

# TRACKS OF TIME

Monthly Publication from the Zephyrhills Historical Association

Volume 17 – Number 4

April 2015

The next Zephyrhills Historical Association meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 5<sup>th</sup> in the meeting room of the *Zephyrhills Public Library*, 5347 8<sup>th</sup> Street. The business meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. and the program is at 7 p.m. Refreshments include drinks, which are provided, and food brought in to share by members.

## Speakers



Jeff Meserve, owner and operator of Abbott Station Restaurant, was our speaker in April. He is also a member of our association and instrumental in our fundraising efforts for the Rosemary Trotman Scholarship Fund. He spoke about himself and particularly about his love for the history of our community. It was obvious to those in attendance how proud he is of the contributions his restaurant makes to that historical tradition and how appreciative he is at the way his establishment has been accepted by the community. Jeff also talked about his efforts so far in trying to purchase and move another railroad caboose to our fair city. The purchase is a bargain, but the price for moving it seems to be quite an obstacle. Time will tell how this plays out.

Our presentation at the May meeting will be by the Zephyrhills High School Chorus, under the direction of Luan Gore. This has become a tradition for us. This is the third year the Chorus has performed for our group in May. They always do a terrific job, and we always enjoy ourselves. We hope you'll come join us.



## **Thursday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, is our next Abbott Station Scholarship Fundraiser**

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

*Tell your server you are supporting the Zephyrhills Historical Association for the cause . . . Judy Meserve*

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Please consider contributing old photos for the website.

My email address is on the opening page

### 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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**FEATURE ARTICLE**

**Field Trip to Centralia**

Provided by Margie Partain and Madonna Wise

On March 20, 2015, the Pasco County Historical Society (they meet in Dade City) went on a field trip to Spring Hill, in Hernando County, to see a miniature layout of the Tidewater Cypress Mill, the largest in the area at one time. Madonna Wise, President of Pasco County Historical Society, and her husband, Ernie, and Margie Partain, who are also members of the Dade City club, along with Zephyrhills Historical members Sharon Reisman and Art Bessinger, enjoyed the trip with other members.

**Margie:**

The sawmill operated from 1910 until 1922 and employed 1000 people. Centralia had a population of from 1500 to 2000 people compared to Brooksville with about 500 residents. Members saw a photo of the largest tree ever cut there, it turned out 5,476 board feet. Many



days the mill turned out 1000 board feet in a day. The display was researched and built by Doug Brainard in his back yard. A piece of property, next to Heaven, landscaped on a lake.

Mr. Brainard greeted us and guided us to a building behind his house. It is where he keeps and works on his trains, scenery and buildings, creates I should say. His marvelous train outlay is on a 14' x 60' piece of land right behind the building. The train, I believe he said, G scale, ran in and out of the building on miniature tracks and in and around the small buildings outside, and among the 60 real trees using bonsai type techniques to keep them small. Some of the trees were decorated like orange trees with pickers and their ladders and hampers. Lots of flowers and moss were growing on the rocks. He had brought in rocks, soil and granite. He told us we could put buttermilk and moss (not Spanish) in a blender and then paint it on the rocks and it will grow.

**Madonna:**

As a prelude to the meeting at the Centralia exhibit, Jeffrey Miller (also a member of the Zephyrhills Historical Association) and Lynn Brainard serenaded the society members with delightful historical songs. Jeff on electric guitar and Lynn on violin shared some examples of their historical songs. The first song, "Follow the Drinking Gourd," was a tune from the era of the Underground Railroad. "Follow the drinking gourd...the old man is waiting for to carry you to freedom..."

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As the total group arrived they played a historical rendition of “Eatin’ Goober Peas.” This fitting Civil War song was popular particularly with southern soldiers who depended as a staple in the Confederate Army on the goober pea or peanut. The tune was frequently chanted in their marching regiments, and was composed by P. Nutt in 1866. “Peas! Peas! Peas!... Eating Goober Peas. How delicious eating goober peas...”

The musical duo of Jeff and Lynn are known as the “Dixie Blues,” and they will be performing songs about the Civil War at several Hernando County libraries. They perform Civil War tunes with their origins and significance.

**Margie:**


Mr. Brainard had chairs and a screen on the wall and showed us Hernando County on a map and where Centralia was located. The slide show went on to show us old photos of the courthouse in Brooksville, 1<sup>st</sup> car in Brooksville owned by the Burrell family, 1<sup>st</sup> hotel name Vernada and the 1<sup>st</sup> school in the county built in Spring Hill on Ft. Dade Avenue.

He had photos of a couple of hotels, one being the Centralia Hotel and another, the Bayport Inn. Bayport, just west of Brooksville, on the Gulf was a major port during the Civil War. A 1920 photo of the lumber yard on 160 acres with cut lumber piled 15 ft. high. A photo of the inside of the Gamble commissary was shown which was one of the largest stores in Florida, larger than the ones in Tampa and Jacksonville. It has a storeroom that could hold 4 freight car loads of merchandise. They sold flour, cornmeal, grits, sugar, salt, coffee, seasonings, medicines, garden produce, clothing, yard goods, household utensils, tools, kerosene and fancy foods such as: olive oil, feta cheese and other delicacies. People came from other settlements to shop there. Mr. Brainard said it was like a Walmart before there was Walmart. He mentioned a boarding house run by the Varn family.



Mr. Brainard said it was like a Walmart before there was Walmart. He mentioned a boarding house run by the Varn family.



The town had doctors, a dentist, churches, a bakery, a school, barbershop and a movie theater, named the Flicker Palace, a restaurant named Hungry None and a drugstore. A sidewalk made of boards ran through the town, His display, has two rivers, a mill pond, a tressel and a tunnel. He added he doubted that Centralia had a tunnel but he thought every railway should have a tunnel. He also had a section representing Weeki Wachee Springs. The fruit for sale at the stores and commissary and in the box cars on the train were made from molding material and beads. He had a box car load of Hershey’s chocolates. The buildings were perfect; he had made them according to what he thought they would look like for the tie period and from the photos he had. The town lights up at night.



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ZHS JROTC Bulldog Battalion, GO FOR IT!

**Madonna:**

Doug Brainard, a member of the Springhill Garden Club and active nationally in a group known as ‘Garden Railroads,’ is a skilled gardener and learned local historian. His apparent green thumb skills have clearly merged with his knowledge of railroad history (both bygone and technical) to exhibit a living history exhibit. Doug has extensively investigated Centralia and



generously conveyed stories and shared vintage photographs of the town and surrounding area. The Centralia Mill employed one thousand people in its heyday and for a town with a population that reached 2,000, the mill with its commissary and various related businesses analogous to the cypress mill and depot, exemplified early Florida. The mill of course was dependent on the then massive cypress trees in the area. The replica which is often shared with historical, garden and student groups, has a re-creation in scaled facsimiles of the 'Bear Bar,' the various businesses, and steam-



operated miniature railroad which of course carries several train cars full of lumber simulating the trek to market. Doug shared interesting tidbits of railroad history and demonstrated the operation and powering of a steam locomotive miniature. Doug said that the mill boasted cutting a phenomenal 100,000 board feet of lumber each day in its prime. With the depletion of the resource, the town is now a ghost town and the foundational remnants of the town may be explored.

**Margie:**

Mr. Brainard told that the Tampa Northern Railroad went from Tampa to Thomasville, Georgia just north of Tallahassee, with a little spur off to the side leading to Centralia. He had a gas operated ‘pusher’ that he seemed very proud of, used for pushing open cars back and forth for loading. The other trains were electric.



At the very end, he had a different track set up with a steam locomotive running, blowing out steam. In his building he showed us how he makes it work. The locomotive has a water tank to which he adds the water and a little ‘steam oil’ (fine oil that mixes with water). He adds the oil for a lubricant for the pistons and moving parts. The locomotive also had a small butane tank. He turned on the gas and lit the oil inside the locomotive and a blue flame appeared to heat the water to start the steam action. I hope this is correct; it was all foreign to me.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CHALET FLOWERS</b></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;">   </div> <p style="text-align: center;">5002 SEVENTH STREET ZEPHYRHILLS, FLORIDA 33542</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>813-788-2874</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">MARY ANN · KIM · TIM SANDERS</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>LITTLE ANGEL CHRISTIAN STORE</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">5522 7th Street Zephyrhills, FL 33542 (813) 782-7600</p>
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According to Mr. Brainard, all that remains at the site, which is just a couple of mile from his home, is a ramp going from the mill pod to the sawmill, the pond is filled with trees, also partial vine-covered walls and foundations still stand, some taller than a man.

He and his wife served wonderful brownies and cold bottles of water. What a treat as it was hot that day. Everyone seemed to enjoy the outing. If you haven't been already been, you need to go! There were alot more to see.

Note: The description of what was for sale in the commissary was taken from the internet. Enjoy the full story and more pictures at:

<http://www.fivay.org/centralia.html>

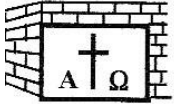
<http://centraliarailroad.com/>

**Model Train Show & Swap Meet – March 14, 2015**

Several members of our association helped the Zephyrhills Depot Museum host this event the week following Founders Day. The event was well received by the community, as you'll notice by the picture of a full parking lot. Everyone apparently had a wonderful time. Clreen sent along some pictures of the event, which are being shared here. Enjoy!



Wow! Not sure the parking lot has ever been so full!

<p><b>CornerStone</b>    <b>Baptist Church</b>                  7th Street &amp; 8th Avenue</p> <p>Come be our special guest                  Coffee &amp; Donuts 10:30***** Worship 11:00 A.M. and 6:00 P.M.</p> <p>Dr. Neal Resue—Pastor                  *NealDoe1956@verizon.net</p>	<p>In Memory of</p> <p><b>Ryals Furniture Exchange</b>                  And Great Parents  <b>Powell &amp; Maude Ryals</b></p> <p>From son James</p> <p><b>God Bless America</b></p>
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Model Train Show & Swap Meet Pics



ZHA members and Train Masters



Val & Rex Hiatt, friend for Indiana, Betty O'Dell



Victoria DeGeorge & Vicki Elkins



Louie Holt & Victoria DeGeorge



Some of the crowd



Lyden Green in the caboose

Distant Cousins

by Jerry Pricher

The mention of the Varn Boarding House in the Centralia article put me in mind of my own ancestry. I am a Varn descendant, and I am fairly certain these folks were cousins of mine.

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Johan Peter Varn (1719-1774) came from Germany to Charleston, South Carolina, some time before 1748. Two of his sons were born in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Jacob was born in 1748, and John George was born September 1, 1751. I am descended from both of these sons. They are my Fourth Great Grandfathers.

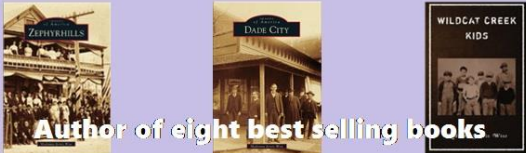

I have mentioned in this publication before that my paternal grandparents were second cousins once removed. I also explained that I doubt that either of them ever realized it. I'll explain how this connects to the Varns in a moment, after I've explained how I'm descended from the two brothers. My paternal grandmother, Carrie Eugenia Sloman (1882-1963), had maternal grandparents who were full second cousins. Lazarus Brown Murdaugh, born in 1817, was the grandson of John George Varn. Anna "Annie" Varn, born November 1, 1828, was the granddaughter of Jacob Varn. I have no idea whether they knew their family connection or not. It was not uncommon in the time for even first cousins to marry, so it's not in any way shocking.

Lazarus Brown Murdaugh's Great Aunt was Susannah Murdaugh (1806-1844), and she was married to Thomas Pricher (1799-1865). Their grandson, William McKindred Pricher (1872-1927), married Carrie Eugenia Sloman and bore a son, Otis Merriwell Pricher (1909-1985), who is my father.

My Varn ancestry is one in which I have high confidence. It is one connection that has been verified via DNA testing, although my direct link is with a fellow researcher whose particular line changed the spelling of the name to Varnes late in the nineteenth century. I did most of my research in the late 1990s, but I returned to it for some time about two years ago, and that's when I made this connection to the Varnes cousins. I have known since early in my research that some of my Varn cousins settled in Hernando County, but I have been unable thus far to make a determination of our direct connection. I have made the connection to the group who settled in Polk County, in the Bartow area, and it may or may not have been this family connection that brought my paternal grandparents to the area and ultimately to Hardee County, where my father was born.

Tom Varn was the Athletic Director at Hernando High School for a long stretch, and I got to know him pretty well during my years as a football and basketball official. This was before I started doing my genealogical research. I was no longer a sports official by that time, so I had little reason to run into Tom again, but I thought several times about contacting him to see if we could determine our relationship. I never did, and, unfortunately, Tom is no longer with us. I found a grave in Sumter County, near Sumterville, of Asa Varn, from the right time period, but was never able to find this name anywhere in my research. I would not be surprised if he was connected to the Hernando County Varns. Maybe someday I will know. Jon Ferguson can attest to the fact that it's probably a long shot.

Well, I've rambled on a bit here I know, but Margie's mention of the Varn name in her recollection of the presentation at Centralia just got me going. I'm glad she included it. Maybe it will be enough to get me going again on my research. Some of you know first hand that research in genealogy is quite addictive and time consuming. Time will tell if I get myself back to it. I certainly have the time for it now.

 <p><b>Author of eight best selling books</b></p> <p><b>Madonna Wise Books</b>  <b>Author, Research &amp; Consulting</b>  <b>Madonna Jervis Wise</b>  <b>Zephyrhills, Florida</b>  <b>Murphy, North Carolina</b></p> <p><b>813-469-8627</b>  <b>MadonnaJWise@gmail.com</b>  <a href="http://madonnawisebooks.wordpress.com">http://madonnawisebooks.wordpress.com</a></p>	<p><b>Cutting Edge Beauty Salon</b></p>  <p>813-782-4001      813-469-3437</p> <p><b>Joni Gauger</b>  owner/stylist</p> <p>6132 Fort King Rd.  Zephyrhills, Florida 33542</p>
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