

TRACKS OF TIME

Monthly Publication from the Zephyrhills Historical Association

Volume 24 – Number 1

January 2022

There will be NO meeting in February.

The Association had a regular business meeting in January. The minutes from that meeting will be published in a future newsletter before our next scheduled meeting. Andy brought up an important point at the meeting concerning having in-person meetings while we are still experiencing problems with Covid 19 in Florida, particularly the new Omicron variant. A motion was made and carried to temporarily have meetings every other month, along with further reviewing our situation regarding the pandemic. I can attest to the fact that at least three people who were at our meeting in January subsequently came down with covid. I am among them. I think it's clear that Andy's concerns were valid. I suspect our meetings will once again be put on hold, and I strongly feel we should play it safe and discontinue our fundraisers until the situation improves.

Just in case some of you still need to renew your membership or make contributions, I am leaving Andy's address here for your convenience.

Andrew Nagy, 5548 23rd Street, Zephyrhills, FL 33542

We will discontinue our fundraisers for the time being.



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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


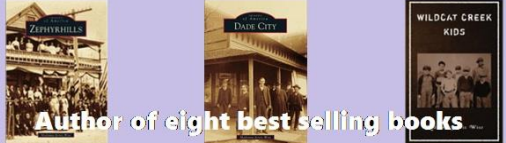
The mission of the Zephyrhills Historical Association is to research, gather, and share local historical information with all generations, through our literature, programs, and scholarships, and to volunteer assistance to the Zephyrhills Depot Museum and WWII Barracks Museum.

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Buffalo Soldiers

by Erica Freeman

Most people associate Buffalo Soldiers with the Wild West. That’s where they made a name for themselves; given to them by Indigenous tribes to describe the buffalo hide coats they wore or, as the National Park Service claims, the Apache declaring, “they had curly, kinky hair...like bison.” Their achievements were spread over four countries from 1866-1951. One of the places that the 10th Cavalry Regiment was stationed was none other than Lakeland, Florida.



Florida has a long tradition of black soldiers. Under Spanish rule, enslaved people from the British colonies who made their way to Florida could be free so long as they converted to Catholicism and/or joined their militia. So many were successful that in 1738, St. Augustine established Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, the first legally sanctioned free black town in the present-day United States. The original Underground Railroad led to Florida. Unfortunately, in 1763, the Treaty of Paris gave East Florida to Britain. The black population went with the Spaniards to their

new home in Cuba rather than risk the Britons reclaiming them as property. By then, over 2,000 people had been saved from slavery.

The bill known as An Act to increase and fix the Military Peace Establishment of the United States was proposed in 1866. The proposal restructured the army; its regiments, how soldiers were trained, etc. It contained no provisions for black soldiers. 23,706 black soldiers fought in 23 regiments in the Civil War from 1863-1865. The 72nd Colored Infantry unit was commanded by Captain Howard B. Jeffries, one of the founders of Zephyrhills.

Senator Benjamin Wade of Ohio insisted that black infantry and cavalry regiments be added to the bill and when the Army Reorganization Act of 1866 passed, four infantry units and two cavalry units were added. In 1898, the USS Maine exploded off the coast of Cuba under suspicious circumstances. Cuba was in the midst of a war for independence against Spain and as a major economic ally, the United States was invested in the outcome. The explosion encouraged the country’s population to support sending troops to help Cuba win their freedom. All four of the remaining black regiments reported to Florida.



Teddy Roosevelt, his wife, the generals, media representatives, and others stayed at the Tampa Bay Hotel. Most of the regiments, including the two black infantry units, were stationed in Tampa Heights. However, they were spread from Port Tampa with complaints of no shade trees to four regiments in Lakeland. Just south of what’s now the Ikea on Adamo Drive was military corral with the horses and mules. Naturally, it was a temptation for rustlers, but the deputy United States Marshal knew just where to find them: Pasco County. Most of the stolen animals were recovered.

The 10th Cavalry Regiment camped alongside Lake Wire. The historical marker is close to Lawton Chiles Middle Academy. Three white regiments were also stationed in Lakeland, but they weren’t subject to rampant racism by the locals. Corporal John E. Lewis described his experience to an Illinois paper, writing, “but, with all its beauty it is a hell for the colored people who live here, and they live in dread at all times.” Right after setting up camp, some soldiers had gone to Dr. Forbes Drug Store for a drink and were refused.

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After hearing what happened, the soldiers went back as a large group to force the proprietor into serving them. After they were refused again, Lewis recounted that Joab Collins, the barber from next door, burst into the store and said, “You damn niggers better get out of here and that damn quick or I will kick you bastard sons of bitches out.” Collins went to get his personal pistols while the soldiers readied their guns. The ensuing gunfight took out all the windows and Collins. Lewis called his death an “act of Providence”.

Making conditions worse between the various regiments and locals, the 10th cavalry was Provost Guard. They could arrest both black and white soldiers, unthinkable to Lakeland residents. On an occasion, a local black resident was arrested for violating the liquor laws due to Polk being a dry county. Laws like that were often used for people that local law enforcement just didn’t like, and the soldiers realized this. When the prisoner was transferred to the Bartow training to get his trial, cavalry members rushed the train in overwhelming numbers and got him off it. Not all white soldiers were biased either. Letters to home mention gambling, learning about Craps and watching the expertise and precision with which the Buffalo Soldiers could crack their whips. If only pride and prejudice hadn’t kept them and crackers from comparing their skills together.





With the 1866 Army Act mentioned earlier, blacks could become officers in the military except they had to meet all the training and educational requirements, which was an almost impossibility for many. A writer for the New York Times Illustrated Magazine described the 24th Infantry in Tampa as having all white officers “of course”. Another of the 10th Cavalry’s white officers tried to make dinner reservations before sailing out, but all told him something similar to “to have colored men eat in her dining room would ruin her business.” Most of their white officers grew to

have the upmost respect and admiration for the black soldiers. John J. Pershing was just 35 and first lieutenant when he was made an officer with the 10th Cavalry, but his first job out of high school was teaching black children. However, once people saw how he treated all races equally, he was called “Nigger Jack” and then, “Black Jack”.

When it came time to sail, room was only found for two of Roosevelts prized horses. All other equine was left behind and the cavalry were turned into foot soldiers. The 10th Cavalry fought in the 1st Brigade alongside the Rough Riders; a prestigious position that made other regiments jealous. However, most of the Rough Riders were impressed especially by the multiple times they were trapped by enemy fire and as the Washington Post put it, “If it had not been for the Negro cavalry, the Rough Riders would have been exterminated.” They all joined together in the Battle of Kettle Hill and San Juan Hill. “White regiments, black regiments, regulars and Rough Riders [i.e. volunteers], representing the young manhood of the North and the South, fought shoulder to shoulder, unmindful of race or color, unmindful of whether commanded by ex-Confederate or not, and mindful of only their common duty as Americans” described Pershing later. However, Sgt. George Berry of the 10th Cavalry reached the summit first, taking flags for both the 10th and 3rd Cavalry with him.

Thank you to Madonna Wise, Clereen Brunty, Nick Linville for Jeffries’ 72nd United States Colored Infantry, James W. Covington, William B. Gatewood Jr., Florida Historical Quarterly, Floridamemory.com, Hal Hubener and Andy Nagy.

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