

Monthly Publication from the Zephyrhills Historical Association

Volume 15 – Number 8

August 2013

The next Zephyrhills Historical Association meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 3rd at the Zephyrhills Depot Museum, 39110 South Avenue. The business meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. and the program is at 7 p.m. Refreshments will be served.

Speakers



Our speaker for August was Jeff Cannon, author and local historian. He is a member of the Pasco County Historical Preservation Society and maintains their web site at www.pascocemeteries.org. He spoke to the group about the cemeteries in Pasco County and about how communities and groups can contribute to their preservation. Those in attendance were made aware of much, and we enjoyed his presentation very much.

Our speaker for September probably needs no introduction to the members of our group. Bob Howell was Zephyrhills Police Chief and worked for years alongside our legendary Chief, Bill Eiland. He will be talking about his upbringing in our community and his experience in the police department. It also seems quite appropriate that he will be speaking in the same month as Clereen's article about Nathan Geiger. We hear his name quite often when Nathan gets to telling his tales about his teenage years. Perhaps Bob will share a story or two about some of their exploits. We look forward to it!

Thursday, September 26th, is our Ruby Tuesday Scholarship Fundraiser

We are meeting up at 5 p.m. on that day, but you can come anytime.

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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.

 <p>Garage Doors, Inc. Kerry Ryman President</p> <p>36413 SR 54 • Zephyrhills, Florida 33541 Telephone: 813-782-5926 • Fax: 813-788-6773 E-mail: kerry@rymanconstruction.com License # GDI 09084</p>	 <p>ABBOTT STATION RESTAURANT</p> <p>813 322 3686</p> <p>5327 Gall Blvd. Zephyrhills, FL 33542 www.AbbottStation.com</p>
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Member Spotlight

Nathan and Gail Smith Geiger

by Clereen Brunty



Both being labeled “Pioneer Families”, at long last we would like to share some history of this family.

Nathan Curtis Geiger’s family history

When Florida became a state in 1845, shortly after the Seminole Indian War, and the Government opened the state up to settlers, Nathan Geiger’s Great-Great-Grandfather, John Geiger, Sr. and his wife, Mary Jane Dormany Geiger moved to what is now the Zephyrhills area and homesteaded on 640 acres. Their children were A.E. (Abraham Elias), John Jr., Jesse Cornelius, Martha, Samuel and 2 half-brothers, Dave and Abe. John Geiger, Sr. set aside


five acres of the farm for a family cemetery (off 54 West on Geiger Cemetery Road). His son, John, Jr. who was killed in the Civil War, was the first person buried in the cemetery.

One of seven children born to this union was Abraham Elias Geiger, Nathan’s Great-Grandfather who married Sarah Elizabeth Smith on December 20, 1868 and lived in Tucker Town which is now Richland, FL. Their 13 children were John Andrew, Elias Jasper, Sarah, James Laurence, Willis Marion, Mary Cager, Lilly, Dallas, Lorenzo, Margery, Omah, Carrie and Nannie.

James Laurence Geiger, owned and operated Geiger Mercantile store in Zephyrhills and held the position of Postmaster from 1911-1921. His four children were William, Blanche, James Donovan and Gladys.

Blanche married Joel Turner who was a native and lifelong resident of this area and was a rural mail carrier for Zephyrhills from 1920-1957. They had two children; Betty Jo and Norman. Don was the father of John Geiger, a Zephyrhills school teacher and City Council member. Gladys married Tollie Smith, brother of Eunice Smith Neukom and Cullen Smith.

Elias Jasper Geiger, Nathan’s Grandfather, was married to Virginia Spivey. (Virginia was the daughter of John Spivey who settled here in 1868 in Oakdale which was near Pretty Pond) and they had seven children, Simon Jasper, Archie, Virginia Sarah “Virgie”, Curtis James, Manuel Gordon, Victor Lovell and Angie LeRona. Angie married J.J. LeHeup who was killed in a hunting accident in 1931.

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They had two children; Fred and Jaynell. In 1942 Angie married Lonnie Skinner and they adopted a daughter, Catherine. Angie was Postmaster of the Crystal Springs Post Office 1949 – 1976 when her daughter Jaynell took over the reins for the next seven years.

Curtis James Geiger married Sylvia Ann Hawes and they had two children, Phyllis Faye and Nathan Curtis. Sylvia had a son from a previous marriage, Charles Bennett who was born in 1926 on Anna Maria Island during the 1926 Hurricane. His father disappeared and to this day was never found. Sylvia and Curtis married in 1935 when Charles was about 9 years old. Charles attended school in Zephyrhills and was drafted into the Army in 1945. Just as he finished Boot Camp, Japan surrendered but they sent his Company on to Japan where he stayed from 1945-49 when he got out of the Army and came home. Six months later the Korean War started and after the Korean War was over he went back into the Army staying until retirement as a Warrant Officer serving two tours in Vietnam.

Phyllis married J.D. Locke and worked as a banking officer for the Bank of Zephyrhills which was later renamed to SunBank. They had two daughters, Linda and Lisa.

Nathan married Gail Smith Geiger and has two children, Sharon and Alan.

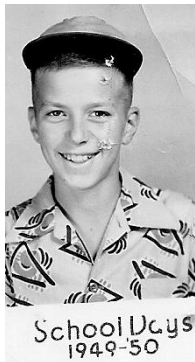
In 1941, Curtis bought the Feed Store from Mr. Storms, renamed it to Geiger’s Feed and Seed Store, which was located on 7th Street and then in 1964 he sold the business to Nathan and Gail who operated it until 2003 when they decided to retire.



Many of John Geiger, Sr.’s descendants owned and operated businesses in the Zephyrhills area. Some were school teachers, some worked for the railroad, and some worked in Tampa as bus drivers, street car drivers and on the fire department. Many of these are still in the Zephyrhills area and many who have passed away are buried in the Geiger Cemetery.

About Nathan...

Nathan was born on June 17, 1938 at his home, which was located west of Shannon’s Fruit Stand on Eiland Boulevard (formerly Geiger Road), and was delivered by Dr. Jones. Growing up he recalls attending the Zephyrhills red brick school building, which was on 11th Street – now Raymond B. Stewart Middle School. Back then, grades 1-12 were all housed in the same building. He remembers having Mrs. Hamilton as his 1st grade teacher and Mrs. Rosemary Trotman as his 4th grade teacher. That was the time when the Hercules Powder Company moved to Zephyrhills and with all the children they had it overcrowded our school so they moved the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades to the barracks at the Zephyrhills Airport for six months while building an Elementary complex which was on the West side of the main school grounds. It would end up being 3 rows of classrooms with a playground under the large oak trees.



While in grade school, Nathan would help at Neukom’s Drug Store where his mother worked, hauling ice from Kerr’s Ice House on 7th Street and crushing it up to use in the soda fountain. He also did other odd jobs such as mowing the yard, pulling weeds and scrubbing the floors. He would receive a whopping 35 cents an hour! At twelve years old Nathan ran a paper route on his bicycle for the Tampa Times for a year. He would carry a ball-peen hammer just in case a vicious dog would try to attack him. At thirteen years old he worked in the produce section of Peoples Supermarket owned by Logan & Corinne Peoples.

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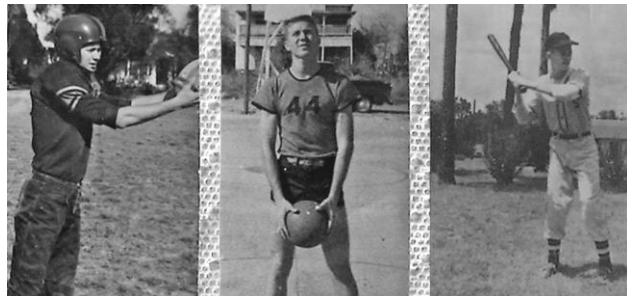
Member of Zephyrhills Historical Association, Ladies Shrine, and First United Methodist Church

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From the age of fourteen until he graduated from high school, he worked with his dad in the Feed Store. Nathan says that Don Storms, Sr. began the Feed Store in the 1920's and his dad worked for Don in the late 30's and early 40's and then bought the store from Mr. Storms who moved to Plant City to become a school teacher. Nat Storms, the son of Don, worked in the store until he moved to Brandon to become an Ag teacher. Nat is the father-in-law of Senator Ronda Storms who represented Zephyrhills within her District. Nathan was also involved in some watermelon and hay fields, pruned orange trees, had a small lawn mowing business and still enjoys the farm life on his land off Sunshine Road.

In High School, Nathan played the clarinet in the marching band under the direction of John T.V. Clark. He enjoyed many sports in 9th through 12th grades...playing defense and offense on the ZHS football team under Coach John Clements, was Captain his senior year when his team won the Gulf Coast Conference. He also loved playing Center position on the basketball team with Coach Webb as well as 1st Baseman in baseball with Coach Clements. He recalls having to provide tools and doing work on the field and spreading clay. His daddy supplied seed, tools, and a water hose and would let Nathan drive the truck to school to carry the tools needed. Also in the summer he would play on the American Legion baseball team, Post 118. Now as if he didn't have enough on his plate, Nathan also was a member of FFA (Future Farmers of America) from 7th grade through 12th. He was Treasurer his Sophomore year and Secretary his Junior year with Ag teachers, Terry Kirton and Robert Brown. They would have cattle judging contest and practiced parliamentary procedures. They even went to a State Convention in Daytona Beach.



Nathan graduated from Zephyrhills High School in 1956 and enlisted in the US Navy as an Airman Apprentice with interest to do engine repairs. He was stationed for 3 days at NAS (Naval Air Station) Jacksonville and then transferred to Great Lakes Naval Training Center for his 10-week boot camp training. Nathan spent time at several naval bases including NAS Norman, Oklahoma for 2 months; NAS Millington, Tennessee for 3 months; then back to NAS Jacksonville Overhauls and Repairs for a year and a half as 3rd Class Petty Officer E4. He was a co-pilot and crew chief to make sure the jet was in proper working order. The pilot taught him how to fly but he never got a pilot's license. He also spent time at NAS Cecil Field located southwest of Jacksonville in Fighter Squadron 14 working on jet fighter planes.

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Other tours of duty included NAS Key West, Florida, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, NAS Mayport, Florida aboard the USS Intrepid and the USS Forrestal in Norfolk, Virginia as well as two Mediterranean tours on the Franklin D. Roosevelt Air Craft Carrier anchoring in Athens, Greece; Istanbul, Turkey; Poleramo, Sicily; Naples, Leghorn & Genoa, Italy; Cannes, Monte Carlo, Nice, France; Barcelona and Rota, Spain. Continued locations included Gibraltar; Port Lyautey, Africa; the Azor Islands and Newfoundland. All this was during Peace time.

After returning home from the military, Nathan became a volunteer with the Zephyrhills Fire Department from 1960 – 1964. He grew up as a member of the First Baptist Church in Zephyrhills which had several pastors over the years: Rev. A. H. Mathis, Rev. T. W. Page, Rev. Bill Oswald, Rev. Charles Roesel, Dr. Deaton, Rev. Len Turner and Rev. Charles Brock. Then he started attending the Agape Baptist Church and New Hope Baptist Church, both on Chancey Road and presently attends CornerStone Baptist Church on 7th Street. In his younger years, Nathan was in R.A.'s (Royal Ambassadors) and joined the choir. Some of the positions he held in these churches were Training Union Director, Chairman of the Board of Trustees and Deacon. Nathan continues to enjoy gardening, fishing, tending to cattle and has a lawn mowing service. His favorite color is blue, his favorite song is Dixie, favorite book is Treasure Island, favorite movie is Shane from the 1950's and his favorite restaurant is Sonny's BBQ in Zephyrhills. He also enjoys the old Gunsmoke TV shows. Nathan became a member of the Zephyrhills Historical Association in 2006, held positions of board member 2007-2013 and Vice President 2010-2011. He also has served on the Auditing Committee.

Gail Smith Geiger's family history

In the 1820's, Willis Frank Smith, Gail's Great-Great-Grandfather was in Duval County, FL and in the U.S. Army during the Indian Wars, settling in this area in 1838 between Sunshine Road and Fairview Heights Road, was married to Sarah Green. They had thirteen children with one being Allen Henry Smith, Gail's Great-Grandfather.

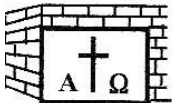
In 1863, at age 19, Allen enlisted in the Confederate State Army in Hernando County (Pasco County had not been formed yet so was a part of Hernando County), married Vianna Patience Roberts, (the widow of William R. Overstreet) and gained four small sons of the widow, Taft L., James Lucius, George W. and William R. Jr. ages about 2 to 9 years old. Taft L. died before 1870. Allen and Vianna had four children, Rosa Patience Smith who was first married to Dayton Emmett Wallace, Minnie Melissa Smith who was married to Elaja (E.J.) Spivey, Charles Henry Smith, Gail's Grandfather, who married Kathryn "Kate" Maxwell Knapp and Allen Eugene Smith who married Mary Allen Knapp (Kate's sister).

From the union of Charles & Kate, three children were born, Bonnie Bell, Austin and Hazel. Austin married Eileen Florence Patricia Reichart and they had three daughters, Peggy Lou, Gail Marie and Mildred Karen. Gail was born on May 28, 1939 in her grandparent's house which was ¼ mile from her current home now off Sunshine Road and was delivered by Dr. Bradshaw.

About Gail...

Gail attended Miss Granger's "Child's Garden of Learning" school for her kindergarten through 2nd grade years. Gail had several "firsts" in her life. Her 3rd grade was her "first" year of being in a public school which was in the red brick Zephyrhills School building. She remembers they had no electricity, no phones and an outhouse for the bathroom, would pump water from a pitcher pump, cooked over wood until gas service came into the area. Ice was purchased at Kerr's Ice House and was used in a wooden ice box on the back porch.



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In their young years, Gail and her sisters, along with a cousin, Shirley Potter, formed a club in the hay loft of their Grandfather’s barn and aptly called it the “Barn Club”. They elected officers, had chores, and held graduation ceremonies when anyone of them accomplished certain procedures. In the winter time and when their dad purchased an old travel trailer for them to play in, they moved the Barn Club from the barn to the travel trailer. Every Sunday morning at least an hour before time to leave for Sunday School, they held their own Sunday School and Church services in the Barn Club trailer. One of them would teach the lesson, another would lead singing and another would preach. Lots of great memories come from those services.

Other great times they had was swimming at the Zephyrhills Pool, operated by Coach and Beanie Clements, Friday night roller skating (when there was no football game), at Crystal Springs Roller Rink operated by Truman Rooks mother-in-law, Mrs. Curtis, playing croquet on Sunday afternoons, weather permitting or playing Monopoly on those colder days. Our “playhouses” were laying sticks on the ground to mark off rooms under the oak trees along the side of the dirt road we lived on. This was a dead end road and no one passed our house except our two aunts who each had a home beyond ours, so there was no fear of traffic.



In High School, Gail was in the marching band grades 6 thru 12 under the direction of John T.V. Clark and was Student Director in the State Contest in her Senior year. Gail was a student worker in the School Office her Senior year. Also in her Senior Year, she participated in the “first” Miss Zephyrhills Beauty Contest and won “1st” Runner Up. She took piano lessons from Mrs. Wright for a few years and then was lucky enough to have Jean Murphy move to Zephyrhills and taught her really how to play the piano.

Gail’s mother was a school bus driver the entire time her girls were in school, so Gail and her sisters were the first on and the last off the bus route each day. Her mom, Eileen, was born in 1916 in Illinois and came to Zephyrhills when she was 18 years old to be with her dad, Joseph Reichart, who owned “Joe’s Barber Shop” which was located in the business portion of the Zephyr Hotel on 5th Avenue. Her dad, Austin, was a substitute bus driver and was a farmer, had his own Butcher Shop where he processed many, many cows and hogs for people in the Zephyrhills area. In those days these fresh meats could be sold directly to the local grocery store, the Peni-Saver, where they would be cut to suit the customer. He also raised vegetables which were also taken to the local store for sale. He always planted black-eyed peas and they would get up very early in the morning to pick the peas, take them back to the house, sit on the porch, shell the peas, clean them and take them to the store. It seemed that the store owner wanted the peas “shelled” not still in the hull.

Gail graduated from High School in 1956 being in the same class with Nathan. In the summer of 1956, Gail worked for Zephyrhills Telephone Company as a Filing Clerk. This was the town’s “first” telephone company and was owned by brothers, Tommy and James Jarrett. Then in the Fall of 1956, Gail worked as a secretary at the Pasco Packing Company in Dade City for three years and following that she worked for Attorney Raymond Hodges as secretary until becoming a full time homemaker and mother in 1962.

Growing up, Gail was a member of the First Baptist Church in Zephyrhills where she was in the G.A.’s (Girls Auxiliary) and choir under the direction of her piano teacher, Jean Murphy. Jean encouraged her to start playing the piano for church on Sunday evenings when the youth had charge of the music and Gail soon became the church pianist and later church organist continuing in that position until the present. She has served in 4 different churches in the area through the years.

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Nathan and Gail grew up together, school and church, and dated some in high school but it wasn't until Nathan got out of the military that they really noticed each other. One day at church, after Gail had been playing the piano, Nathan eyed her coming down the steps of the church in a cute red dress and asked if he could take her home. Nathan had bowling on Mondays and Gail would go to the movies by herself. When both were over at 9pm they would go to the Freezette (now Mari's Donut Shop on Hwy. 301) hoping to see each other there. Church was their main meeting place. Nathan proposed to her on the way to a softball game when he pulled off the side of the road and reached for a small box under the seat containing the ring. Gail was so excited and just had to show it off at the ball game. Their love is still in full bloom as they celebrated their 52nd anniversary on July 28th.



Friday, July 28, 1961, the Zephyrhills News posted, "Pioneer Families United When Nathan Geiger Weds Gail Smith". Nathan and Gail were wed at the First Baptist Church in Zephyrhills with the Rev. Bill Oswald officiating. Gail's sister Mildred, served as Maid of Honor and Ernest Peeples served his friend as Best Man. Ushers were Casey Kearsse and H.C. Nesbit and music was by Nell Nesbit and Jean Murphy. A reception was held in the church social hall where Phyllis, Nathan's sister, kept the Brides Book. They celebrated their 50th anniversary on July 28, 2011. The Geiger's were blessed with two children, Sharon Louise in 1962 who presently lives here in Zephyrhills, and Alan Wayne in 1966 and presently lives in Auburndale, FL. Nathan and Gail have seven grandchildren, Matthew, Brent, Stephen, Justin, Alyssa, Ethan and Anna along with three great-grandchildren, Sydney, Grayson and Easton. In 2010, the Geiger and the Smith families noted 4 generations of Zephyrhills High School grads.



After Sharon was born in 1962 and until closing the business, Gail helped out at the Feed Store and did the bookkeeping and later became a full time partner with Nathan in operating the business. Since retiring from the store they have enjoyed several trips around the country including Alaska, Hawaii, Canadian Rockies and many of the mid and Western states. On a side note...Gail still likes to hang her clothes out on the line to get fresh air! Through the years she has enjoyed cross stitching, for many years made her and her daughters clothes, likes crossword puzzles, computer games, playing the piano and still cans the home grown vegetables from Nathan's gardens. Gail became a member of the Zephyrhills Historical Association in 2006 and was Secretary 2010 and 2011, has been Social Chairwoman and still serves in that position. Her favorite color is yellow, her favorite song is Moon River by Andy Williams, favorite book is the Bible – King James Version, favorite movie is Old Yeller and favorite restaurant is Red Lobster. Gail currently is a part time employee of Hallmark.



An interesting historical fact, Rosemary Wallace Trottman, former Zephyrhills School teacher and founder of the Zephyrhills Historical Association in 1980 was born in 1901 as a third generation in eastern Pasco County. She was born in the cabin built by relatives and friends on 160 acres that has been granted to her great-grandfather, Willis Frank Smith under the Armed Occupation Act of 1842. The land was handed down to her grandfather, Allen Smith and then to her mother, Rosa Smith Wallace. This would make Rosemary Trottman and Gail 2nd cousins. Mrs. Trottman was also Nathan and Gail's 6th grade teacher.

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