wise, the author of *Wildcat Creek Kids* and several other books, gives a glimpse of Zephyrhills' culture, cultivated over 100 years, from the inception of Zephyrhills Colony Company in 1919, to "tin can tourists", to the current home of a world-class parachute center.

Follow her on her blog at
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Zephyrhills News Celebrates 100 Years (continued from Page 3)

In 1955, George Washington Wickstrom purchased the paper. Wickstrom came to Zephyrhills from Rock Island, Illinois. He brought extensive experience, gained working at daily newspapers, to this community. He also taught college journalism and wrote several books. George Wickstrom's son, Bernie Wickstrom, later became editor-in-chief in 1960 when he moved to join his father from Stanton, Iowa, where he published *The Stanton Viking* (per daughter, Valerie Wickstrom Davis). Bernie is the most remembered editor in the current community.

In December 1978, the *New York Times Company* purchased the newspaper. The announcement was made by Sydney Gruson, executive vice president of the *New York Times* and George Wickstrom, who was co-owner and publisher of the *Zephyrhills News*. The announcement also said that Bernard Wickstrom, George's son and a co-owner, would remain editor the newspaper and would also become its publisher, reporting to William Ebersole, a vice president of the *Gainesville Sun*. Ron Horton, assistant classified advertising manager of the *Ocala Star-Banner*, was appointed advertising director of the News. The announcement described the paper as a full-sized seven-column paper selling for 15 cents per copy and published on Thursdays. It said the circulation was averaging 6,200 copies. *The New York Times* sold the paper to Asterisk Publishing Company in February 1984. At the time, a news release said that the paper had an average circulation of 7,800, and sold for 25 cents per copy.

At the time of Bernie Wickstrom's death in 1987, *St. Petersburg Times* columnist Jan Glidewell wrote, "He came as close to being a Renaissance man as anyone I know in Zephyrhills. He wrote poetry, was a member of the American Watercolor Association, was an avid fisherman, an opera and classical music enthusiast (he owned thousands of classical records), a talented photographer and a ballroom dancer." Glidewell also reported that Wickstrom served two terms as president of the Zephyrhills Chamber of Commerce, was past president of the Rotary Club, belonged to two PTAs, was an officer in the Quarterback Club, worked on the campaign to build the Bulldog stadium, belonged to the Boosters Club, helped establish a tennis tournament, served on about 60 boards of non-profit, community-oriented organizations, was responsible for the revival of the Zephyrhills Founders Day celebration and was one of the most devoted and ardent supporters of the Zephyrhills Library. The stage on the north side of Lake Zephyr in Zephyr Park is named in his honor.

Republic Newspapers of Knoxville, Tenn., purchased the News in 1988. The company was founded with the purchase of the News. By 1999, a separate section was being published for Wesley Chapel. In January 2003 the publication was purchased by Barry Scripps of Orlando and operated under the legal name of *Scripps Zephyrhills News, LLC*. Linville Enterprises, LLC purchased *The Zephyrhills News* in 2009. Zephyrhills is fortunate to have a longtime resident, Danny Linville and his wife Jan, as it's Publisher and Editor.

Though there have been many changes in location, ownership, editors and technology; The Zephyrhills News has been an information source to the community from the city's birth. As the "City of Pure Water" moves into the future, *The Zephyrhills News* staff is committed to continuing the tradition of providing dedicated service and accurate news to the people of Zephyrhills.

HAPPY 100TH BIRTHDAY TO THE ZEPHYRHILLS NEWS!!!



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