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## Regional and Local Historical Societies

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REGIONAL AND LOCAL HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

**THE HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION \***

by MRS. JOHN BRANCH, *Chairman*

There are no short cuts to obtaining a County Historical Commission and Museum. Such objectives come to fruition through the concentrated efforts of many interested persons. Usually the leader has enough enthusiasm to inspire others to join in the cause. Once he lets his project be known, he finds there are others eager to help.

You need the cooperation of the City or County, or both, one of which will probably furnish the site and one or both funds for the project. The City or County Park Board will be glad to cooperate in keeping and beautifying the grounds. The various Garden Clubs could contribute to this end.

In the instance of creating the Hillsborough County Historical Commission, the County Commissioners were approached and discussions followed. Consent was given by the County Board with the request that a few endorsements urging the creation of a Commission, be submitted. This was requested by the Commissioners to serve as evidence that the proposal had popular appeal

Members of the Daughters of The American Revolution and United Daughters of The Confederacy gave a great deal of help in getting endorsements. The County Parent-Teachers' Association which had a membership of some eighteen thousand was contacted. It secured the endorsement of its membership. The Federation of Women's Clubs, The Women's Club, Chamber of Commerce, The Junior Chamber of Commerce, and many other clubs and organizations, comprising a membership of some twenty-five thousand persons supported the project. The first step took about six months. The next

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\* Mrs. Branch was asked to tell of the establishment of the successful Hillsborough County Historical Commission in the belief that other counties might be added to the very few in Florida which have led the way in a work which is so necessary if Florida's local history is to be preserved.

step was to draw up an enabling act authorizing the County to create a County Historical Commission. The enabling act provided for three thousand dollars annually. The proposal then was presented to the members of the Legislature of our County for their approval. These officials readily gave their approval, and when the next Legislature met, in 1949, the authorization of a Historical Commission for Hillsborough County became a law.

The Commission is composed of eleven persons keenly interested in doing this kind of work. They were carefully selected. They serve without pay. It involves of course the gathering of historical data, the assembling of old documents, correspondence and interviews with "old timers" who may furnish important information concerning almost forgotten events.

We have had the good fortune of having as our County Historian an eminent retired newspaperman, D. B. McKay, former mayor of Tampa and former publisher of the *Tampa Daily Times*. Mr. McKay's rich knowledge of historical Florida and his keen interest in the Commission have been a valuable help.

Our first project has been to gather the pioneer family records, the cemetery records and old Bible records. The County has an "Old Timers" Association and for the past two years we have sponsored a picnic at which we registered all the "old timers." To qualify one must have been a resident of the County for forty years or more. Of course, many have lived in the County longer than forty years.

The *Manual on Small Museums*, by Laurence Vail Coleman, Director, The American Association of Museums, Headquarters at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington 25, D. C., found in a few public libraries, is excellent for Director suggestions.

The plan now is to have a general law for the whole State, so that each County will not need to have a special Act. This proposed legislation will need the backing from people

all over the State. Just before your legislators leave for the 1953 Session mention this to your local members and let them know it has your approval. Then later write them letters reminding them to push it through.

If you would have a County Historical Commission and Museum, start to work now by talking to every person you meet. Carry your campaign to Civic and Service Clubs and try to get their support. It is not too soon to begin.

It is planned to make our library outstanding in historical and genealogical material. Polk County, which is a neighbor of Hillsborough, had one of the first Historical Commissions in the State. Through the able leadership of Mr. M. D. Wilson, it purchased the United States census records of the southern states from the earliest times on microfilm.

In addition to the regular members, the by-laws of our Commission permit us to have associate members, who assist in the activities.

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#### **THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN FLORIDA**

This Association is continuously active, with well-attended program meetings at regular intervals. On May 23, last, Mr. Gene Plowman of the Associated Press addressed the Association and their guests on "John Ringling, the Circus King," a subject with which he is well acquainted, as he is the author of the forthcoming "The Amazing John Ringling." His talk covered much of John Ringling's life, from his humble beginning to his extraordinary and generous gift to the people of Florida.

On June 26 Marjory Stoneman Douglas, on the subject "The Sense of Time," told of her numerous interesting experiences while gathering material for her books in remote sections of South Florida. Two sound films on "maps" were shown.

Another historical marker was placed and dedicated by the Association on July 25 in commemoration of Mrs. Julia D.

Tuttle's large part in the founding of modern Miami. Senator Scott M. Loftin made the address of dedication to the "Mother of Miami."

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#### **SEMINOLE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

The preservation of local history should be the foremost objective of the history-minded people of Florida. Realizing this, several local and regional historical societies have been organized in various parts of Florida during the past two years, thus adding their efforts to the few associations who have long been carrying on.

A group of public-spirited citizens of Sanford and vicinity with a warm interest in the past of their area, met on July 10, last, and formed the Seminole County Historical Society. The first objective is a building, planned as a library and museum, whose first and foremost accession will be the library of General Henry S. Sanford. Mrs. F. E. Roumillat was elected president, Mr. Randall Chase vice-president, and the other officials are: Mrs. C. R. Dawson, Dr. J. B. Root, Mr. John W. Meisch, Mrs. C. Stuart Brown, and Mrs. Fred T. Williams. An advisory committee was named, being: Mrs. Miriam Russell, Mr. Volie Williams, Jr., Mr. Rolland Dean, Mrs. A. R. King, and Mrs. Roy Tillis.

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#### **HALIFAX HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Recently elected officers of the Halifax Historical Society are, Mr. W. L. Coursen, president; succeeding John R. Parkinson; Mr. R. L. Smith, vice-president; Mrs. Ianthe Bond Hebel, secretary-treasurer, both being reelected. The directors are: Mr. C. C. Durkee, Mr. Virgil R. Hall, Mrs. Lucille Maheau, Mr. Leon J. Robbins, Dr. Josie M. Rogers, and Mr. Calvert Smith.

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**GENERAL CLINCH MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION**

At a meeting of the General Clinch Memorial Association in Fort Clinch State Park on June 26, last, Mr. Harold Colee made the principal address.

Mr. Dan Kelly is president of the Association, whose objective is to preserve the history of the Fort and the area, as well as furthering the recreational facilities of the Park.