

Monthly Publication from the Zephyrhills Historical Association

Volume 21 – Number 1

January 2019

The next Zephyrhills Historical Association meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 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 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 February meeting will be Duke Chadwell, who's been a member of our organization for awhile now but doesn't make it to a lot of meetings because he no longer resides in Zephyrhills. I found his senior picture in the 1968 Zephilsco online and used it here. It's a blast from the past, so to speak. I have known Duke for the better part of my life. His parents were always very kind to me, and they were a big part of life in Zephyrhills. His dad seemed to know just about everybody in town, and he seemed to be at every event I ever attended. He was a big man, and he seemed to always have a smile on his face. Duke and his brother, Eddie, were friends of mine in high school. I have only fond memories of our times together. I've asked him to come and share with us his memories of his parents and the Zephyrhills of his youth. I know he is knowledgeable about much of the history of Zephyrhills, so much more may be discussed. I hope you will come join us.

**Tuesday, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 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](mailto:pattycakeclown1@aol.com)) for information.



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**Jeff Miller**

**Pasco County Historian**

For a walk down memory lane visit

[www.fivay.org](http://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><b>Clereen Morrill Brunty</b>                  ZHS Alumni Contact  <b>clereen@tampabay.rr.com</b>  <b>813-782-8763</b></p>	 <p><b>chalet flowers</b>                  Kim Tim  Maryann Sanders                  owners                  Ph: 813-788-2874                  chaletflowersfl.com                  5002 7th Street                  Zephyrhills, FL 33542</p>
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**HISTORY OF PASCO COUNTY**

*Jeff Miller's site at  
fivay.org*

**Telephone Service**

*Phone Pioneer Built Systems*

*This article appeared in the Tampa Tribune on Nov. 16, 2001.*

**By CAROL JEFFARES HEDMAN**

DADE CITY — Americans are so in love with cellular telephones that it's hard to imagine a time when Pasco residents didn't have access to even wired communications.

The first telephones in Pasco came nearly 30 years after Alexander Graham Bell invented the device in 1876.

The Pasco County Telephone Co. was organized in April 1903 by W. J. Ellsworth of Jessamine, near St. Joseph in northeast Pasco. Included in the company were John S. Flanagan and L. Halsema Sr., both of San Antonio; I. F. Corrigan and Abbot Charles Mohr, both of St. Leo; and Clarence Griffin of Dade City.

At its best, the telephone was nothing but a "plaything" for the few subscribers, Mohr wrote in later years. The result was a company faced with threats of being sold to pay off debts. The organizers raised enough money to pay off the most pressing of those and then turned over their stock to Griffin, the president and general manager.



Griffin also owned a drugstore where he housed the central exchange. Initially there were only 16 lines, but the 1910 directory lists 135 numbers in 10 communities: Dade City, Trilby, Blanton, Greer, St. Joseph, St. Thomas, Jessamine, St. Leo, San Antonio and Pasco.

Locating the switchboard at the drugstore was suggested by Dr. R. G. Sistrunk, who thought it would be helpful for calling in prescriptions. But Griffin and his clerks only made the connections for telephone subscribers when they weren't too busy.

The instructions cautioned: "When you are called, answer promptly. The party at the other end may be impatient and will not wait forever. Do not expect Central to remember who called you. The operator will ring only twice."

**Wettstein's First Empire Is Born**

Telephone pioneer Otto Wettstein Jr. was vacationing in Eustis in 1910 when a friend advised him of the small Dade City exchange that was for sale. Wettstein had built his first telephone exchange in 1896, at age 21, in his hometown of Rochelle, Illinois. In the next two years he developed 30 more exchanges in Iowa and Nebraska.



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While in Florida, Wettstein was considering buying other telephone exchanges and went to look at the Dade City company. Florida had only about 700,000 people and 32,000 telephones then. Jacksonville was the only town that had competing exchanges.



With financial assistance from Elliot E. Edge of Groveland, Wettstein bought the Dade City exchange and included it with those in Eustis and Tavares to organize the Lake County Telephone Co. at a cost of about \$25,000. That same year he developed the Fort Lauderdale exchange.

Bitten by the real estate bug and a bit of homesickness the next year, Wettstein traded his telephone exchanges for 42,000 acres along the Kissimmee River, thinking the land looked like Midwest farmland. He planned to colonize the property and farm. But the land was wet, and Wettstein went broke trying to sell the property and farm the 60 acres he kept for himself.

Wettstein was nearly penniless in March 1915 when he read in a Tampa newspaper that R. C. Cummings, a lineman in Dade City for the Lake County Telephone Co., had been electrocuted by crossing a telephone wire with power lines from Tampa Electric Co.

Wettstein wrote and asked for Cummings' job, and on April 2, 1915 he arrived in Dade City to work for the company he had once owned. For \$80 a month, Wettstein returned to climbing poles, something he wrote he had not done since leaving Rochelle 17 years earlier.

After a few months on the job, Wettstein was told he was about to be fired. He asked for a meeting with the directors and found the only complaint was he devoted too much time to civic work and not enough to telephone business. Wettstein convinced the directors his civic work was good public relations for the company and he kept his job, plus his chairmanship of the membership committee of the Pasco County chapter of the American Red Cross and membership on the Board of Trade, which organized the Farmers Dairy Association.

### Wettstein Empire, Part II

Within a year, Wettstein proceeded to buy the company, again with Edge's help. Wettstein operated the Dade City exchange, which now had 200 subscribers, as Pasco Telephone Co.

Wettstein moved from Dade City in 1917, returning to Eustis where he bought the Leesburg exchange. He then added the Groveland and Clermont exchanges, followed by a system of six exchanges in the area of the Suwannee River.

In 1919, Wettstein moved to Live Oak and three years later purchased telephone exchanges in Winter Garden, Apopka, Kissimmee and St. Cloud. When his daughter graduated from Live Oak High School in 1922, Wettstein moved his family to Orlando to enroll her at Rollins College.

He built a headquarters in Leesburg, then acquired the balance of 28 exchanges, which he merged into Florida Telephone Corp. in 1925.

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In Memory of

**Ryals Furniture Exchange**  
And Great Parents  
**Powell & Maude Ryals**

From son James

**God Bless America**

“Starting with nothing except experience, energy and ambition in 1915, with Mr. Edge’s confidence and help, I had, in 10 years, acquired a system of 28 telephone exchanges and control of a corporation with a capital of 1.4 million dollars,” he wrote in his autobiography.

“I came into this telephone situation at an opportune time. The Bell and Peninsular were the only telephone companies in Florida, operating more than one or two exchanges. The others were local companies owned by one individual or by a group of business people who could not obtain telephone service in any other way than to organize their own company.” Wettstein died in Leesburg in 1967 at age 92.



Florida Telephone Corp. was purchased by United Telephone Co. of Florida in 1973. United Telephone became Sprint Corp. in 1992.

**Service Comes To West Pasco**

The first telephone exchange in west Pasco was in New Port Richey at the home of Clyde and Harriet Lapham in the early 1900s. Harriet was the operator on 24-hour duty.

By 1922, the phone equipment was moved to the second story of the old Eastern Star building at Missouri Avenue and Boulevard South. Lapham continued as operator. By 1926, under the name Peninsular Telephone Co., there were 129 telephone subscribers in New Port Richey. That number fluctuated throughout the boom years and the Great Depression. In 1941 there were 139 subscribers. That number jumped to 289 in 1946 after a larger switchboard was moved from Bradenton in 1944 and five operators were employed.

General Telephone Co. bought Peninsular Telephone Co. in 1957. GTE merged with Bell Atlantic Corp. last year to become Verizon Communications.

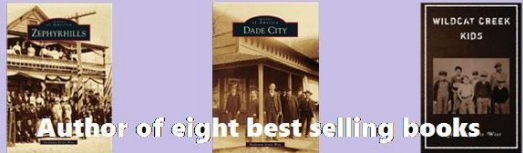




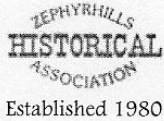
The first telephone calls were put through by cranking the telephone to call for the operator. Only the name of the person being called was given to the operators, who would in turn ring that person. The operators where also privy to the latest town gossip.

Bill Dayton, a Dade City attorney and a Pasco County historian, related a story told to him by the late Elizabeth Burks, who came to town in 1919 with her husband, John. The couple only knew one family in Dade City and when Elizabeth Burks went to place her first call, she cranked the operator and said she wanted to reach Lucy Lock.

“I don’t think she’s home right now,” the operator told Burks. “I just heard her say she was going down to Mrs. Jackson’s. You might wait five minutes and try and reach her at Mrs. Jackson’s.”

The dial tone was introduced in 1945, letting callers know when the line was free to place a call.

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## ZEPHYRHILLS HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

### BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES JANUARY 8<sup>TH</sup>, 2018

The Regular Monthly Business Meeting of the Zephyrhills Historical Association was called to order at 5:30 P.M. President Jerry Pricher gave the Invocation and led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The minutes from the last meeting, which was on November 6, 2018, was read by the Secretary with Rod Rehrig making a motion to approve, seconded by Clereen Brunty and accepted by the group.

The Treasurer's Report for November and December 2018 was given by Andrew Nagy. Clereen made a motion to approve the report as read, seconded by Beverly Holmes and agreed to by all.

There were no new members or guests with us tonight.

Old Business: Comments were made about the Christmas events and the good time had by all.

Regarding Fundraising, Patty Thompson brought in flyers for the next dinner at Sergio's, which will be on January 15 at 4 P.M. The flyers are honored all day from 11 A.M. until 9 P.M.

Jerry declared that there is an opening on the Board since Tenci Alexander no longer attends. Clereen is seeing to the hospitality tasks and Beverly is taking care of the name tags. Beverly was asked to become a member of the Board and all agreed.

Andrew made a motion that the fees for not wearing our nametags be increased from \$.50 to \$1.00, seconded by Rod and agreed to by the group, this move being made because coins can't be used in the bank's ATM.

New Business: Founders' Day is coming up in March with the theme being "Plains, Trains and Automobiles." Bob Porter will see to the vintage cars for the parade. There was discussion regarding the cost of the parade spots. Clereen made a motion that we get 3, seconded by Rod and agreed to by the group. There will be a check for \$112.35 given to Main Street Zephyrhills for three spaces. Patty mentioned that there are some new rules this year such as walkers needing to wear safety vests. There will be further planning at the February meeting.

Scholarships will be discussed at the next meeting when Louie Holt comes.

Jerry announced that he and Louie will be at the depot to let visitors into the caboose when the train guys have their Model Train Show and Swap Meet.

Other New Business: Rod is selling tickets for the raffle of a cooker at the Zephyrhills Pigz in Z'hills BBQ and Blues Fest. He will bring raffle tickets when we meet up at Sergio's on the 15th.

The CD, which is coming due, was brought up, as was a suggestion by Jerry that some be put into the regular account. Also, there was discussion regarding expenditures and an attempt to determine what we take in on average. The topic will be put on the agenda for the next business meeting under Old Business.

Rod made a motion for adjournment, seconded by Beverly, which was met with approval by the group. The meeting concluded at 6:10 P.M.