

Monthly Publication from the Zephyrhills Historical Association

Volume 18 – Number 8

August 2016

The next Zephyrhills Historical Association meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 6<sup>th</sup> in the meeting room of the *Zephyrhills Public Library*, 5347 8<sup>th</sup> Street. The business meeting is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. and the program is at 6 p.m. Refreshments include drinks, which are provided, and food brought in to share by members.

### Speakers



Our speaker for the August meeting was Hazel Boatwright Massey, mother of Melanie Massey Foltz, who was also in attendance. Hazel talked mostly about her years in Order of the Eastern Star, an organization in which Melanie is still active. It was a big part of the social life of this community for many families when I was young. Many family names came out in the discussion. It was great to remember. Hazel also talked a little bit about her childhood out on Morris Bridge Road and all the families there. She said she would be happy to return to talk more about this part of

her life. She had really only prepared this night to talk about OES. We all enjoyed her presentation very much.

Our speaker for the September meeting will be Janette Dunnigan, who graduated from Zephyrhills High School in 1968 and is also the stepdaughter of our own Bill Kustes. She was a cheerleader at ZHS and was involved in many other activities as well. She has been a judge in Pinellas County for a number of years, but is not quite ready to retire. Janette was asked to talk about her time growing up in Zephyrhills, as well as her accomplishments since. I know we are in for a treat. Come join us.

**Tuesday, September 20<sup>th</sup>, is our next Give-Back Scholarship Fundraiser  
at Sergio's Italian Restaurant on West 54 in Zephyrhills.**

We are meeting at 5 p.m. on that day.

Contact Patty Thompson (813-780-8559 - [pattycakeclown1@aol.com](mailto:pattycakeclown1@aol.com)) for information.

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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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Secretary .....	Anna Boone
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Newsletter .....	Jerry Pricher Clereen Brunty
Programs .....	Jerry Pricher Carolyn Dean
Scholarship .....	Margie Partain Jerry Pricher

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 <p><b>Clereen Morrill Brunty</b> ZHS Alumni Contact</p> <p><b>clereen@tampabay.rr.com</b></p> <p><b>813-782-8763</b></p>	 <p><b>chalet flowers</b></p> <p>Kim Tim  Maryann Sanders owners</p> <p>Ph: 813-788-2874 chaletflowersfl.com</p> <p>5002 7th Street Zephyrhills, FL 33542</p>
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Editor: Jerry Pricher, 5138 20<sup>th</sup> Street, Zephyrhills, FL 33542  
Phone: 813-788-2547 email: jerry@pricher.net

**Note from the Editor:** Madonna Wise passed along to us much of the material she gathered from her latest book on the Wesley Chapel community. There are some great interviews, articles, and pictures here. There are lots of familiar names among these folks, but I'll begin with the folks most familiar to me — the Porters. I'm a few years younger than Tom and slightly older than Bill. I know Bill far better, but I always sort of idolized Tom, particularly as an athlete. He was probably best known as a baseball player, but he went to State in Track one year, and long jumped further than anyone had ever jumped in this state in all classification. His state record long jump of twenty-three feet, eleven and three-quarter inches, stood for many years and was truly an amazing event.




Years later, when I was officiating basketball, I was working a game in Haines City on Friday night. We were in the coach's office at half time, and the athletic director asked me where I was from. When I told him I was from Zephyrhills, he related to me that he had considered Tom Porter one of the greatest athletes he had ever seen. This really struck me, considering it had been at least twenty or thirty years since he'd seen him play. It's one of those experiences I'm unlikely to ever forget.

### The Porter Legacy

by Madonna Jervis Wise

The present day "Wiregrass Ranch" property has a complex history. Around 1937 James Barney Porter purchased land that now houses the nearby Zephyrhills Municipal Airport. In the early days of World War II, the Army Air Corps wanted that land for an air training station. Great-grandson J.D. Porter, said, "When the land was condemned by the Army Air Corps, the proceeds were parlayed into a purchase of 15,000 acres from the Rockefeller Land Trust." James Barney Porter who lived with his family, wife, Kathryn Virginia Hatcher and children Martha, Margaret, James Hatcher and Robert Paul in Plant City, bequeathed parcels of the land to his sons: James H. and wife, Martha, and Robert P. Porter and wife, Louise. James H. Porter later moved his family to the ranch in 1946. James H Porter and his wife, Martha McDonald, and their three sons, James "Don," Tom, and William "Bill" worked the ranch, raising cattle, citrus, and crops.

James H. Porter was referred to as "Wiregrass." It was James Porter's late friend, Dade City Buick dealer Ed Madill, who was most responsible for the iconic nickname, 'Wiregrass.' Each Christmas, Madill sent Porter a box of matches, with instructions to burn wiregrass on the ranch. The ashes fertilized grass for the cattle. The name stuck. Once, when Madill was in Mexico, he wrote a postcard to his friend and addressed the envelope "Wiregrass Porter, Gatorville, Florida, USA," The letter actually arrived. In 1972, Wiregrass Porter made land sale for portions of Saddlebrook Resort. The next year, the land for what was to become Meadow Pointe, was sold. The Porters donated land for a Pasco Hernando State College Campus and other civic sites.

 <p>Gina King Granger Social Media &amp; Digital Marketing Strategist</p> <p>(813) 602-1818 PO Box 1718 Zephyrhills FL 33539 gina@offthechartmedia.com</p>	<p><i>Artistic Expressions</i></p> <p>5906 7th Street Zephyrhills, Florida 33542 813 783-7731</p>   <p>Custom picture framing Prints Needlework Photos Paintings Computer photo editing</p> <p>Beverly Koehler Barnett, Owner      aeframer@gmail.com</p>
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James Don “J.D.” Porter, Jr., Quinn Porter Miller and William “Bill” Porter at their office on September 23, 2015, 3717 Turman Loop, Suite 102 Wesley Chapel, Florida 33544

“Uncle Bill Porter with niece and nephew” in September 2015, taken in Wesley Chapel, Florida

*(Photo courtesy of Ernest Wise.)*

In the interview, we reviewed the map of the early settlers to Wesley Chapel. Bill Porter affirmed that his family did not arrive until the mid-1940s to live in Wesley Chapel, so their knowledge of the very early period is limited. He had heard the name “Gatorville” originated from the Godwin family. He said his father, Wiregrass, explained that the Godwin’s had particularly tanned skin which showed a roughness from the Florida sun...thus for the skin texture...Gatorville. From the map, he mentioned that “Jay Field” occupied the space where Wesley Chapel High School and Weightman Middle School now sit. Asked if it was named for Jay Ryals, he said that was a possibility. He said his perception would be that the old Wesley Chapel informal boundaries were from the other side of Boyette Road to the far side of Interstate 75.

Bill Porter inquired about our knowledge of the ‘Mandy School.’ Bill said that he believed the **Mandy School** was an old log school that was on what would now be the north side of CR56, about 200 yards northwest of the Pasco Hernando State College. He said they were particularly proud that the old log school was so close to PHSC campus and the site was selected with that in mind. In addition he said remnants of the structure included some foundation materials from the log house and excavation from two outhouses that sat nearby. *(A theory is that Mandy may be: Amanda Ann Cooper Godwin, wife Berien Godwin; which would mean that Mandy was the daughter of James Madison Cooper, Jr. and Elizabeth Ann Fisher. School board records from Hernando County do not have evidence of a school named Mandy School although some records have been lost. It may be the school was a home used to teach a few children.)* In addition, both Bill and James Don “J.D.” Porter said that they had seen remnants of the tram roads on the Wiregrass Ranch property. J.D. said that the rail bed was used by folks to walk to Tampa, because it was higher and easier to navigate. He said he had found a metal lever some years ago from what he believed to be a train engine. In addition they had both heard that folks would jump on the tram cars to hitch a ride to Tampa along with the turpentine or lumber.

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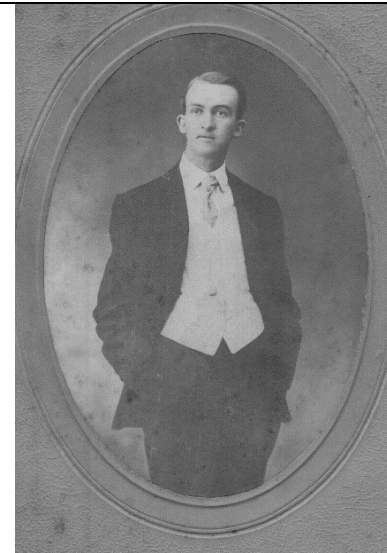
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ZHS JROTC Bulldog Battalion, GO FOR IT!

Bill Porter said the old adage was that *you would know a person who was a native of Wesley Chapel because they would be carrying a bucket of sand.* When I inquired about this, he responded that the bucket was to fill in the ruts in the road, and only locals had the knowledge of the roads that were filled with ruts and bumps. As for ranching, Bill said his father, Wiregrass, had mostly cattle but also had citrus groves, worked in timber and produced watermelons. He said his father would grow as much as 40 to 100 acres of watermelons. He had heard many stories of open range and the adjustments that were made in the conversion to fencing.


James Barney Porter was involved in the hotel and ice plant business in Balsam, North Carolina, Lake City and then Plant City before relocating in Wesley Chapel with his wife, Kathryn and children: James H. "Wiregrass, Robert Paul, Margaret Alleene and Martha Kathleen in the 1940s. He made his living with ranching, citrus groves and watermelons. His grandson, Bill, said that he bonded with the land and built a family cohesiveness that he believes has lasted four generations. He owned thousands of acres south of State Road 54 from the mid-1940's on. Large parcels of land were given to sons, James and Robert. Robert later sold his land after the World War II to Leon Bishop who owned 'Jack's Cookie Company.'

(Courtesy of Quinn Porter Miller.)



Bill said his family, his grandfather in particular, spoke of the assistance of Joe Lamar Strickland & Robert Drawdy Strickland, sons of pioneer, Laurin McQueen Strickland, with their neighborliness and assistance with the transition to living in Wesley Chapel. He also said that Wiregrass, his father, felt that Dan Hale, foreman of the K-Bar Ranch was the quintessential cowboy in stature, work ethic and skill and was revered, and was often called upon to assist on Wiregrass ranch. In those days, Bill said, ten to twenty-five cowboys might be working on the ranch and they would all show up at his house for his mother to feed. Laughing he said, his mother, Martha Porter, was like a short order cook...she could whip up a meal for many people in no time at all. He added that Martha McDonald Porter was the source of cohesion in the family and provided quiet guidance and leadership.

As for the Porters in 2015, Bill, Quinn and J.D. spoke of the stewardship philosophy of the multigenerational Porter family originating with James Barney Porter. Bill said they valued education and the sense of community.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WATSON CLINIC</b><sup>LLP</sup> Dermatology at Zephyrhills</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rick L. Moore, M.D.</b> Dermatology</p> <p>6901 Medical View Lane Zephyrhills, Florida 33542 www.WatsonClinic.com</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Office: 813-788-7867 Fax: 813-783-7187</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> <b>Zephyrhills Museum of Military History</b> A City of Zephyrhills Facility</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Open Saturday 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.</b> <b>39444 South Ave. (813) 780-0078</b></p>
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The family was approached many times to sell the land but resisted because they wanted to act at the most appropriate time for growth and meet the needs of the community. For example, a focus was on health care; and that stemmed from Wiregrass’s wife, Martha McDonald Porter who had been a registered nurse. When the Porters decided to donate land for both the Pasco Hernando State College campus in Wesley Chapel and the Florida Hospital Wesley Chapel, their focus was on health and education. The new college has a nursing program and the state-of-the-art hospital serves health care needs which include education on prevention. Bill said this was in keeping with the family philosophy of people first.

J.D. recalled that some exciting events occurred on Wiregrass Ranch. J.D. said that he had heard that during World War II, a P-51 Mustang airplane crashed on Wiregrass Ranch in a training mission. (Note that Robert Widner may have a record of this with his research on crash sites from this era.)

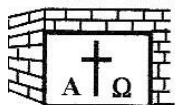
They also recalled baptisms that were performed from the Double Branch Baptist Church at Clearwater Pond on Wiregrass Ranch.



A photo of the children of James Barney Porter and wife Kathryn Hatcher Porter include: Martha, Robert Paul Porter, James Hatcher Porter and Margaret.

(Courtesy of Quinn Porter Miller)

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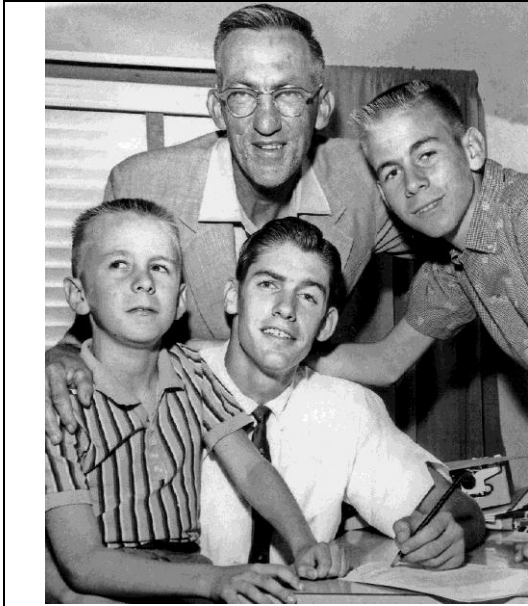
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From son James

**God Bless America**

In follow up to the statement about the P 51 Mustang airplane crash that occurred on Wiregrass Ranch, I (Madonna Wise) contacted Bill Smith, 90 year old native of Wesley Chapel, said regarding the World War II Army Air training in the area,

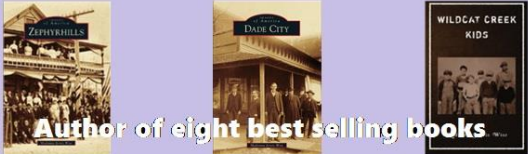

*“I can point to the spot where the P-51 crashed. I was there in a few minutes after the crash happened. Also there was a B-26 that crashed southeast of the new hospital and another at just north of the Pebble Creek Golf Course. In fact it was on some of the golf course, but this was way before the golf course was there. There was one survivor...he had fallen out of the bomb bay doors. I believe I could still find the spot of both crashes. You brought back a lot of memories to me.”*

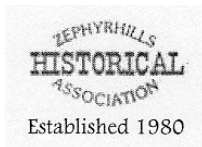


James “Don” Porter signed with “Ole Miss” (University of Mississippi) to play college football around 1958. He is shown with from left to right: William Porter, father, James H “Wiregrass Porter, James “Don” Porter and Thomas Porter. Bill Porter said that Don played baseball with University of Mississippi. He had a professional contract with the Houston Colt 45’s Team, one of two teams added to the National League before the 1962 season, but with two years of military service, it waylaid the baseball career somewhat.

(Courtesy of Quinn Porter Miller)



 <p><b>Author of eight best selling books</b></p> <p><b>Madonna Wise Books</b>                  Author, Research &amp; Consulting                  Madonna Jervis Wise                  Zephyrhills, Florida                  Murphy, North Carolina</p> <p><b>813-469-8627</b>                  MadonnaJWise@gmail.com  <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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## ZEPHYRHILLS HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

### BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES

AUGUST 2<sup>ND</sup>, 2016

The Regular Monthly Business Meeting of the Zephyrhills Historical Association was called to order by President Rod Rehrig, who gave the Invocation and led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The July 5 minutes were read by Secretary Anna V. Boone, with motion to accept by Sharon Reisman, seconded by Tenci Alexander and approved.

The Treasurer's Report was given by Treasurer Clereen Brunty. A motion to accept the report was made by Jerry Pricher, seconded by Rose Carrigg and approved.

Old Business: Regarding fundraisers, Patty Thompson reported that no money has been received from Mike's Smokehouse. Rod said that he will check with them. Margie Partain and Patty went to four restaurants and Beef O'Brady's agreed for the Association to have a scholarship fundraiser there. Flyers were given out for the August 23, 2016 fundraiser at Beef O'Brady's. We generally eat together at 5 p.m.

Other Old Business: Elizabeth O'Dell proposed we assist the "Support the Troops" effort in providing postage for mailing packages to our troops overseas. Jerry moved that we send \$100, seconded by Tenci Alexander and approved by all.

New Business: Margie brought a letter from Zephyrhills Hospital thanking the Zephyrhills Historical Association for agreeing to decorate a Christmas tree on December 4, 2016. Our tree will have an Oregon theme. Margie made a list of Oregon facts she researched for decoration ideas. Also, blue and gold ornaments will be needed.

Other New Business: For August birthdays, dining out will be at Manolo's as requested by Clereen. The date will be August 12 at 4 p.m.

Jerry moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Art Besinger, with all agreeing. The meeting ended at 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Anna V. Boone, Secretary  
Zephyrhills Historical Association

The guest speaker will be Hazel Massey who will share her experiences as a long time member of the Eastern Star.