

TRACKS OF TIME

Monthly Publication from the Zephyrhills Historical Association

Volume 20 – Number 5

May 2018

The next Zephyrhills Historical Association meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 5th in the meeting room of the *Zephyrhills Public Library*, 5347 8th 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



The Zephyrhills High School Chorus, under the direction of Luan Gore, entertained us at our May meeting. It is always a treat for us having them perform for us in May. It has become something of a tradition with us, and we

always enjoy their wonderful melodies. We treated the entertainers to pizza and soft drinks as usual after their presentation. All of us had a great time!

Our speaker for the June meeting is no stranger. Dave Walters has been a member of our organization for the past few years, and we have enjoyed his pictures and his writing several times in our newsletters. We've seen his work other places as well. He was with the Zephyrhills News for years, and now finds his home at the Zephyrhills Free Press. Dave made a comment one night at an event to the effect that he believed I must bleed orange and black. I considered it a compliment, and it made me think of how he has seen this community over the years. He did not grow up here, but I believe he has adopted Zephyrhills as his home town. I have thought for some time now that this perspective would make him an interesting speaker for our group. Come join us. I am sure you will not be disappointed.



Tuesday, June 19th, is our next Give-Back Scholarship Fundraiser
at **Sergio's Italian Restaurant** on Hwy. 54 West in **Zephyrhills**. We are meeting at 4 p.m.
Contact Patty Thompson (813-780-8559 - pattycakeclown1@aol.com) for information.



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Jeff Miller Pasco County Historian

For a walk down memory lane visit
www.fivay.org

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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 <p>Clereen Morrill Brunty ZHS Alumni Contact clereen@tampabay.rr.com 813-782-8763</p>	 <p>chalet flowers Kim Tim Maryann Sanders owners Ph: 813-788-2874 chaletflowersfl.com 5002 7th Street Zephyrhills, FL 33542</p>
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Life of Mary Lee Madill Parsons

by Madonna Jervis Wise

“Enjoy Every Day As A Blessing,” is the life-long catchphrase of lovely, 96-year-old Mary Lee Madill Parsons who shared a wealth of historical information about Ellerslie, Dade City, Zephyrhills, and frontier Florida with family stories and philosophy of life as she chatted with Stephanie Black and Madonna Wise on May 9, 2018.



Mary Lee’s family arrived in 1918. *They rented a box car and came into the small depot in Dade City. They told me that the box car housed a horse and buggy as well as their belongings and of course my parents and three oldest brothers.* Her parents were Warren Benjamin Madill (1892-1955) and Nina Mae Lamson (1893-1964). (Her mother was born in Nebraska and her father was born in Saginaw, Michigan.) Mary Lee was from a cohesive family of seven children: Edwin Lamson Madill; Dr. James Warren Madill, Laurence A. Madill, Bonnie Mae Madill (Barfield) Dail, Alan Madill, Ninetta Madill Powell and Mary Lee. She

quipped that the family birth order was noteworthy with the first three born being her older brothers, Edwin, James and Lawrence, followed by the birth of three girls including Mary Lee and then their brother, Allen Madill, the baby of the family, who just recently passed away in April of 2018. (Mary Lee and Ninetta survive.)

With three older brothers, the old Victrola was always busy with dancing. James loved to waltz and Lawrence preferred the jitterbug and we were frequently dancing which I loved.

A close knit, hard-working, Florida pioneer family, Mary Lee spoke fondly of her brother Laurence, a captain of the 116 Infantry, 29th Division, who was killed at age 25 in Normandy in 1944 during World War II. *He was the smartest boy I ever saw,* said Mary Lee. *With a photographic memory, he read everything imaginable including the phone book. Once when I complained about having to do a book report, he volunteered to help me out for the fee of one dime.*

Mary Lee was kind to share some light on the small village of Ellerslie. Mary Lee was born in Ellerslie and lived there from her birth in 1922 through 1933, when her father built their second Florida home on 14th Street in Dade City. (Stephanie Black wished to gather as much information on the Enterprise Church which was once located in Ellerslie and is now an integral part of the hands-on exhibits at the Florida Pioneer Museum in an effort to gather information for an upcoming commemoration the 140th anniversary of the church.) *We moved to Ellerslie to the end of the road that is currently known as Johnson Road but I know more commonly as Madill Road, a house that is one half mile across the hill from the spot where the Enterprise Church was located. My father enlarged the tiny house to accommodate our growing family. My parents lived in Ellerslie from 1918 until 1933.*



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We attended school at the Enterprise Church for about three years. Our teacher was Robert Hammer and his son, also named Robert, attended with us. The church school had no bathroom so periodically we were allowed to go out into the woods and use the bathroom in the bushes. There was no pay for the teachers in that era. It was the Great Depression and times were really hard. Mary Lee explained that her father and three brothers, Laurence, Ed, and James, made the trek with their father to find work in Kansas and formulated an agreement with teacher, Mr. Hammer, to take his son, Robert along for work. They each received 50 cents per day for labor and because of this arrangement, Mr. Hammer did not charge any fees for the teaching services. With about 15 students, Mary Lee assumed that other parents paid for the school from bartering and the donation of home-grown vegetable and goods from their gardens. While our father was gone to Kansas making ends meet, our adopted Uncle, Melvin Branch stayed with my mother and sisters. He had been a soldier friend of my father's and had a limp, and lived with our family for many years.

(Note that historian Jeff Miller reported that the beloved teacher, Henry A. Hammer, lived into his 90s and died in 1953 and is buried at Oakside Cemetery. He taught at a number of Pasco schools.)

Describing the interior of the Enterprise Church/School, Mary Lee said she was fortunate to have obtained one of the original pine benches that were in the church as a collector's item in her mountain home in Asheville, North Carolina. *The bench covered the entire width of the church, and the students sat in rows according to their grades. There was a bucket of fresh water at the back of the church and it held a water dipper. For some time, we students were afraid to drink from the dipper. You see Mr. Hammer's daughter had convulsions (we called them fits) and we worried that her ailment was contagious, not knowing any better. (As a side note, back in the day, if you had a hole in your dipper, you could purchase a patch from the general store to repair the hole.)* The children were expected to sweep and tidy up the church, especially for the Sunday service, and Mary Lee assumes that the congregation cared for the church building and grounds similarly.

The children were incredibly respectful of Mr. Hammer...he was like God! With the multiple grades, students learned a great deal. She credits Mr. Hammer with much of the academic success of her brothers, three of whom, 14-year-old Lawrence, and his two older brothers, Edward and James who graduated from Pasco High school in the year of 1934.

As for the church, Mary Lee recalled that on Sundays it was packed and very busy with horse & buggies and cars parked all about. There were occasional revivals and an intermittent fifth Sunday sing followed by Lunch on the Grounds in which one was expected to appear with a bowl of food or a pie for the table. *I remember once my mama said, don't eat Mrs. Smith's pie and we looked at the pie and saw that there was an imprint of a child's footprint in the fruit pie, chuckled Mary Lee, that must have been quite a story.* Occasionally during one of the big bashes, her brothers would hoist her over the fence to grab a watermelon which they would all enjoy. She remembered the Castleberry family who lived on the next corner away from the church.

The church was surrounded by a cemetery (now known as Enterprise Cemetery). Lydia explained that the practice was for the entire grave to be covered over by concrete in that era, and she recalled that students were known to occasionally sit on the top of the tombstone and eat their lunch. *It is curious what anecdotes come to mind. I remember the time that a baby passed away and my parents came to the rescue. My father constructed a little coffin from wood, and my mother lined the coffin with delicate material from a yellow jacket for the burial. Later I remember playing near the cemetery and encountering a swarm of yellow jackets. I received from fourteen to fifteen stings and as I was coming out of the daze, realizing what had happened, there was a gentleman dotting me with tobacco...literally spitting tobacco on my bites to sooth the effect.*

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The community was close-knit and Mary Lee said that everyone looked out for each other. Mary Lee affectionately recalled that her granddaddy lived in Dade City. He purchased the Larkin home near Lake Pasadena. She fondly recalled visiting her grandparents and remembered that Rhoda T. Larkin who lived near her grandparents was truly a sophisticated lady of Dade City—*the first woman I ever saw who wore lipstick! So refined.* After 1933 when her father built their family's home in Dade City, she recalled that her father was incredibly resourceful. He worked out an arrangement with the train conductor. The train conductor would sound a particular pattern on the train whistle, and her father would immediately recognize it to designate that a cow or hog had been hit by the train. Her father would be out the door to butcher the animal and retrieve the meat for their family or a neighbor who needed it.


Mary Lee married Benjamin Parsons on June 12, 1941. He was the oldest son of Benjamin F. Parsons, Mayor of Zephyrhills for twenty years. *My husband was truly a man of great kindness and I feel so fortunate that we were married for 45 years,* said Mary Lee. *His family was very nice as well; my father-in-law was a real extrovert and my mother-in-law was quite shy and demure—opposites attract. At the time we were married, Ben was reading for the Law. He had studied for three years at the University of Florida, and finished his degree at Florida Southern in Lakeland because he wanted to be closer to home.* He continued studying Law after they were married but then left those studies when Mary Lee was pregnant with their first child, and working two jobs.

(Note that Mayor B.F. Parsons served Zephyrhills from 1932 to 1952. He was born July 11, in Anderson, South Carolina, and came to Zephyrhills in July 1914 when he was appointed Seaboard Air Line Railroad Agent. He left railroading for a short time to work with the Sun Oil Company, and in 1947, he became Atlantic Coastline Railroad's first agent and remained in that capacity until he retired in 1954. As Mayor, he was instrumental in getting the federal government to locate an airport in Zephyrhills. He was responsible for the construction of the Woman's Club building, of the municipal pool, the city hall on Fifth Avenue and obtaining the first library building for Zephyrhills. He was survived by not only son, B.F. Parsons but his wife was Lucy Minnie Sanders, a native of Danielsville, Georgia; and there were two sons, Carl and B.F. Parsons, Jr. as well as daughter, Mrs. Sarah Ward, Dade City and eight grandchildren.)

Throughout his life, he loved to read and was constantly learning with exceptional skills. A quiet man who never raised his voice and had a natural kindness, Mary Lee continued, *once I asked him why he was attracted to a woman like me, and he said, I always know you will raise hell once in a while.*



Mary Lee was employed at the Coleman & Ferguson Store in Dade City in 1941 and making \$9.50 per week, which was fifty cents more than her father. She was married in the Methodist Church on Church Avenue in Dade City. When she broached the idea of a formal wedding in 1941, to her mother, her mother proclaimed it was unheard of and too expensive. Mary Lee decided to pay for the wedding herself and she purchased cloth and sewed her wedding dress and dresses for the four attendants. When someone informed her fiancé that he was expected to purchase the bouquet, he located one for the outrageous price of \$1.50—quite a sum at that time. When asked about photos, Mary Lee explained that photos were not abundant, clarifying that she received her first box camera as a graduation gift when she graduated from high school in 1940. (Both Stephanie and Madonna commented on the beautiful image of the wedding dress that Mary Lee constructed, and the bouquet which were displayed in the professional photo that she shared which she said also cost \$1.50.)

   <p>Author of eight best selling books</p> <p>Madonna Wise Books Author, Research & Consulting Madonna Jervis Wise 813-469-8627 Zephyrhills, Florida MadonnaJWise@gmail.com Murphy, North Carolina http://madonnawisebooks.wordpress.com</p>	 <p>Zephyrhills Museum of Military History <i>A City of Zephyrhills Facility</i></p> <p>Open Saturday 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. 39444 South Ave. (813) 780-0078</p>
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Soon after they were married, Ben accepted a teaching job in Miami. Just back from their honeymoon, one of his professor from Florida Southern called to say he had sent out numerous references for Ben and some job offers were missed because Ben had not left a forwarding address. *During our honeymoon, we were just enjoying life.* Mary Lee said she packed up some of the wedding presents such as linens and they headed to Miami. *It is a small world, because we found a house to rent that was just two blocks from the school that Ben was to teach at, and low and behold, the house was owned by someone who was from Dade City.*



Ben went on to work for twenty years in the engineering department of Pan American Airlines and then at the airline based in Nashville. At the same time, Mary Lee worked at Eastern Airlines where she managed the time cards among other tasks. *This was when Eddie Rickenbacker was at the helm of Eastern Airlines,* said Mary Lee, who explained that she and Ben traveled extensively. *Many of my co-workers didn't use their travel vouchers and they passed them to me, so I would travel to Scotland, France and all kinds of places using the vouchers. One time on a flight to Europe, a name was called by the stewardess, and the gal who was sitting beside me said, Isn't that you? Then I remembered I was using one of the vouchers!* She explained that Eastern Airlines was meticulous about the appearance of their employees and when traveling on your employee vouchers, you were expected to be dressed impeccably well with nylon stockings and the like.


After their work with the airlines, Ben Parsons opened a hardware store. He moved into the former Florida Power & Light Building in Hialeah, Florida. With her usual industrious spirit Mary Lee purchased



the dress shop right next to her husband's hardware store on Palm Avenue, which she owned for twenty-two years. During that time she had two loyal employees who were part of the team. A lucky move was when well-known television celebrity, Bonnie Andrews, was in the market for a dress store to outfit her for her television program. For nearly four years, Mary Lee provided the ensembles for Bonnie Andrews, sometimes multiple outfits for each program. Word caught on and her shop was selling similar clothes throughout the community. Customer service was paramount to Mary Lee and she recalled many accounts of customers, including husbands who came in to purchase gifts for their wives. *It was*

a time when women were working outside of the home, and clothing and styles were important.



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After the various enterprises, Mary Lee's husband announced one day that they were retiring to the mountains, and selling their shops. *I loved that man and would follow him anywhere so we went to Ashville. We owned the original home where Ben was born in Zephyrhills and for some time went to North Carolina to build an A-Frame Cabin.*

Did you know Rosemary Trotzman? (author of the History of Zephyrhills; teacher) Mary Lee asked Madonna who replied, yes, I was in a teacher sorority with her during my early teaching, Delta Kappa Gamma, and had the pleasure of riding with Celia Anderson and Rosemary to the monthly meetings...a true delight.

Well, my husband had a sudden heart attack and was in a coma for some time. One day, I received a phone call from Rosemary, who said, he is awake? Rosemary was an intelligent person. My husband never fully recovered but until his death, I always knew he was with me. One could always see the love and devotion in his face...when I spoke to him about our years together, a tear would roll off his cheek.

We had 45 wonderful years! One has to appreciate each and every day!

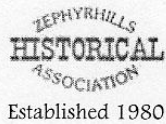
2018 ZHA Scholarships



Annica Morgan, Jerry Pricher, and Madison Reidenbach



ZHS Chorus, May 2018



ZEPHYRHILLS HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES

MAY 1ST, 2018

The May 1, 2018 Regular Monthly Business Meeting commenced at 5:36 P.M., called to order by President Jerry Pricher. He gave the Invocation and lead in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Minutes from April's Meeting were read by the Secretary with a motion for approval made by Clereen Brunty, seconded by Rod Rehrig and accepted by the group.

The Treasurer's Report was given by Andrew Nagy. It was approved by a motion from Beverly Holmes, seconded by Clereen and agreed to by everyone.

There were no new members or visitors.

Old Business: Patty Thompson brought in flyers for the May Fundraiser to take place on the 15th at Sergio's, which falls halfway between Business Meetings and another will take place in mid-June. Jerry suggested we might do a dinner night out for July - August as the Fundraiser will be skipped for those two months.

Louie Holt reported about the Scholarships with discussion regarding the recipients and how they were decided upon. From seven excellent applicants, two were chosen, Annica Morgan and Madison M. Reidenbach. Louie found out it is up to us whether we want to, as in past years, give the Scholarship money to the high school to dispense or to give it directly to the students. After discussion, Louie made a motion that we present a \$1,000 check directly to each student here at our Regular Business Meeting in either June, July or August and to give a check for \$500 each to Shelbie Pollock and Sarah First for continuing education. Bill Kustes seconded the motion and all were in agreement.

Regarding the Depot and Jeffries House, Jerry stated there is no leadership right now but he continues to work on it. The City will give us one liaison person and a key. We will address this further at June's Meeting.

Other Old Business: There is none.

New Business: Rod Rehrig and Andrew Nagy announced the Memorial Day Ceremony which will take place at the Oakside Cemetery on May 28 at 11 A.M. Andrew will be the master of ceremonies and Rod will be singing. This year, the names of men from this area who died in the First World War will be read and a bell rung as each is named. People are asked to bring folding chairs and any Gold Star Mothers will be seated up front.

Andrew brought up Steve Spina as to when we will be presenting him with a plaque for being the surviving charter member of the Association and that Steve has one more year to serve as City Manager. Nothing has been decided regarding the plaque.

Clereen announced that Irene Dobson turned 94 this week and that Polly Gill has been in the hospital but is back home.

Bill reported that he got to go on an Honor Flight to Washington, D.C., that it was a wonderful experience, and wheelchairs were provided by the Knights of Columbus. He will give a longer report about his trip at a future meeting.

Rod made a motion we adjourn, seconded by Bill with everyone in agreement.

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

Our program is a musical one presented by the Zephyrhills High School Chorus under the direction of Luan Gore.