

The next Zephyrhills Historical Association meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 5 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.



**The Rise and Progress of Zephyrhills**

*This article appeared in the Zephyrhills Colonist on Nov. 23, 1911.*

**By SAMUEL E. NYCE**

In February 1910 we made our first appearance at Abbott, now Zephyrhills. We arrived at 4 P.M. during a drizzling rain. The first impression was not an inviting one. As we looked around, we found a few old and dilapidated buildings, about all of them paint less and lots of black walls. The buildings here were Hennington's old store, the house directly opposite the station, the house now occupied by J. F. Stebbins, and one in the rear of same located along what is now called 7th Street. The only one occupied prior to the organization of the Colony Company was Hennington's store. There were also three R. R. houses about two blocks north from the station, and the shacks at the turpentine distillery occupied by Negroes. The distillery has now disappeared. The main view before us were black oaks, on a tract opposite Hennington's old store which was at one time cultivated. The Colony Company office was in the old house now occupied by J. F. Stebbins, but faced the east, since turned so as to face 5th Avenue. We made our appearance at the office of the Colony Company rather disgusted at the surroundings, and the conditions existing. We were royally received by Captain Jeffries and Mr. Moore, and on inquiry we found that the only place for lodging etc., was with Mrs. Davis at the Colony House opposite the station and then we went and found her house was well filled, but that she would feed me, provided I was willing to sleep in the school house in the woods on the other side of the R.R. (Continued on Page 3)

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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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(Continued from Page 1)

Of course with the rain and night approaching we were ready to accept almost anything and we were reconciled to the conditions existing. After supper we were told that a number of men were ready to go to the school house in the woods and I accompanied them, bringing up the rear. It was dark and as I followed them, stumbling, and tumbling a number of times, I was reminded of the night marches under similar conditions in the Army of the Potomac. At last we came to the school house, rather an ancient building and uninviting lodging place, surveyed the field and, being tired was soon in the embrace of Morpheus. Next morning the sun rose before we did and soon disappeared behind the clouds, with threats of more rain. The schoolhouse was located on what is now 9th Street between Third and Fourth Avenues. We returned to the Colony House, had breakfast and then returned to the office of the company, not pleased, and felt like leaving at once. We were invited to see an orange grove, in company of others just as we were. We were taken to Captain Renfro's grove, about three miles from the office, and all hands were pleased. It seemed that this was the turning point, seeing what could be done in this wilderness. The sun came out in full glory and the day was a delightful one, and we had a better opinion of the surroundings. At this time, no doubt fully convinced of the success of the colony, Mr. Hennington laid the foundation for, and commenced the erection of his new store, also a few new houses were going up and a number of men commenced operations. The only streets opened were 5th Avenue, and this only partially, and a few cross streets, perhaps a block. Willis Geiger had erected a house on 6th Street above 5th Avenue, which was then among the oaks, and several were in the course of construction. There were some tents, part tents answering for a habitation but no real homes had been erected, save those mentioned, and the greatest complaint existed. After a few days we secured lots and land and made preparations to build, then returned north for one month, and when we returned found great changes and all for the better. In most every direction the saw and hammer were heard, mostly by amateurs. Geiger & Geiger's store, Orcutt's barber shop, the Zephyrhills Inn, Mr. Summy's home—these places had, Phoenix like, arisen, the black oaks were disappearing and general industry appeared to be on. The newcomer made inquiry from the native and it seemed no two had the same idea or the same way of cultivating. In consequence, some colonists did one way and some another in planting, while some followed northern habits. Some started correctly, more incorrectly, and the errors were a great education to the tiller of the soil. We had our ups and downs; not all the newcomers were desirable or beneficial. The place, being new, like all other new places received the adventurers and, for a time, raised more or less discontent. According to their ideas they had expected the streets paved with gold, and that they could lay under the orange trees, simply picking off the fruit. They had an idea it was no work. For a time the growls were infectious, but they soon disappeared in one way or another for the colony's good. If any remain their places will be taken by these less in expectation but more industrious. Other places have received their growls or will receive them. In these early days, nigh unto two years ago, colonists were ignorant of farming conditions in this climate, all being used to frozen soil in northern climates. This was a different proposition, but clearings were made by some and preparations to plant.

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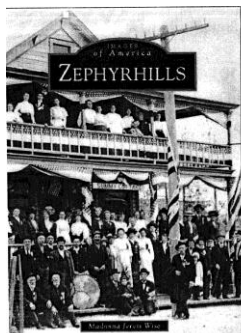
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Madonna Jervis Wise, the author of *Wildcat Creek Kids* and several other books, gives a glimpse of Zephyrhills' culture, cultivated over 100 years, from the inception of Zephyrhills Colony Company in 1919, to "tin can tourists", to the current home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

Follow her on her blog at  
MadonnaWiseBooks.wordpress.com



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Annually the museum sponsors a number of events and activities.

They include: "Pioneer Florida Day" held on Labor Day with music, crafts, storytelling, demonstrations of the "old ways," historical presentations and "cracker" food. "Black Tie & Blue Jeans Dinner and Dance" held in February. Farm Festival and Quilt Show, Horse Pull held in February

Other activities held include Country Christmas, Cane Grinding, and various related activities during the year.

The museum is host to hundreds of school children each year as they study Florida heritage and pioneer life. Many individuals and organizations use the buildings and grounds for various activities including class reunions, picnics, and services and weddings in the Enterprise Church.

The Pioneer Florida Museum & Village trustees and members strongly believe that the preservation and recognition of our past, our ancestors, and the life they lived help to build the foundation for a better future.

### **Mayors of Zephyrhills**

Source: *Zephyrhills From A to Z*

W. C. Boggs 1914-17

J. C. Whitehall 1917-18

G. B. Dewars 1918-19

C. H. Curtis 1920-21

F. E. Tomlinson 1921-24

G. W. Gibson 1924-28

John Hohenthauer 1928-32

B. F. Parsons 1932-51

I. A. Krusen 1951-53

Floyd A. Gibson 1953-57

C. A. McDonald (acting) 1957

Willa Rice 1957-60

C. N. Chamberlain 1960-63

E. D. Arnot, Jr. 1963-76



James Bailey (acting) 1976-77

Robert Johnson 1977-92

James Bailey 1992-2000

A. Roy Burnside 2000-02

W. Cliff McDuffie 2002-

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