



## WEST PASCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Newsletter

June 2015

### From our President, Bob Langford

As we move into the summer the West Pasco Historical Society and the Rao Musunuru Museum closes during this summer but you can make an appointment to enjoy/research our vast catalog of items and research material.

Since the city is changing Sims Park, we know that there will be construction being conducted that will certainly affect our membership and guests to the facility. When done, I'm certain it will be a much more enjoyable area.

I'm happy to introduce our newly elected officers. Our Vice President is Dan Callaghan, who also takes care of our programs both at the Historical Society and the New Port Richey City Library, and serves on committees and is a Greeter. We also have Kelly Hackman serving as our Recording Secretary as well as a volunteer on committees. Our Corresponding Secretary this year is Diane Faulkner who is also a Greeter. Teri Abbott is our new Librarian and a volunteer on committees, and Brittini Bradford is our new Curator. Our new Treasurer is Dannee Brooks, who is also a Greeter. We also have new Directors that are listed elsewhere here in the newsletter.

We are always looking for folks to volunteer, especially Docents and Greeters. If you like history, especially West Pasco County and Port Richey/New Port Richey history, I'm sure that you would find a very satisfying volunteer position that you would like while aiding our visitors to have an interesting and enjoyable time looking through our collections.

**We will reopen on August 28<sup>th</sup>.** We will be celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of our building, and the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the New Port Richey post office, which gave the town its name. Be sure to plan to come out and help us celebrate this great event!

Bob Langford

## They put the “New” in New Port Richey 100 years ago

*In 1914 the name Port Richey referred to the area around the mouth of the Pithlachascotee River, which was settled earlier, as well as the newer section around Orange Lake and farther south. The Tampa Morning Tribune began referring to “old Port Richey” and “new Port Richey” to differentiate between the two sections, but the post office was called Port Richey, and only that name appeared on maps. In 1915 a new post office named New Port Richey was established, and the new name became official. In January 1916 a newspaper called the New Port Richey Post appeared. The lead headline was NEW PORT RICHEY LEADS IN ITS FIRST YEAR. In the following article from the New Port Richey Press of Jan. 27, 1921, Gerben DeVries recounted the founding of the New Port Richey post office.*

Six or seven years ago there was no post office here—there was no New Port Richey, in fact. Those of us who lived in this part got our mail from Port Richey. No direct road connected what is now New Port Richey and Port Richey. There was an old wagon trail by way of the Casson house and the old Clark grove, and there was a shorter woods path along what is now Madison street, thence on through the Casson place, and coming out at the point where the Herms floral gardens are now located. The other route was by row boat down the river. We generally took the latter, and caught our supper and breakfast by trawling as we went.

I remember one day I caught 36 trout and jack fish trawling to Port Richey after the mail. Generally the one who went got the mail for the rest of the bunch. He was also expected to bring back two fish for each letter. If there were a dozen letters it was up to him to catch 24 fish. As we increased in population we tired of this. It was reasoned that the Star Route carrier might just as well return to Tarpon Springs on this side of the river, and leave our mail in boxes instead of going back on the other side over the Old Post Road. So we set apart a day and cleared a road through the Hill place (now the Casson farm) and down part of what is now Madison street; and along this route we put up our mail boxes. But the carrier, Driver by name, had a will of his own which we had not reckoned with, and he would not accept this as his routing, hence all our work went for nothing.

This disappointment, however, did not peeve us. We said, “If we cannot be served by carrier from Port Richey we will get a postoffice of our own.” It was suggested by the Port Richey Company, by Mr. Holzscheiter, and others that I circulate two petitions, one for a postoffice here, the other for my being appointed postmaster. I really did not consider the job worth having, but the Port Richey Company, by whom I was then employed, said I could put the postoffice in their office building, which was then standing in the middle of Main street, surrounded by saw-palmetto, and they would not deduct anything from my wages for the time consumed in taking care of the mail. Under these conditions, then, I set about getting everybody south of the Herms property to sign the petitions. They were presented with about 80 names, as I remember, the one seeking appointment as postmaster being the duplicate of the other so far as signatures were concerned. In due time the petitions were acted upon, and I was examined for the important position of postmaster.

But a delay occurred in establishing the office on account of our not choosing a suitable name. The department contended that since there was already a Newport Florida and a Port Richey, Florida Newport-Richey would lead to errors and confusion. Quite a number then favored calling the place Chascotee, after the latter part of our river’s name. This, too, was considered unsuitable by the land company and many of us settlers, who had done so much advertising under the name of Port Richey. We got in touch with our congressman—Hon. Mr. Sparkman—and on his suggestion, got up another petition, asking that the place be named New Port Richey, dividing “Newport” into two words. After some correspondence the department accepted this naming. A copy of this petition is now on file in the Avery Library and Historical Society’s rooms, with the original signatures copied. I received my commission as postmaster dated July 21st, 1915, but, as I did not at once receive my supplies and regulations, the office was not established until August 30th, 1915.



## MEMBER PROFILE: Frances Mallett

Frances Mallett, a life member of the West Pasco Historical Society, is the historian of Port Richey. It's natural that she would have that title, as ancestors on both sides of her family were important figures in the history of the town.

Frances' paternal grandfather, James Washington Clark, settled at the mouth of the Pithlachascotee River around 1872 and is thought to be the first permanent white settler in the area. It wasn't yet called Port Richey because Aaron M. Richey hadn't yet arrived. In fact, Frances believes, it was Mr. Clark who suggested to Mr. Richey that he settle here.

The two men met in Brooksville. Mr. Clark established a post office called Hopeville in 1878. In 1891 the governor appointed him the county commissioner for western Pasco County. He traveled by horseback to Dade City for the county commission meetings.

Frances' father, Victor Malcolm Clark, is believed to be the first child born in Port Richey. He was a civil engineer and was the first elected Mayor of Port Richey (the earlier mayor, who served about six months, was named by the charter).

Frances' mother died at age 40 when Frances was 10 years old. Her maiden name was Lonnie Lee Nicks. She was the daughter of Henry Robert Nicks, who settled in Port Richey in 1904. His obituary called him "The Father of Port Richey." Nicks Park is named for him.

Frances says that Mr. Nicks bought most of Port Richey in 1902 when there a large land sale, "so he had provided all his children with acreage, and we had citrus and of course we had our own vegetable gardens and fruit trees. And always remember the mullet. We had plenty of mullet and grits." Nicks died when Frances was 8 years old.

Frances Fair Clark was born on Dec. 9, 1919, in a home that was located near Catches. She remembers growing up when all of western Pasco County was a community. "All west Pasco county, Aripeka, Hudson, Port Richey, New Port Richey, Elfers, Odessa—everybody knew everybody, and it made it really nice," Frances recalled.

Frances attended the old Pierce Elementary School, a red brick school on Main Street that is now the New Port Richey Public Library. One teacher comes to mind. "I remember especially Mrs. Talitha Waddy Revels. She had no trouble getting us to study and finish our work because she would read the Tom Swift stories to us. She said, 'Now when we finish our work we'll continue with Tom Swift.' And she was just a wonderful lady."

She remembers that students at Pierce in what would have been about 1928 were given color brochures showing photos of lung damage caused by smoking cigarettes. "Back then it made an impression on me when it showed big ulcers on your lungs."

Frances remembers the boom period in New Port Richey when she was very young, but the 1930s depression provided her with "the best education I ever had, learning how to take care of things, and make feed sack dresses and grow gardens and utilize what was available. And we were really better off here than in the cities. I understand that, because we had chickens and cows for milk and pigs and we had our citrus groves and of course we picked wild huckleberries and blackberries and all of those things. And we had all of the seafood we could eat. It wasn't expensive like it is today.

Frances said, "My father knew just when the tide was right and he'd take a wash tub with a little colored boy that he took care of after his parents died and he lived on our place and he would drag that wash tub and dad would fill it up with mullet and make sure that all the neighbors, black and white, all had mullet for dinner that night. And that went on as many times a week as they wanted."

Frances had four children in two earlier marriages: Archie Burnside Jr. and Charles, Sandra, and George Blankenship. Archie is a retired Coast Guard serviceman living near Mobile, Ala. Charles is a retired FAA Air Traffic Controller living in Jackson, Tenn. Sandra is one of two women elected to the Pasco County Commission in 1980. They were the first women to hold the position. George was a retired Air Force veteran, buried in the Florida National Cemetery.

In 1948 Frances married Walter J. Mallett, a veteran of World War II who was awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart for heroism aboard the USS Ticonderoga in 1945. He rescued pilots and other personnel injured in a Japanese kamikaze attack and was nearly killed himself. He spent a long period of time in hospitals after the war recovering from his injuries.

Walter was in the seafood business in northern Florida. In 1951 they moved back to Port Richey, where Frances' father had left them property. Walter and his brother Lester later opened Tropical Realty on Main Street in New Port Richey.

Frances and Walter had four children, Walter Jr. (Butch), Susan, Victor, and Bob. Dr. Frank Y. Robson, who opened a practice here in 1952, delivered two of her boys. She wanted him to deliver them at home so that they could be yet another generation born in Port Richey, but he declined. They were born at Tarpon Springs Hospital. Butch works for the Forest Service and lives in Weeki Wachee. Susan lives with her parents. Victor is employed by the Pasco County school system. Bobby is an attorney.

*Some quotes in this article were taken from a 2004 interview conducted by Dr. Marc Yacht.*



Frances and Walter Mallett,  
Sept. 6, 1980.



## A collection of old photos is donated to the museum

We're always pleased when a visitor drops by the museum with an old photo or two to let us scan or to donate. In March of this year, two sisters came by and gave us, not a few, but more than 50 old photos and documents from New Port Richey in the 1920s and 1930s. The photos are on our [westpascohistoricalsociety.org](http://westpascohistoricalsociety.org) web site, as well as the [fivay.org](http://fivay.org) web site.

The photos were donated by sisters Dottie Cleaves of Palm Bay and Nadine Robbins of Bartow. Their father, Wendell Waters, grew up here and graduated from Gulf High School in 1934. Wendell's parents, Herbert and Winona Waters, came to New Port Richey around 1923. Winona's father, William A. Dustin, retired to New Port Richey in 1922. Herbert directed the choir of Community Congregational Church, and in 1925 Winona organized the first orchestra at Gulf High School, which consisted of eight pieces.

In the next few pages are a few of the donated photos.



Gulf High School orchestra, 1928-29. Back row: Winona Waters (director, who played the violin with the orchestra), Wendell Waters (age 11, cello), Helen Bremner (piano, holding trombone), Arthur Gardner (violin), Raymond Nikkari (violin), Philip Lautenslager (cornet), Richard Gardner (saxophone). Front row: W. D. Bremner (principal), Gordon Fullington (drums).



WEST PASCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



The brand-new Hacienda Hotel in 1927, north side.



First State Bank, the first bank in New Port Richey, in the 1920s. The building still exists, on the northwest corner of Main and Grand. Behind the bank is the Sass Hotel/Enchantment Inn. It burned down in 1926.



## WEST PASCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



The old Gulf High School on Grand Blvd., perhaps in the 1930s. This building now houses Schwettman Education Center. It is the oldest building still in use as a school in Pasco County.



William A. Dustin (1861-1942) heading south on Grand Boulevard, winter of 1922. On the right, part of the New Port Richey railroad depot is visible.

## Julie Obenreder remembered New Port Richey in 1945

*Julie Obenreder, a founder of the West Pasco Historical Society, arrived here with her husband Roy and three children in August 1945. In this excerpt from My Pioneer Days in West Pasco, she recalls what it was like. She is pictured with her husband in 1962.*



All of West Pasco was a slow moving, quiet place during the 1945-1965 period. It was a friendly place where everyone knew and helped his neighbor. There was no such thing as a stranger or a locked door. Crime and vandalism were unknown except for very minor incidents.

My husband, Roy, myself, and three children, James, Joyce and Connie Ann, arrived in New Port Richey late one hot summer afternoon in August, 1945.

We had come from Erie, Pennsylvania, in search of health for one of our children. We planned to stay temporarily in the home of Roy's parents. The senior Obenreders had been spending the winter months in New Port Richey for several winters. They first lived in a rented apartment owned by Mrs. Jeanette Marting. It was on School Road at the south end of the city, a road which at that time had not yet been named.

We had been warned of the many difficulties we would encounter on our arrival in the south but coming from a city where we had enjoyed every convenience, including bus transportation, we were fully unprepared for the conditions we actually found outside the city limits of New Port Richey.

Coming into the city from the north on old Highway 19 (now State Road 595), we had our first look at the beautiful Pithlachascotee River. After the miles of swampy land filled with dead looking cypress trees with hanging gray moss covering bare branches, or tall scraggly looking pine trees and palmetto thickets encountered from the Georgia-Florida line, the river was a most welcome sight.

Driving along the winding river road toward town, we admired the colorful houses built along the river banks, painted in pastel shades, which were such a contrast to the more conventional white or drab colored houses of the north. The first really tropical looking thing we noticed was the lovely Turk's Cap hedges which in August were loaded with bright red flowers, and of course, the many stately palm trees. We stopped beside the river to enjoy the scenery and to allow the children to pick a few dates from beneath one of the palms. The fruit was very sweet and chewy with a sort of tough, pulpy center.

As we continued our drive toward town we didn't meet a single car on the road. A few small boats were on the river and some men were fishing from wooden docks. It presented a serene and beautiful picture and like everyone who sees the river for the first time we fell in love with the quiet scenery.

At the south end of town we came to a large two story red brick building on the left of the Boulevard just after crossing a one-way iron bridge. It was the Gulf High School. Across the road from the school was a grocery store. We stopped to make inquiry as to directions for reaching our destination. We talked with the owner of the store, Zane Rankin, a friendly, helpful man. He said he had come to New Port Richey from Zanesville, Ohio, in 1923 and was proud of the fact he had been named for a second cousin, Zane Grey, the noted author. He was acquainted with Roy's folks, who traded with him in the winter, and was able to give us the information we needed to find the elder Obenreder's home. (Zane Rankin closed his grocery store in 1966 and passed away in 1982 after serving as manager of a laundromat located at the corner of West Gulf Drive and Boulevard South for a number of years.)



## WEST PASCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

We purchased a few staples from Rankin and proceeded south about a mile to East Trouble Creek Road. As we turned off the paved highway (Old 19) we found ourselves in deep rutted sand, which was almost impassable. As time went on we learned to carry a shovel and tow chain in the car to help get out of the sand which could be much worse than snow for getting stuck. The harder you tried to get out, the deeper you sank.

It was almost dark when we arrived at the small cottage, which was invisible because of the thick weeds and jungle growth higher than our heads. Roy took a sickle from his toolbox and carefully chopped a path to the front door while we waited. He was ever watchful for the snakes his folks had told us about. (There were no people in the lawn service business at that time so many winter homes were left to the ravages of nature).

We had passed two other houses in the couple blocks from the highway. Later, I would learn the one on the left was the William (Bill) Waller residence, a family who would become our good friends, and the home on the right side was the winter home of a family named Nielsen from Detroit, Michigan. Otherwise, I saw some citrus groves and much wild looking jungle-type land with tall pines, palmettos, and undergrowth. We were to learn that very first night that the woods, as we called it, was full of hoot owls and they really hooted all night long.

We spent our first night in total misery. The heat was unbearable. The house was quite small. It had been closed all summer and smelled of mothballs, which Roy's mother put between the mattresses and springs and throughout the closets every spring. There was not enough breeze stirring to rid the house of the odor although we opened every door and window. Since there was no electricity out as far as Trouble Creek Road, there was no such thing as a fan. Mosquitoes were another major problem. There were multitudes of them and it would be many years before mosquito control was initiated in Pasco County.

We discovered a pitcher pump in the back yard near the door. Roy soon found out about sand fleas too as he discovered they love to swarm around a hot, sweaty body as they did while he tried to clear away the underbrush in the yard the next morning. I'm sure if it hadn't been for the expectation of better health for our little girl we would have packed up and returned north that same day.

We soon learned all things were not impressive or comfortable. Redbugs, or chiggers, as the southerners called these particular insects, are tiny mites, native to the south. They bite and cause severe itching. The crackers' treatment was to rub the skin with kerosene oil, or in their words, lamp oil. It seemed to work as well as anything. The gray moss hanging from the trees in such abundance was full of redbugs.

Another surprise to us was the Florida cockroach. I couldn't believe my eyes when I first saw one. How big they were!! They were known as "palmetto bugs," as they seemed to thrive mainly around palm trees and palmetto bushes, but I found out they thrived everywhere else as well. They would get in the kitchen and the closets and would absolutely eat up a silk garment.

I remember our first Easter in Florida. I had purchased silk dresses for the girls. Having done my shopping a few weeks early, I hung them in the closet. When the girls went to dress for church Easter morning they came running out to the kitchen to tell me their pretty dresses were full of holes. I saw they were right but had no idea what had caused it. My neighbor told me roaches liked to eat certain types of material and that was what happened to the dresses.

Boric acid powder placed in small containers around the house was the solution my neighbor suggested at the time. It seemed to work and I use it today in my cupboards and closets. It is a safe and inexpensive insecticide.

We had our problems with snakes, too. We killed several while clearing the yard around the cottage but these were harmless, similar to garter snakes. Not so, all that we would encounter in later years, especially when the builders began to clear land for development in the late fifties and the snakes began to move out. Most of the deeply entrenched ones were rattlers, deadly and dangerous. In the swamp areas there were many moccasins.

## WEST PASCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

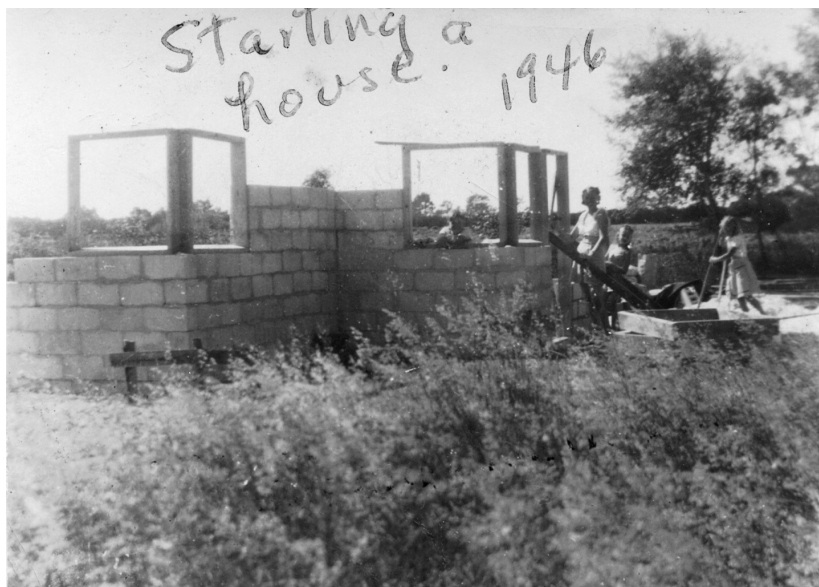
Soon after we arrived in Florida I walked outside one day to get in the truck parked in the driveway. As I was about to step up onto the running board I glanced down and there was a rattler stretched from one side of the truck to the other. I think he was just traveling across the yard but I had almost stepped on his head. I froze in my tracks, afraid to move for fear he would coil and strike. Jimmy was standing in the front door. He saw my predicament. "Don't move, mom," he cautioned. I heard him running back to the room where his dad kept a shotgun. Jim came back with the gun, stood in the doorway and aimed at the snake. I prayed he wouldn't miss, knowing that he was no expert with a gun and that he was only twelve years old. He aimed very carefully and fired. He hit that snake right between the eyes. I certainly was thankful as I saw that big rattler curl up and die.

We had sold our car before we left Erie in order to purchase a truck to provide transportation for some of our furniture and we couldn't afford to keep the car and truck too. The truck turned out to be a piece of good fortune.

There was no work to be had in New Port Richey. Roy went to Tarpon Springs seeking a job. He talked with Dan Tagarelli, owner of the Tagarelli Lumber Company, Tarpon Springs. He needed a truck and driver for local deliveries. Roy took the job and worked at it for over a year. One of the arrangements was that he would take one half his wages in building materials, which was agreeable as we were going to build a house immediately. His pay was to be thirty dollars a day and he would pay all the truck expenses. Consequently, he received fifteen dollars worth of building materials and fifteen in cash at the end of each working day. After paying truck expenses we had about eight dollars a day left over.

We purchased three acres of land on the west side of Roy's parent's acreage on East Trouble Creek Road. We were hesitant to build there because Florida Power Corporation could give us no assurance as to when the electric lines would be extended out that way. But the land was so much less expensive than in town and since we intended to build our home mortgage free, we decided to forgo the conveniences of New Port Richey and build in the country. We would just wait for all the good things to come later.

After we finished supper each night the whole family, including the children, walked down the road about a block to the lot Roy was clearing to build our first Florida home. He dug palmettos, chopped trees, scraping and leveling the land with the use of nothing but hand tools, mainly a shovel, pick, axe, and hoe.



*Their home under construction on East Trouble Creek Road, Oct. 1946.*

WEST PASCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

## The Historical Society's Events and Programs



*By Vice-President Dan Callaghan*

As much as we appreciate your dues, I ask that you consider becoming a more active member in the West Pasco Historical Society. As we begin to plan our events, programs and special exhibits for the 2015-2016 season from September to May, I think it is worthwhile to consider what we offered from September 2014 to May 2015, and to ask, "Why were these offerings so poorly attended?"

Did you know that with the assistance of the New Port Richey Library, your historical society offered a Florida Film Series on Saturday afternoons? Among the films we showed with a Florida tie-in were "The Yearling," "The Creature from the Black Lagoon," "Cocoon," "Out of Time," "Distant Drums," and most recently "Beneath the 12-Mile Reef."

Did you know our guest speaker for our September opening was Florida State Rep. Amanda Murphy, who brought us up-to-date on what is (and is not) happening in Tallahassee?

Did you know our Rao Musunuru M.D. Museum was decorated for Halloween with webs, giant spiders and skeletons, and that during a news conference, zombies attacked our guest speaker?

Did you know that in November we sponsored the "Veterans' March Around Orange Lake" honoring all branches of our military, with participation of several Junior ROTC honor guards, a flag display from Revolutionary War days by Sarasota's Florida Veterans for Common Sense, as well as several local veterans' organizations?

Did you know that among our guest speakers was a person who has been to the Antarctic nine times, that we learned about a woman who served in the Black cavalry called the Buffalo Soldiers, and that we saw a presentation on the outdoor display of model railroads? Were you there for the sing-a-long in the Gazebo led by Dixie Blue?

Despite the poor attendance at many of those events, your Board is proceeding to organize the 2015-2016 programs, hoping that you, your friends and your family will attend. Among the events and programs we are considering:

## WEST PASCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

- Celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the building which houses our museum on August 29, 2015
- Founder's Day with members of our pioneering family speaking of the earliest days of West Pasco history in September
- Halloween at the Museum, with a presentation by ghost investigators
- A Veterans' Day Dinner Dance with a Big Band in early November
- An opportunity to meet local authors, get a book signed and buy early Christmas presents in Peace Hall
- A Christmas celebration with a wassail bowl, and Dixie Blue leading us in singing Christmas songs
- A Black History presentation in February
- A Display of the Chasco Fiesta's History in March
- A Presentation on Why American Indians are Denied Their Day in Court on Land Claims in April
- Special Exhibits on Poetry, Women, Military Literature, All Faiths, including Pages from the Early Bibles

Your active participation is always welcome, whether it's attending our events and programs, or being a greeter on weekends at the museum, or helping us to plan these events and others in the coming months. We want to be more than just the museum of West Pasco—we want to be a historical society in more than name only.

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## WPHS Officers and Directors 2015-2016

*Effective June 1, 2015*

Chairman and de facto Board member	Bob Hubach
Director (2017) President	Bob Langford
Director (2017) Vice President	Dan Callaghan
Director (2016)	Clay Colson
Director (2016) Recording Secretary	Kelly Hackman
Director (2016) Corresponding Secretary	Diane Faulkner
Director (2017) Treasurer	Dannee Brooks
Director (2016)	Daryll Stevenson
Director (2016)	Judith Koutsos
Director (2017)	Antonia Miernik
Digital Archivist and de facto Board member	Jeff Miller
Director (2017)	Bill Aycrigg
Director (2017)	Terry Kline
Curator and de facto Board member	Brittni Bradford
Librarian and de facto Board member	Teri Abbott
Honorary Board Member	Rao Musunuru M.D.

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Web site: westpascohistoricalsociety.org  
Hours: Fridays, 1-4 p.m.; Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Closed June through August.