

TRACKS OF TIME

Monthly Publication from the Zephyrhills Historical Association

Volume 18 - Number 2

February 2016

The next Zephyrhills Historical Association meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 1st 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



Our speaker for the February meeting was Betty Brown. She talked mostly about her years in the Florida Power Office here in Zephyrhills and the people she worked with over the years. She had special memories of her managers, Merle Bright, Bob Johnson, and Jim Bailey, but also many others. It seems clear to me that those who worked together in that office were more like a family than a business. I certainly think my father felt that way about his years spent there. Those who attended were truly blessed by Betty's presence.

Our speaker for the March meeting will be Melanie Massey Foltz. Once again, Carolyn Dean secured Melanie's appearance. She is our classmate from the Class of '69, so we've all known each other from a very young age. Many of you know her mother, Hazel, who was the cafeteria manager for ZHS for many years. You may also know her aunt, Mary Lou "Cookie" Massey, also a cafeteria manager, but remembered by many as a mermaid at Weeki Wachee and a lifeguard at the City Pool. Melanie retired from the school system, and has devoted quite a bit of her time since to her quilting, and I hear she's good at it. This may be the primary focus of her presentation. I hope you'll come join us.



Tuesday, March 22nd, is our next Give-Back Scholarship Fundraiser at Mike's Smokehouse on 7th Street. We are meeting at 5 p.m. on that day. Contact Patty Thompson (813-780-8559 – pattycakeclown1@aol.com) for information.

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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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The Overstreets of East Pasco

Contributed Susan McMillan Shelton

William Rabon Overstreet was the first Overstreet to come to the eastern part of Pasco county. He was born about 1828 in Tattnall, Lowndes, Georgia. His father George moved the family to Madison County, Florida, by 1830. By the mid 1850's he had come to the Fort Dade area. He later got a large homestead east of Dade City across the Withlacoochee River. Here he met Vianna Roberts of Key West. She was born on Oct 13, 1839, and married William about 1855. Their first child, Taft, was born in 1856 but died as a baby. They had the following children:

- James Lucious Overstreet, born Nov. 20, 1858 in Madison Fla.
- George W., born Oct. 30, 1860 in Madison
- William Rabon, born about 1862 in Madison

He came to this area with first-hand knowledge of the Seminole Indians. His father had fought in the Second Seminole War. In 1841 the Seminoles raided the family home in Madison. They burned the house and killed two of William's sisters. William received a wrist wound and his mother later died of her wounds. William and his brother Silas Taft, a doctor, both fought in the Third Indian war. Three years later he enlisted to fight in the Civil War. He and his brother and two cousins went into the Confederate Army. He left a three year old, James Lucius, and a baby, George. Due to illness and a bullet wound to his right wrist and hand, the army discharged him in early 1862. He returned home. Several months later he was physically fit to re-enlist. He spent the rest of 1862 fighting in Virginia and Maryland. In the summer of 1863 he was captured at Gettysburg. He was taken to Ft. Delaware. There he died on Oct 17, 1863, of anemia and malnourishment. Meanwhile William Jr. had been born. When Vianna learned of her husband's fate she was determined to keep his memory alive by telling the three boys about their father. William Rabon was buried at Ft. Delaware in a mass grave. Vianna remarried a Smith from Zephyrhills. She died Nov. 08, 1877.

The three Overstreet boys grew up here in Pasco and remained here most of their lives in Zephyrhills or out east Dade City.

James Lucious homesteaded a piece of land east of the Withlacoochee River in 1901. Lucious is described by family members as being bossy and loved to have his own way. He went by the nickname of Luce. His first marriage involved a shot gun. He married Laura Tucker on Dec. 20, 1877. They had Margaret Leola, b. Feb. 12, 1878 in Richland, d. April 29, 1948.

His second marriage was to Elizabeth Smith- William- Boyette b. about 1844., d. about 1912. Their children were:

- Ivy Lucious, b. Oct. 18, 1882, d. July 14, 1972
- Silas Taff b. Sept. 22, 1883
- Edgar Eugene, b Jan. 10, 1888, d. May 06, 1915
- Lawrence Preston b. April 10, 1892, d. Feb. 24, 1925



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His third wife was Elizabeth Childers-Flanagen, b. Jan 20, 1884, d. June 23, 1955. They had two girls:

- Alice Mae, b. April 05, 1915, d. Aug 14, 1989
- Jo, b. Mar. 21, 1918, d. June 10, 2002

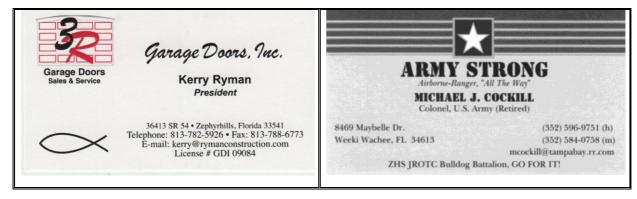
Because of the big number of cousins and step cousins the "younger generation" became known as the "Overstreet Gang." Here we do not have space to tell all of the many adventures that the gang was part of. They grew up in a different time. They had learned to be tough. Most of them had lived in a home that had step-parents. The times had called for men to be men and the women to stand behind them supporting them with grit and a gun to fire along with them. They had to many times take the law in their own hands. They did whatever they had to provide for their families.

All of them were farmers and raised a lot of cattle on the open range. This led to several disagreements, some that involved shots being fired. One Overstreet ended up with being hit with a bullet and a broken jaw when the ownership of a hog came into question. Several Overstreets did time for going too far in taking the law into their own hands.

Things were changing in Pasco. More and more people were coming to the county to live. It became harder to keep the herds of cattle together in the woods. One day Preston, Taft, and Walter Overstreet went to the Brooksville area to tell Charlie Lykes that he had picked up about 50 of Preston's cows when he moved his herd through the woods on the way to Kissimmee. Preston informed Mr. Lykes that he expected to have 50 new cows at his house by Saturday. On Saturday morning Charlie Lykes and his cow pokes showed up at Preston house east of Dade City with 55 cows. Several people from town came to help in the branding and partying. One of them was Robert Sumner. Preston's wife, Lizzie, made a big supper for all. Later they all spent the night under the trees. The next morning they all returned home.

The biggest life-changing event happened when the government introduced prohibition that gave people the opportunity to make cash money making moonshine liquor. The Overstreets and a lot of other people entered a new world, of outrunning and outsmarting the sheriff's deputies and federal agents. Grand Pa, Luce and his wife and Taft had a gunfight with federal agents. One of the agents was wounded. Making moonshine was a family affair. Everyone helped out. Even seven year olds acted as lookouts to warn Dad when federal agents were sighted. One teenager ran with one boot on and one off to lead the agents away from the still so that Dad would not be caught because he had to take care of the family. People helped take care of their family, friends, and neighbors with the money that was made from selling moonshine.

Everyone wanted a piece of the moonshine pot of gold, even the family pigs. Preston Overstreet's hogs sometimes had trouble standing up after they feasted on the mash that was left over from making the moonshine. Everyone met everyone. Pasco's finest bought it, some would resell it. Many of the officers would turn their heads when money would cross their hands. This included those that sent other people to pick up their part so that they could not be discovered taking "insurance money."



Not paying your insurance money for a moonshiner meant taking a chance on getting caught. There were tough sentences for selling bootleg whiskey. This is one story of an Overstreet who was willing to take all chances to support his family in a better lifestyle, and to prove that he was his own man.

Preston Overstreet and several of his brothers and cousins had several stills out across the Withlacoochee River. They relied on themselves for protection. This caused feelings of anger and resentment between them and the other side of the law. One of the lawmen was a new federal prohibition officer named J. V. Waters. He and the Overstreets had several times warned each others as to what they would do the other.

On Oct. 4, 1922 Dade City changed forever because this hate relationship ended in a bloody killing out east of Dade City on two track road. Some of what follows came from the *Dade City Banner* and other newspapers from the area, and as far away as Atlanta. They date from Oct. 5, 1922, running almost every day until Dec. 22, 1922. The rest comes from the people that lived it.

J. V. Walters and Pasco County Deputy A. P. Crenshaw were looking into a theft of a store that had burned down in Dade City. The burning of the store was thought to have been done on purpose to get the insurance money. They decided to go out across the river to look for the merchandise at a ranch. While they were out there they would look for moonshine stills. They took a pair of handcuffs with them. The handcuffs were never seen again, suggesting that perhaps they had arrested someone at the ranch. As the car that they rode in headed back to town, they were ambushed. Both men never got the chance to defend themselves. They were shot at close range by shotguns. Later that evening Wilson Connell, Paul, Taft, George Overstreet and John Trautman found the two dead men in their car as they returned from Lakeland to the ranch where one of the Overstreets lived. They went to Luce Overstreet and called Dade City and told Judge Dayton what they had found, since they could not find the sheriff, B. D. Sturkie.

After 48 hours, indictments for first-degree murder charged George, Taff, Bascomb, Paul, Preston, and Byrd Overstreet, and Wilson Connell with the killings. George was later charged with being an accessory. The evidence against the men included threats made by the Overstreets about Waters, a shotgun found at Preston Overstreets' house. A few days before the killings the Overstreet bought buckshot in Dade City. Also a man by the name of Perry Haines had come forward and said that he had seen the Overstreets in the area at the time of the killings. He came forward after the county offered a \$5,000.00 reward for the murders.

Newspaper reporters, the head of the federal prohibition department, the Department of Justice, a citizens league, and The Anti-Saloon League came to stop the whiskey rebellion that had broken out here. All eyes were on Dade City to see how Pasco County handled this.

The trail began on Dec. 04, 1922. Preston and Paul Overstreet were the only ones tried. From Tampa the governor sent Judge McMullen. The most brilliant legal talent in the state came as the attorneys for the prosecution and the defense. The Overstreet family had sold enough cattle to raise \$5,000.00 for their lawyers.

During the trial over thirty witnesses were called to testify. On Dec. 15th, 1922, the state rested its case. The defendant made a motion for the court to instruct a verdict in favor of Preston Overstreet for lack of evidence. The motion was granted. He was found not guilty.



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After 45 minutes of being behind closed doors the jury also found Paul Overstreet not guilty. There are no records that show anyone else was ever tried for the killings.

Justice had been served for Preston and Paul Overstreet because they did not kill Waters and Crenshaw. However they knew who did and did nothing to stop the killings or bring the men to justice. The two men who did shot the law men were very close friends to the Overstreets and later married into the family. Both men gave up making moonshine after the trial. They moved out of the area and both became Baptist preachers.

After this brush with the law the Overstreets returned to their moonshine stills. The sheriff's race came. Ike Hudson ran on a platform of doing away with all moonshiners. He won, but some things never change except on the surface. The sheriff and his chief deputy, C. C. Walker, centered their activities against those who broke the prohibition laws. In January 1925, 60 people were arrested in Pasco county, 15 of them was moonshiners.

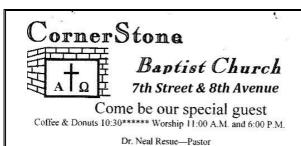
The friction between the sheriff's department and the Overstreets increased with the boastfulness of Deputy Walker and the demands of the Overstreets not to cross the Withlacoochee River. In a little over two years there was another killing. Both the *Dade City Banner* and the Tampa papers carried accounts of this murder, from Feb. 26, 1925, to Feb. 27, 1925. This account comes from people who was there, the Overstreet family, and the people of River Road Dade City.

One day in early Feb., 1925, Preston Overstreet was in his back yard working. His oldest daughter, who was 12, was with him. She later said that the chief deputy came walking around the house. She said she heard the conversation between him and her father. The deputy told Preston that if he would send Sheriff Ike Hudson and himself \$50.00 a month, they would turn their backs on his moonshine stills. Preston became upset and told him he would not give them anything. He told him to get off his land. Preston was an excellent shot and was known to be able to shoot a fifty cent piece out of the sky. Walker quickly left.

On Feb. 24, 1925, Preston Overstreet had heard the law was not to be anywhere on this side of the county looking for stills. He and a Mr. Connell was to go to his stills. Mr. Connell sent word that he was sick. Neal Wilson said that he would go with Preston. Preston's wife Mary Elizabeth Hopson Overstreet fixed them a lunch and put it in a brown paper bag.

The night before, Deputy Walker, a boy who was a Hancock, and Ike Hudson's son, and four federal agents from Tampa had staked out Preston's stills. The morning of the 24th the agents had gone back to Tampa for a case there. Deputy Walker, the Hancock boy, and Ike Hudson's son waited in the woods. Having no breakfast, Walker sent Ike Hudson to town in their car to get some food.

Soon after he left, Preston Overstreet and Neal Wilson got to the still. Walker and Hancock was hiding in the palmettoes. Preston had laid his gun down. Both he and Wilson had their backs towards Walker. Walker stood up and said, "You are under arrest." Before they could turn around, both Preston and Neal were shot in the back. Neal Wilson fell dead. Preston was gravely wounded. They were laid on a tarp. Walker and Hancock sat down and ate the lunch that Lizzie had fixed for them while they waited to see if anyone else would show up at the still.



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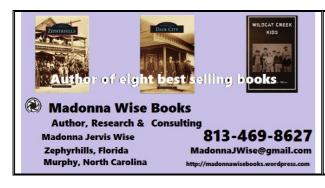
Meanwhile, Luce Overstreet's wife had seen Walker earlier that morning going out towards the stiles. She called Taft Overstreet's wife and told her to get Taft to go warn Preston. He and a Negro that worked for him went out to the still. When he got there he found Preston's hat and thought he had escaped. Then he was arrested by Walker. He saw Preston was still breathing. Preston took three breaths and died. They put the body in Preston's car to take into town. On the way in they stopped at Preston's house and showed his wife that he was dead. Two of his daughters always remembered seeing the men open the back door of the car and seeing their daddy's arm falling out.

Walker took the bodies to Dade City and threw them out in front of the courthouse. He told someone to go and get one of the children of Officer Crenshaw so he could see the man who had killed his father. Walker delivered the bodies to the sheriff, and put Taft Overstreet in jail. He was not let out until after his brother Preston was buried. He was discharged for lack of proof that he owned any of the three stills that had been destroyed. The older children of Preston remembered the two coffins in the hallway of Preston's house and people coming from all over to comfort their mother. Preston left behind six children: Lawrence Preston, Hazel, Sadie Ray, Juanita, James Earl, and Preston. The next day at the funeral, over 400 people came to the Oak Grove Baptist Church on River Road. Neal Wilson was buried at the Withlacoochee Cemetery. Preston was buried at Enterprise Cemetery.

With the death of Preston some things did not change, but a whole lot did. The other Overstreets kept making moonshine. Mary Elizabeth's life of love and safety ended. She now had five kids to take care of. She could not take care of the cattle and soon they were gone, taken by cattle herds going through the area. She depended on local churches and her Mother, Father, and Sister Callie who lived in Tampa for food and other needed items. There was times when there was only scraps of food to eat. She and the oldest girl, Hazel, would go outside after having gave the younger children the little food they had. They were hungry too but there was not enough.

Shortly after Preston's death, Elizabeth went into town with some of the kids. When she came out of the store she found her five year old son fighting with some other kids who had made fun of his daddy. Several weeks later, James was trying to light a wick in an incubator for the baby chickens and he caught his clothes on fire. Elizabeth and Juanita were working in the garden. They did everything they could to save him, but he had breathed too much into his lungs and died soon after this. People would come and ask Elizabeth if they could adopt one of the kids. She always refused.

She later remarried, hoping that this would be what her and the kids needed. The family had too many step-people in it and she divorced him because he was not good for her kids. She finished raising the kids and went on with her life. In the 1950 or 1960s a picture company came to her to buy the rights to her story to make a movie. She said no because she did not think they would show Preston for the man he was, the loving husband and father, the man who did his best leaving one era and trying to adapt to a new one. She realized that Preston's legacy was in him and not the Cooper colored moonshine still that took sugar and corn and turned them into something that caused a lot of pain. The day before she died in 1981, she spent most of the day calling out to Preston to come and take her home. We feel in our hearts that Preston did just that.







ZEPHYRHILLS HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES FEBRUARY 2ND, 2016

The Regular Business Meeting of the Zephyrhills Historical Association was called to order at 6:06 PM, February 2, 2016 by President Rod Rehrig. The invocation was given by Vice President Jerry Pricher and he led the Pledge of Allegiance as well. The minutes from the January 5, 2016 meeting were read by Secretary Anna V. Boone, accepted by Jerry Pricher, seconded by Rod Rehrig and approved. The Treasurer's report was submitted by Clereen Brunty, accepted by Leo Wagner, seconded by Rex Hiatt and approved by all.

Old Business: There was a fundraiser update by Patty Thompson and Margie Partain. Patty tried to find 2 other restaurants and she called the Fresh Country Café (formerly Island Breeze Cuban Café) and The Great Catch but hasn't heard back. The question was posed whether some want to go back to Mike's Smokehouse Barbeque & Grill for a fundraiser. Seven hands were raised. Patty Thompson talked about a scholarship walk and getting sponsors to pay walkers so much to walk. Volunteers were called for to solicit contributions for the scholarship fund. President Rod Rehrig asked the group to consider this.

New Business: Polly Gill brought the ZHA tee shirts. They are \$10.00 each and Polly said it would be good for us to wear them in the Founders' Day Parade. Regarding the scholarship for Zephyrhills High School, Margie Partain will contact the school to see if they need the form.

The audit committee came together on January 8, 2016 and reports that the books balance.

It is time to renew the Main Street membership, which is \$150.00 per year and includes business contact information, free use of various media, entry into the parades, as well as other free offers. The cost is \$25.00 for just entry in the Founders' Day Parade. Jerry moved to continue the \$150.00 renewal for another year, seconded by Bill Kustes and approved by the group. Founders' Day will be March 12, 2016, 9AM-4PM. THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT will be the theme with focus on the 1960s. Bob Porter is seeing to having the vintage automobiles for the parade. Gail Geiger and Jo White carried the ZHA banner last year but Gail cannot this year so Margie Partain and Clereen Brunty might do it.

CD renewal comes up February 14, 2016. The Treasurer, Clereen Brunty, asked if there should be any changes to get a better rate. Jerry Pricher moved to let Clereen do what she thinks is best, seconded by Tenci Alexander, and approved.

Those having February birthdays are Rex Hiatt and Penny Porter and we will be going to Mike's Smokehouse Barbeque & Grill on February 12, 2016 at 4:00 PM. Patty Thompson asked if we should try the Smokehouse again for a scholarship fundraiser and would each person need to present a flyer?

Jerry Pricher moved to adjourn, seconded by Bill Kustes and approved by all. The meeting was dismissed at 6:29 PM.

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

Please note that meeting times have changed to 5:00 PM for the Zephyrhills Historical Association Board Meeting, 5:30PM for the regular meeting and 6:00 PM for the speaker.



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