The Newsletter of the Tallahassee Historical Society

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December 12 Meeting

Fore! Come to Our December 12 meeting and Learn About Edward Houstoun, his Plantation and the Capitol City Country Club Cemetery

By Bob Holladay, President

For nearly 100 years, the lands of the former Edward Houstoun plantation marked the eastern edge of Tallahassee. Houstoun was a leading figure in the city’s antebellum history, and the most important railroad developer in the region. Until recently, however, scholarship was scant regarding Houstoun and his pivotal role in the early development of the city. If you follow the news carefully in Tallahassee, you know that the Houstoun land, particularly the portion that contains the Capital City Country Club, has been a source of controversy as to the reported existence of an African-American cemetery. The Tallahassee Historical Society’s December speaker, Jonathan Lammers, has been instrumental in reexamining whether or not this cemetery could be definitively tied to Houstoun and his plantation. In November, his work helped inform the first-ever archaeological testing of the suspected cemetery location with ground-penetrating radar. For the December talk, he will discuss his research and provide an update on the results of the archaeological investigations.

Jonathan’s presentation will be part of the historical society’s December 12 “potluck” Christmas meeting at the historic Old Willis Dairy, 1609 Centerville Road, Tallahassee, 32308. The doors will open at 5:30, followed by dinner.

Houstoun arrived from Savannah around 1836 to manage his family’s cotton plantation in what is today the Myers Park area. Within a few years he established himself among
an elite group of planters who dominated the area's economy and politics. During the 1840s, Edward Houstoun was nominated as a director of the Union Bank of Florida, and later helped organize the Central Association of Cotton Planters of Florida. Houstoun served on the board of the West Florida Seminary, which eventually evolved into Florida State University.

Houstoun is best known as the developer and owner of the Pensacola & Georgia Railroad (P&G), chartered in 1853 by Houstoun and business partner Edward C. Cabell. Construction of the railroad began in 1855, with a right-of-way running along the northern and western edges of his property. Houstoun and Cabell also gained control of the Tallahassee Railroad running between Tallahassee and St. Marks. The principal object of both of these lines was to ship cotton to market.

In time, Houstoun's plantation expanded to more than four square miles of land. The number of enslaved persons working the land also grew to nearly 80 persons by the eve of the Civil War. During the war, Houstoun donated a portion of his lands for the construction of an earthen fort in what is today Old Fort Park. One of his sons also participated in the Battle of Natural Bridge.

After the war, management of the plantation lands passed to Patrick Houstoun, who developed the area as a stock farm known as “Lakeland Plantation.” Around the turn of the century, the land was sold to local attorney, George Perkins, who donated a portion of the former plantation for what is today the Capital City Country Club golf course.

For decades, stories persisted about the existence of a former African American cemetery on the grounds of the golf course. On November 19, Jeffrey Shanks, with the National Park Service, with the support of Mayor John Dailey, the city commission, and the country club's board of directors, began the process to answer long-standing questions.

We hope that you will join us on Thursday evening, December 12 learn first hand about Edward Houstoun, his plantation and its legacy. Please RSVP by December 6 at www.tallahasseehistoricalsociety.org. Non-members and guests: $10 at the door.

Jonathan Lammers began his career at the Florida Division of Historical Resources where he authored a study of the Tallahassee Cascades. He later moved to California where he conducted historic surveys and prepared landmark designations for the San Francisco Planning Department. He returned to Tallahassee in 2016 with his wife and daughter and currently works as a historic preservation consultant. He is passionate about Tallahassee history as well as local ecology and native plants.

Someone once wrote it is good people who make good places. And another wrote that a place is only as good as the people in it. To many people in our fair city, Forestmeadows Recreation Center is that kind of place.

Frank Sherwood, an avid tennis player and retired FSU professor, wrote an account of the history of Forestmeadows and tennis in Tallahassee. He was a resident of Tallahassee with his wife Susse, and died August 30 at age 99. Susse died several years earlier and they both were very involved in our community and are missed by all who knew and worked with them.

But this is not about Frank and Susse. It is about a place that Sherwood identified in his writings as a community-changing facility that no one really had the slightest idea would happen. Yet it has emerged as a place where many hundreds of people enjoy sports and recreation.

Forestmeadows Recreation Center is located on Meridian Road in north Tallahassee. When Sherwood wrote about the center, he was preparing his history to be presented at an annual dinner of elderly tennis players who go by the name of “Golden Boys” and “Silver Belles.” These two groups and others (numbering more than 75 people) play tennis Monday, Wednesday and Fridays at Forestmeadows and he wanted them to know, as if they didn’t already know, how blessed they were that they were able to play at Forestmeadows and how the center came into being.

Sherwood wanted to point out that Forestmeadows did not arrive out of nowhere nor was there a big master plan that brought it into being. In fact, he noted, Tallahassee’s long-time director of parks and recreation, Randy Trousdell, said that it is a facility that a government would never have built, both for political and economic reasons. Yet, it has emerged as the center of a much larger recreation and sports complex in which the city can justifiably take great pride.

Dr. Jim Pumphrey, who initiated the first development of the facility told Sherwood he wasn’t sure of the exact date when Forestmeadows was started, but it was reported in the Tallahassee Democrat in a letter written by Pumphrey that things got underway in 1973. The date is important because it represents a huge sea change in the game of tennis in Tallahassee and the number of people who would be drawn to be a part of the game in our area.

Sherwood wrote that in the 1950s and early 1960s, tennis activity was concentrated at Winthrop Park, which had several clay courts. James Masson Gunn, another mover and shaker in the game of tennis at the time, wrote in his memoir in 1989, “During these years a group of us used to play at Winthrop Park several afternoons a week on the soft courts. We’d be there with broom and water hose to prepare the courts for our use. There were such people as Bill Long, Dick Baker, Jim Mahorner, Barry Hornbein, Bob Earnest, Jim Pumphrey, Earl Freiden, Bob Peters, Pete Durland, Tommy Traylor and many whose names I’ve overlooked or forgotten.”

In 1967, the city decided that the clay courts at Winthrop were too expensive to maintain. So, they paved them
over and for many players this made them less attractive. Besides that there were simply not enough courts in town. The city recreation department knew of the scarcity of courts and proposed building a major facility in southwest Tallahassee. But this was too far to commute and besides, most of the hardcore tennis players of the time wanted soft courts. Killlearn Country Club had not been developed yet and Capital City Country Club had only one hard court at the time.

“It was in this context that the idea of developing a tennis facility on Meridian Road on property owned by the Phipps family emerged,” wrote Sherwood. “Jim Pumphrey declares that the true initiator of the enterprise was tennis pro, Herb Rapp.”

More than 20 people put up $100 each to become charter members and to provide seed money. Four people including Pumphrey, Rapp, Colin Phipps and Fred Lindsey became the executive committee and put up more money and used their names to get more. Eventually the number of charter members grew to 100.

Forestmeadows began with one Har-Tru court, for some reason labelled the “pro court” and which is now designated as court number 1. Sherwood said people started playing before there was real fencing and Pumphrey recalled that all they had was chicken wire to contain the errant balls.

The leadership group met regularly and managed to add to the facility. In five years, six more Har-Tru courts were added plus a swimming pool and clubhouse with lounge and locker rooms. Jim Gunn joined the group and financed the construction of four hard courts necessary for junior players who were training to play in tournaments.

In April 1978, Jim Pumphrey, who was dissatisfied with the slow development of the facility, purchased the club for $120,000. The ownership was put under a new organization, Passing Shots Inc., and Pumphrey’s family members and some staff were the stockholders. Extra land was purchased bringing the total to 20 acres.

Two years later, Passing Shots began the expansion of the facility, designed by the architectural firm of Clemons, Rutherford and Associates, AIA. Added were courts for all racquet sports including squash and racquetball, fully heated and air conditioned, new locker-rooms, as well as sauna, whirlpool, steam room and weight room. A dining room, lounge and bar, banquet party room and a viewing deck as well as a fully stocked pro shop were also included in the new construction.

Two tennis teaching courts were added, utilizing a new surface which consisted of a checkerboard plastic on top of asphalt. Billed as an all-weather court because it would quickly shed the rainwater, it eventually turned out to be a mistake. It did shed the water but not the moisture and the surface soon had to be removed because it was dangerous to play on due to the wet surface and players felt the ball did not bounce right anyway.

Now called Forestmeadows Athletic Club carrying the title of “Fitness First Class” and subtitled “Family Fun,” it was, by the early 1980s, the area’s finest racquet sports facility. It included 15 tennis courts, three racquetball courts, and one squash court; two weight rooms and two swimming pools, one for the family and one for laps. Also available was a private banquet room, picnic area, health bar with eat and run snack-bar and movies and video games for the kids.

Forestmeadows had certainly become a major facility for all Tallahasseeans. But Pumphrey finally concluded he had been too ambitious because the club was never able to attract the number of dues paying members to cover the operating costs.

“We just did not have enough people of sufficient wealth to support a reasonable level of club dues,” Pumphrey told Sherwood. There were other problems as well. Operating the club took an inordinate amount of time that a busy orthodontist did not have, even though his wife and two sons worked long hours to keep the club open.

In 1985, disaster struck in the guise of Hurricane Kate, the only hurricane in living memory to pass right over Tallahassee up to that time. Fences were leveled, courts were torn apart, the concrete backboard unit crumbled and trees and bushes were thrown about. The building did not suffer any bad damage but the cost of restoring the club was more than the budget could withstand.

Jim Pumphrey made an overture to the city about a purchase. Residential development was moving north of Tallahassee and the city did not have any recreational activities.
facilities in north Tallahassee at the time. Jerry Maxwell, Deputy City Manager in charge of parks and recreation, pitched the idea to his boss, City Manager Dan Kleman, who ultimately recommended the purchase to the City Commission. Two years later the commission approved the purchase for $1,420,000. Commissioners Judd Chapman and Steve Meisburg were very supportive in bringing the deal to a conclusion especially since Pumphrey threw in 22.5 acres of surrounding property worth $236,000. This allowed the city to add soccer fields and baseball diamonds to the complex making Forestmeadows a major recreation and sports venue for Tallahassee.

Of course, there was more to the story. Residential development north of the city, including Ox Bottom development, was in the formative stages when negotiation on the Forestmeadows purchase was beginning. Jim Smith, former Florida Attorney General and Secretary of State, was pushing the Ox Bottom development and he had a problem. He needed city sewage treatment service because septic tanks would not be acceptable. Smith needed his development to be annexed into the city and a finger annexation was worked out which included Forestmeadows. Without the annexation of Ox Bottom the purchase of Forestmeadows would not have been possible, according to Trousdell.

Pumphrey recalled that having a large recreational area in the path of the annexation effort for Ox Bottom helped the property owners on Meridian Road accept parting with a small part of their land to the city. Ox Bottom got its sewage treatment connections and residents in the area got a major sports and recreation area, none of which would have been possible without annexation.

The City of Tallahassee took over operation of Forestmeadows on March 1, 1989. Originally, city officials wanted to operate the facility as a club with dues paid into a kitty for the right to participate in sports. However, members of the City Commission, notably Mayor Dorothy Inman-Crews, did not want it to be a facility for elites and convinced the commission to order a fee schedule be set up which would provide access to all.

While the fee structure has been in place for many years, the facility does not operate on a break-even basis. On the other hand, Sherwood pointed out that the city has invested in the area by purchasing 132 acres from the Phipps estate adjacent to Forestmeadows, which has further enriched the complex with even more recreational amenities to residents.

In March 2005, tennis enthusiasts talked to the city about building additional clay courts at Forestmeadows. They were told there was no room in the budget, so a petition and fund raising effort led by Mel McCarthy and Ben Goldberg gained 810 signatures and $26,000. Additional funding was provided by the Challenger Tournament, $50,000, and $40,000 was donated by the Friend of our Parks Foundation. Mel McCarthy and Carrol Dadisman appeared before the City Commission to outline the fund raising efforts and the city contributed more than $300,000 to make needed improvements to the facility.

The result was six new clay courts, increasing the total from seven to 13 and five hard courts. Also added were improved fencing, sidewalks and landscaping, benches, covered seating areas and new sod. By the end of the decade the City of Tallahassee had made more than $1 million in improvements to not only Forestmeadows but also to the hard tennis court.
facility at Tom Brown Park as well as other courts around the city. Later, a new stadium court for Forestmeadows was donated by Roy Messer, Karen Vogter and others, which enhanced the facility’s tournament potential.

This was important to the city’s ability to attract high level players. Within three years of the city’s purchase of Forestmeadows, new interest began to crop up among tennis players from around town who participated in a men’s professional tennis exhibition at the Donald Tucker Civic Auditorium. Organized by Simone Watts, a charity tennis event was held at the auditorium on December 7, 1988, with the Tallahassee Tennis Association (TTA) furnishing the umpires. Jim McCloy served as the Chair Umpire for an exhibition match between Johan Kriek and Andre Agassi. Agassi won in three sets. For 10 years ending in 2000, Allen Long and Jim McCloy, working with the TTA and the city, conducted numerous men’s professional clay court tournaments at Forestmeadows, until they graduated to the Challenger level with the launching of the Dr. Koop Challenger in 2001. This hard court challenger tournament initially conducted at the Scott Speicher Tennis Center at FSU was the first of what is now an annual Tallahassee Challenger conducted at Forestmeadows. Since the Dr. Koop Challenger, annual Tallahassee challenger tournaments have been successfully run by Karen Vogter and Maria (Cuff) Yealdhall at Forestmeadows. Subsequently, futures and satellite tournaments were also conducted. None of this would have happened without the support and cooperation of the Tallahassee Parks and Recreation Department and the staff of Forestmeadows.

As for the game of tennis in Tallahassee, it has continued to grow and expand. Besides the major clay court professional tournament each year, summer programs have been organized for young children who are given elementary and advanced tennis training. A corps of tennis professionals is available at the facility which provides group clinics and individual coaching and training.

The facility is open night and day. In the fall and winter tennis leagues organized by the Tallahassee Tennis Association and the United States Tennis Association play on weekends and at night under the lights. Forestmeadows serves all age groups now with tennis courts, racquet ball courts, ping pong tables, hiking trails, biking trails, swimming pools, baseball fields, horse shows, horse trials, horse shoe courts, and even quiet places to just sit and relax.

And it all started with about ten guys who wanted to play tennis on soft courts.
Over the next year we raised funds and built the Stadium Court with stadium lights in time for the 2005 tournament. The court was dedicated during the finals ceremony that year and given to the City of Tallahassee. Roy and Billie Messer donated $35,000 towards the court, and the rest of the money came from several families and the Friends of Our Parks to complete the court and professional lighting to meet the USTA specifications ($100,000+). Over the next several years we refinshed the stadium court, then the Challenger paid to repave courts 14-16. We installed electricity on site to all the courts used for the tournament. The Challenger along with the USTA Pro Circuit invested $100,000 in upgrades to Forestmeadows in order to make the tournament even better.

In the fall of 2012 the USTA Pro Circuit approached us about hosting a series of three soft court tournaments designed to help American players become more proficient on clay. After discussions with the city and the tournament committee, we agreed to become the Final Tournament in the Har-Tru Wild Card Challenge where an American player would earn a wild card into the French Open in May 2013. The USTA Pro Circuit and the Tallahassee Tennis Challenger (along with site preparation assistance from the City of Tallahassee) paid for and built the first Hydro Court at Forestmeadows. This was also the first year that international live streaming was used during the tournament, which increased the visibility of our beautiful City of Tallahassee on the tennis scene. This soft court series continues to the present and is now called the Roland Garros Wild Card Championship.

I also want to point out that the Tallahassee Tennis Challenger continues to invest in upkeep and improvements at Forestmeadows, including replacing the awning after it was destroyed in a storm, purchasing score keepers, and updating the women’s bathroom. The Challenger has also paid for shade structures at Winthrop (now called the Sybil Ballard Courts), and shade structures at Tom Brown Park. Our stadium court is used daily by members of the tennis community and we are grateful for all the community support we receive. More than 300 volunteers assist us every year as we introduce almost 1000 children (3rd graders from Leon County, Special Olympians, and kids from other youth groups in the area), to tennis every year. We love this sport and want to see it grow in our community.

We have had quite a lot of well-known tennis players come through our little town on their way to tennis stardom and it probably wouldn’t have happened without Forestmeadows.

Your Fearless Leader has not written a column for the last couple of issues, so with Christmas and the end of the calendar year it hand, it seems like a good time to give a report.

First of all, I have been overwhelmed by the turnout at our first two meetings of the 2019-2020 season. A lot of this was due to our first-class publicity department, led by our webmaster, Brendan Crellin, who regularly has to endure anxiety from you-know-who about whether he’s going to get the newsletter out on time, but always does with a combination of artistic expertise and patience for my worrying.

We had more than 90 persons show up to hear Secretary of State Laurel Lee talk about the Women’s Suffrage Movement in Florida at our October meeting, and more than 80 to hear Marti Pytel and Andy Wright talk about the mysterious Calvin Phillips and his mausoleum in November. We were scrambling all through both meetings to find seats for folks as they kept coming in the Martin House. And the good news is that at both meetings, we increased our membership with new joiners and renewals. I hope that we have just as large a turnout at our December 12 meeting, our “Christmas Dinner” at the Old Willis Dairy on Centerville Road. Frank and Peper Willis are members and they have been very accommodating to us over the years. Our speaker is going to be Jonathan Lammers, who will be talking about the Houstoun Plantation and the Capital City Country Club and the controversies over the African-American cemetery on the seventh green. It’s a pot luck dinner; THS will provide turkey and ham; the members will bring everything else. While this meeting is traditionally for members, guests are welcome for the incredibly nominal price of $10, payable at the door. Please RSVP at our website, www.tallahasseehistoricalsociety.org, prior to December 12. Your Fearless Leader will be on the premises all afternoon, and folks should feel free to start showing up by 5:30.

Things continue apace on a number of fronts. As you know, over the summer, the Board created two new committees, a Bicentennial Committee to help plan Tallahassee’s 2024 200th birthday, and a Membership Committee to help get more folks to realize what a fun organization we are. Beth McGrotha heads the Bicentennial Committee, which has a slew of very impressive members, including historians
Dr. Larry Rivers from FAMU and Dr. Mike Denham from Florida Southern, but also local folks with a real connection to Tallahassee’s history. Members of the committee have two important meetings coming up, one of them with the Council on Culture and Arts (COCA), which has expressed interest in acting as our fiscal agent in raising money and administering grants for the bicentennial. This could be a very important and continuing relationship for us; as you know, the THS has always subsisted entirely on member dues or specific gifts. If we are going to increase our presence in the community as the “go to” organization for historical knowledge and research, we are going to need a broader financial base and support from the business community and other Tallahassee stakeholders. A second meeting will be held on December 17 with Mayor John Dailey to begin sketching out ideas and goals for the bicentennial. Finally, in January, the committee is planning a community-wide stakeholders meeting to get input on what should be included in the bicentennial celebration. We do really want as many individuals and organizations to be part of this as possible. We will be providing publicity once the date and location are determined. This is going to be huge. Tallahassee is the capital of the third largest state in the union, and I expect it will garner national attention.

Our Membership Committee is headed by Jowanna Oates, and has already helped us immeasurably in regularizing our membership efforts by, for example, making sure that new members get letters of thanks for joining, providing sign-up sheets at meetings and then following up with notes encouraging folks to join, and creating means for people to join and renew electronically. This is a very important part of the process for keeping the THS a growing organization, and we are very fortunate that Jowanna agreed to head our efforts. The THS board would like to create at least one other committee, a Hospitality Committee. As our Secretary, George Allen, says, a THS meeting can sometimes be controlled (or like our first two meetings this year, not-so-controlled) chaos. We are in the process for drawing up specifications for what it would do, but it would basically be in charge of formalizing our meeting structure, at least slightly. That would mean, for instance, ensuring that we have enough and a variety of food and refreshments at our meetings, making sure that our name tags are in a prominent location when you, the members show up, and are organized so that you can easily find them, having a greeting table at the entrance to the Martin House to welcome you when you arrive, and providing sign-up sheets, so that the Membership Committee can determine who is coming, who is not, and how we can encourage attendance. We will provide more details about this prospective committee, particularly as we seek folks to be part of it.

We have also raised the possibility—but have not actually voted to create—an Events Committee. There are historical events that take place in the Tallahassee area on a year-round basis. We try to have a presence at as many as we can, but finding volunteers, deciding what we will display, getting there and back, can be difficult. We would like to find some method of regularizing that and, most importantly, getting the broader membership involved, but that is still under discussion. For those who do like to volunteer, we are in the process making it possible for you to buy an official Tallahassee Historical Society shirt to wear and show your allegiance. More details to come on this.

So, it’s been a good year; a fun year. The Tallahassee Historical Society is a place of learning, and a place of education. But it’s also a place of fellowship and fun. We hope you enjoy being part of it as much as we do. We want and need you.

Send Us Your Historical Articles and News!

The Tallahassee Historical Society is always on the lookout for interesting items of local historical interest, articles, reminiscences, photographs and other illustrations.

1. Written submissions should typed in Microsoft Word, 12 point type, and submitted electronically to President@TallahasseeHistoricalSociety.org. We welcome queries before submission.

2. Photographs or illustrations should, whenever possible, be submitted separately in the jpeg, EPS or Tiff format with a minimum resolution of 300 dpi

3. Deadlines for submission are the 15th day of each month in order to make the upcoming issue of the Apalachee Redux.

Former Tallahassee Historical Society President and FSU Professor Dr. William Warren Rogers had a method in his madness when he created Sentry Press back in the early 1970s: to help his graduate students get published. Bill understood that waiting for a university press to make up its mind whether or not to publish—a process that often takes years—could have disastrous effects on an academic career, where job offers often depend upon whether or not your book has been accepted. So without sacrificing any of the academic rigor involved, he decided to help his students and colleagues. Over the course of 45 years and several hundred books, he did.

Shortly before he died, Bill asked me to become managing editor of Sentry and I accepted. There was no money involved; it was strictly voluntary. But it was important to keep it going, and over the last few years we, I believe, continued the quality work that Bill Rogers started.

Sentry’s latest publication is *Forts, Ports, Canals and Wars: An Uncommon History of Tallahassee and Surrounding Areas* by longtime THS member—and another former president—Joe Knetsch. It is Joe’s 12th book, in a long line that includes histories of the various Seminole Wars, Florida in the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, the Great Depression, the Cuban Missile Crisis and other periods. This one is a little bit different in that it is a collection of articles and talks that Joe has published and presented over a 30 year period. During that time, he was historian for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, so he had access to many early primary Florida sources, including survey records, the correspondence of Florida’s first Surveyor General, Robert Butler, and the records of early road building in the Tallahassee area. The result is an historical feast and a demonstration, if we needed it, that so-called “local” or “regional” history can have national or international importance. Here is just a sample of the topics he covers in this book: the life and career of Robert Butler, road builders of early Leon County, early settlers of Gadsden and Leon Counties, Achille Murat and the opening of public lands in Florida, life in the frontier forts during the Second Seminole War, the early and very difficult attempts to survey the Forbes Purchase, the attempt to build a cross-Florida canal, the importance of salt in Civil War Florida, as well as many other topics.

Printing technology has changed since Bill Rogers started Sentry Press. Now you don’t have to print thousands of copies of a title and then warehouse them for years until they either sell out or you remainder them. You can do short runs, and then if you need to, print some more as needed. Joe and Sentry only published a few hundred copies of this book. At his first signing, the first batch sold out quickly. At his second signing—the November Tallahassee Historical Society monthly meeting, Joe was doing a brisk business. I think he is going to have to do another printing. The paperback edition of the book costs $19.95; the hardback is $29.95. If you know Joe, you can get them from him. You can also get them from My Favorite Books and Midtown Reader.

When we talk about “Spanish Florida” most of us think of the period from 1513 when Ponce de Leon stumbled ashore at Tampa, went to a Rays game, and got himself shot by a poisoned arrow, up through 1763 when, in the aftermath of the French and Indian War, the Spanish decided they would rather winter in Havana than St. Pete and turned...
Florida over to the British. As Madeleine Carr, who taught with me for a number of years at TCC, but who has dedicated a good part of her life to researching and attempting to save the beauty of Wakulla Springs demonstrates in her new book, *Last Betrayal on the Wakulla: Florida’s Forgotten Spanish Period*, the second iteration of the Spanish, from 1783 to 1821, was probably more important on a lot of levels than the earlier period.

The Spanish got Florida back after they helped the American colonists win the revolution, and a number of things quickly became evident: first, the Spanish did not have the political or military muscle to govern Florida, or to control what became an increasingly violent border with Georgia. The result was an influx of white squatters and British and American traders who came to the territory and quickly began to interact with two groups of people, the very large Creek nation, which was already beginning to split in two over differing ideas of how to react to the Americans, and an increasing number of African slaves who fled the Georgia plantations for Spanish Florida, which was free territory. Key players in this drama included two Creek intermediaries called William and John Kennard, who set up a trading post on the Wakulla River in the present state park, and by doing so, “collaborated with the United States” in a process that ultimately split the Creeks, led to civil war, and forced their removal to territories west of the Mississippi River. Ultimately, Carr argues, the Kennards betrayed their own people.

Madeleine Carr’s *Last Betrayal on the Wakulla* is available as an ebook for $5.95 at lulu.com or in hardback for $39.99. It is also available in the gift shop at the Wakulla Springs Lodge.
Recently Lonnie Mann, Mary May and I were privileged to have a tour of the Benjamin Cheever Lewis House on Park Avenue, located across from the remaining trunk of the famed May Oak. Our tour was conducted by Rebecca Vickers, who manages an office in the house. This visit inspired me to take a fresh look at notebooks I have on the “Lewis State Bank and the Family Who Made It Possible” and refresh my memory about Lewis, his bank and his house. Once again I was reminded of the important role Lewis played in the early history of Tallahassee.

In 1836, Lewis arrived in Tallahassee from Salem, Massachusetts, and began clerking in the Drug Store of Dr. J. Edwin Stewart. On December 9, 1837, he, along with Dr. William Waddell and G.H. Randolph, founded another drug firm. In 1839, Waddell withdrew and the store was renamed Randolph & Lewis. Later, in 1846, Lewis became associated with Daniel Huntington Ames and changed the name to Lewis & Ames. After twenty years, in 1856, Lewis sold his interest in the drug business to Matthew Lively, at which time the store became Ames & Lively.

In 1856 Lewis became a private banker, and two years later, in October 1858, he, along with William Bailey and others, organized the State Bank of Florida, where Bailey served as president and Lewis was elected vice president. The Civil War put an end to the bank, which was liquidated in 1863, after which Lewis returned to his own private banking business. He also was heavily engaged in civic and political activities, serving on the City Council in 1868 and 1869.

On May 10, 1870, Lewis’s oldest son George joined him, and in 1873, his second son Edward also became a partner in the firm, now called B.C. Lewis & Sons, Private Bankers. Benjamin Cheever Lewis died in 1880, after which his third son, William Cheever, became a partner in the business. By that time, the firm had become the oldest extant banking institute in Florida. Over the years, the bank was known successively as B.C. Lewis (1856), B.C. Lewis & Son (1870), B .C. Lewis & Sons (1873), The First National Bank and State Savings Bank (1889), and finally the Lewis State Bank (1916).

In June 1985, the Tallahassee Democrat reported that the Lewis State Bank was purchased by the First Florida Bank. When the bank passed from the Lewis family, it had the longest history of continuous operation of any financial institution in Florida.

The Lewis House also has a history. Located at 316 Park Avenue, it was built in 1845 for Charles E. Dyke, long-time editor of the Floridian, a Tallahassee newspaper lasting from the 1850s to 1885. In 1850, Benjamin Cheever Lewis purchased the house, and around 1916 his grandson, George E. Lewis and his family moved in. Research indicates that descendants of Benjamin Cheever still owned the house in 1979 when it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. They retained ownership up to 1993 when the property was sold to the Florida Council for Community Mental Health, Inc. Additionally, a City of Tallahassee Grant & Loan Program made it possible for the house to be sensitively restored and converted into offices. Located on the grounds, in the rear of the house, is a replica of the original 1800s carriage house, built in 1995, and used as meeting space. It can be seen from Gadsden Street.

The Lewis House is an excellent example of adaptive preservation, the kind that the city should encourage as it continues to grow, and which helps Tallahassee maintain its historic character.

1 (Advertisement, Tallahassee Floridian May 26, 1836)
On December 7, 1941, the joy of the Christmas season in Tallahassee was shattered when Japanese aircraft attacked U.S. military bases in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and, over the next few hours, also invaded the Philippines Islands, tiny Wake Island and Guam. Hostilities quickly swept around the globe and by the end of the week, World War II had begun!

News of the Japanese attacks in the Pacific struck Tallahassee residents hard. At least six local families had relatives in the war zone, among them two former Democrat carriers, Paul J. Newman, based near Honolulu, and Lieutenant Talmadge Whiddon, stationed in the Philippines. Others in Honolulu included the A. L. Beenaert’s daughter and her husband, son of Mr. and Mrs. I. A. Metz, who was an electrical engineer for the U.S. Navy; William Whittier Brown, U.S. Army, the brother of Mrs. William Carson; and Frank Pichard, U.S. Navy, the son of the Eugene Pichards of Tallahassee.2 Nearby in Madison, Florida, one family received word that their 27-year-old son, Captain Colin P. Kelly, had been shot down while on a bombing mission north of Luzon, Philippines, the first U.S. Army Air Corps pilot to die in the Pacific war.3

Anticipating what lay ahead, within days hundreds of residents and college students had volunteered in some type of civil defense program. The Red Cross opened offices in the old Leon High School building on Park Avenue; the Leon Defense Council Auxiliary Firemen accepted applicants at the fire station; and Lieutenant Joe Frank, supply officer for the First Battalion of the Home Defense, called for “four privates” to assist at battalion headquarters in Tallahassee.4

Only a week into the war, townspeople had subscribed for almost $5,000 in E-bonds, and others had pledged over $500 monthly for defense stamps. Soon after, the Red Cross War Fund set up an office in the Cherokee Hotel and promised that Leon County would raise $8,000, its part of the nation-wide sum of $50,000. Two days after the doors opened volunteers had raised $1,500, a figure that within two weeks soared to $3,000, and with an assist of fund-raisers at holiday parties in some of the town’s finest homes, more was to come.5

Activities also picked up at Dale Mabry Air Field where over the past year the landing fields, aircraft and facilities had been vastly upgraded. Training was stepped up. Men practiced using machine guns, rifles, and pistols at the firing range near Lake Lafayette just south of the Federal Correction Institute.6 At Mabry Field, “bomb handling” was added to the practice of ordnance squads. The crews were trained and equipped to load “completely assembled bombs, pyrotechnics, and belted aircraft ammunition” into the bomb bay of a dummy aircraft set up at the field.7 The exercises were not
without accidents; on December 19, two fliers in training, a lieutenant and a private, died when their plane crashed in an open field near the Jacksonville Highway.\(^8\)

Through it all, the officers and enlisted men attempted to balance life between the war maneuvers and the spirit of the holiday season. The “Victorettes and Chaperones Clubs,” a group of local ladies who maintained “a high type” of entertainment for the soldiers, organized a week of Christmas parties and dances at the field and in the old Leon High School building, and the U. S. O. announced a round of entertainment for enlisted men at their club on West Jefferson Street. Young girls who would like to help out were invited.\(^9\)

Meanwhile, amid worsening news from the Pacific, local residents also tried to carry on with their seasonal traditions. A number of young men already in the military were home for the holidays.\(^10\) Shoppers crowded the stores, and parents and children added the final touches at home to welcome Santa Claus. At noon on Christmas Eve, the State Capitol closed and Governor Spessard L. Holland and his family prepared to observe their first official Christmas in the executive mansion. Dinner included a wild turkey killed by fourteen-year-old son, Billy Ben, and a goose the governor had bagged on a hunting trip. On Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, the churches in town and the chapel at Mabry Field held their usual services.\(^11\)

In the following days, the revelry was replaced by more solemn events that served to heighten the town’s awareness of the ongoing war. In the wake of Japan’s surprise air attacks in the Pacific, cities across America now exercised caution by ordering nightly black-outs. Florida
officials ceased to light the “big silvery dome” of the Capitol, and the Leon County Defense Council prepared to conduct its first simulation to teach people “what to do in the event of an air raid.” The Council issued instructions in advance: when the siren sounded everyone was to get indoors, turn off all lights, and stay put until they heard the all-clear signal. However, to affect a real experience the Council did not announce the hour of the first blackout. At 10 p.m. on Monday, December 29, the “wild-cat” whistle sounded, the community took shelter, and, aside from a few glitches, the drill was deemed satisfactory. The Council informed residents that in the future they would announce the times of the blackouts, and warned that any “unannounced” blackout would be a “real alarm.”

As December came to an end, the town and the air field prepared to welcome in 1942. On New Year’s Eve, the younger set planned another round of parties and masquerade balls; Mrs. W. V. Knott was scheduled to read her poetry over WTAL radio; and the Bethel AME Church made arrangements for the black community to celebrate Emancipation Day. On New Year’s Day, Senator LeRoy Collins would serve as Master of Ceremonies at the annual “Shopper’s Festival” behind the court house, and Governor Holland was on his way by bus to Miami where he planned to attend the Orange Bowl.

Half a world away, Manila had fallen to the Japanese, and U. S. forces, outmanned and poorly-equipped, had evacuated into Bataan where they dug in to fight a last-ditch effort. Looking ahead to 1942, the editor of the Dale Mabry Observer may have reflected the mood of all Tallahassee when he wrote that “we face a year of hard work, sweet and sorrowful, with an ever-growing task before us,” but are “resolved that we will do our share to defend the country.”

Notes
3. “Madison is Planning Memorial to Brave Young Captain Kelly,” *TD*, December 14, 1941; May, *The Steadfast Line*, p. 49.
5. “Red Cross Sets $8,000 as Quota for City,” *TD*, December 9, 1941; “Defense Bond Sales Growing; ‘Week is Proclaimed For Red Cross War Fund,” *TD*, December 14, 1941; “$1,500 Raised for Red Cross,” *TD*, December 16, 1941; “Red Cross Has More Reports,” *TD*, December 22.
7. “Bomb Handling is Added to Practice of Ordnance Men,” *TD*, December 28, 1941;
10. “Personals,” *TD*, December 24, p. 2; December 26, p. 2; December 28, p. 3; December 29, p. 2; December 30, p. 2, 1941.
12. “Tallahassee Joins State and Southeast in Blackout to Test Organized Civil Defense Against Attack,” “Tallahassee's Blackout Good; Not Perfect,” *TD*, December 30, 1941;
Historical Happenings

Frenchtown Historical Marker Trail: On November 8, the City of Tallahassee and the John G. Riley Center/Museum unveiled nine markers that tell the history of Frenchtown, one of Tallahassee’s oldest African American communities.

Bottom left: Althemese Barnes, President of the John G. Riley Center and Museum. Bottom center: Frenchtown t-shirts made for the marker unveiling. Bottom right: One of the Frenchtown markers unveiled on November 8.
Happy Holidays from the Tallahassee Historical Society!

Tallahassee Historical Society, Inc. - 501 (c)(3)
Membership Application

Annual membership dues: Individual, $20; Family, $30; College, $10; High School, $5
Membership extends one year from payment date.

Make checks payable to:
Tallahassee Historical Society, Inc., and include this form with your payment.

Hand deliver at event or mail to:
Membership Coordinator
Tallahassee Historical Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 3713
Tallahassee, FL 32315

Membership type (Check One): Individual ☐ Family ☐ College ☐ High School ☐ Amount paid: __
Date: / / 
Name: ___________ Family member(s), if applicable:
1) __________ 2) ________
Address: ______________________
City: _______ State: _______ Zip: ___
Phone: ( ) _______ Email: __________

Thank you for your support!