



# *South Brevard Historical Society, Inc.*

*Founded 1966*

*E Newsletter*

*February 2022*

**\*SATURDAY, February 12th  
3:00 pm**

**MELBOURNE PUBLIC LIBRARY  
540 E. Fee Avenue, Melbourne  
Mask wearing encouraged**

**We Present:**

## **SAVING GREEN GABLES**

a presentation by  
**Marion Ambrose**

**President of Green Gables at  
Historic Riverview Village**



**Green Gables and Surrounding Landscape 1898**

**Marion will**

- \*review the history of this community treasure**
- \*give an update on the status of the plan to purchase**
- \*tell us how we can help save and preserve GG for future generations**

**\*IF, FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY REASONS, THIS PRESENTATION MUST BE CANCELLED, YOU WILL BE NOTIFIED VIA AN E-ALERT PLUS IT WILL BE POSTED ON OUR WEBSITE: [southbrevardhistory.org](http://southbrevardhistory.org).**

### **DEAR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS,**

“Thank You” to all who responded to the special email about Historian Weona Cleveland’s 97<sup>th</sup> birthday. She was pleasantly surprised by the cards and letters she received. She has enriched our lives through her interviews because she let folks share the experience of their lives. Her interviews take us beyond the dates and documents of time. **THANK YOU WEONA!**

And....thanks to Weona for inspiring this E Newsletter’s Special Feature. I was looking through a SBHS scrapbook for an article or photos and found Weona’s interview with a woman who shared her memories of very, very early Melbourne. Mary Lawrence came to Melbourne in 1900 at the age of twenty five..... You may identify with her description.

And then....I became more curious about Mary Lawrence so I googled her name and came upon “The 110 Club”, “the world’s largest supercentenarian forum”. Yes, I found out more about Mary. If you’re curious, just google Mary’s name along with Melbourne Florida or the “110 Club” for a great introduction to this site.

**Stay Well....we hope to see you soon!**

*Carol*

**Carol Andren, President SBHS  
(321.725.4115)**

### The SBHS Annual Meeting

We will conduct a short Annual Business Meeting immediately prior to the general meeting program. As a reminder of the items to be voted on, a copy of the Nominating and Budget Committee Reports are attached to this Newsletter.

## THINGS TO DO: READ

### BOOK REVIEW by Kathi Harbaugh

#### Chappie: The Life and Times of Daniel James, Jr. by J. Alfred Phelps

First a little promotion for our wonderful Brevard County Library system. While trying to find a book to review for our newsletter, I wandered into the Florida section of the Fee Ave library. Most of our libraries have a section designated for books about Florida or written by Florida authors. So the next time you are in your library looking for a book to read, try browsing this section. If you can't get to the library, get on the library website and put "Florida" in the search bar. Different leads will show up to help you find something that may interest you.

One of the books I found this month is Chappie: The Life and Times of Daniel James, Jr. by J. Alfred Phelps. In the early 1950's when my family was stationed at OTIS AFB, I overheard my father talk to my mother about this man named Chappie James and how he thought he was really going to make it in the Air Force. The memory has been so clear that when I saw this book I felt it would tell me why I retained it. And indeed it has.

Chappie James was a Florida native son, born in Pensacola, FL on February 20, 1920. The place and time of his birth influenced in many ways his becoming the first African American four-star general in any branch of the American military service. Watching the planes fly over Pensacola gave young Chappie the desire to be a pilot. His parents gave him the tools he needed to succeed. His father, Daniel James, Sr., had little formal education, but had a strong work ethic. Unusual for the times, his mother, Lillie A. James had graduated from high school. To overcome the the abysmal education opportunities for black children in 1920's Florida, Lillie James opened her own school, first in her home and then in a small building built by her husband.

I read with interest the names of military facilities like Tuskegee, AL, Maxwell AFB at Montgomery, AL, Lockbourne Army Air Field at Columbus, OH, Otis AFB, MA, Da Nang AB, Vietnam, and Wheelus AFB, Libya where James was stationed. The book chronicles James' training as a pilot and his journey from Army Air Corps cadet to a 4-star general in the US Air Force. It also chronicles the special struggles of James and his fellow troops in a military that didn't always want African-Americans. Each duty assignment required new skills from public relations with the civilians living near a base where he was in command to staring down Col Muammar Khadafy at the gates of Wheelus AFB.

Chappie James took his last flight on a Lockheed C-141 Starlifter to Andrew Air Force Base on February 25, 1978 and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Author J. Alfred Phelps used military archives, letters, interviews, and a vast bibliography in researching this book. His style is a bit military and sounds like a "Frontline" report. But he covers an important time in the history of our military forces and those who served in them.

The South Brevard Historical Society, Inc., is a non-profit corporation and an IRS 501 (C) 3 organization. All contributions are tax-deductible by limits of law. A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Florida Division of Consumer Services by calling 1-800-HELP FLA. P.O. Box 1064, Melbourne, Florida, 32902-1064

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[www.southbrevardhistory.org](http://www.southbrevardhistory.org)

**SPECIAL FEATURE: MEMORIES OF OLD MELBOURNE**

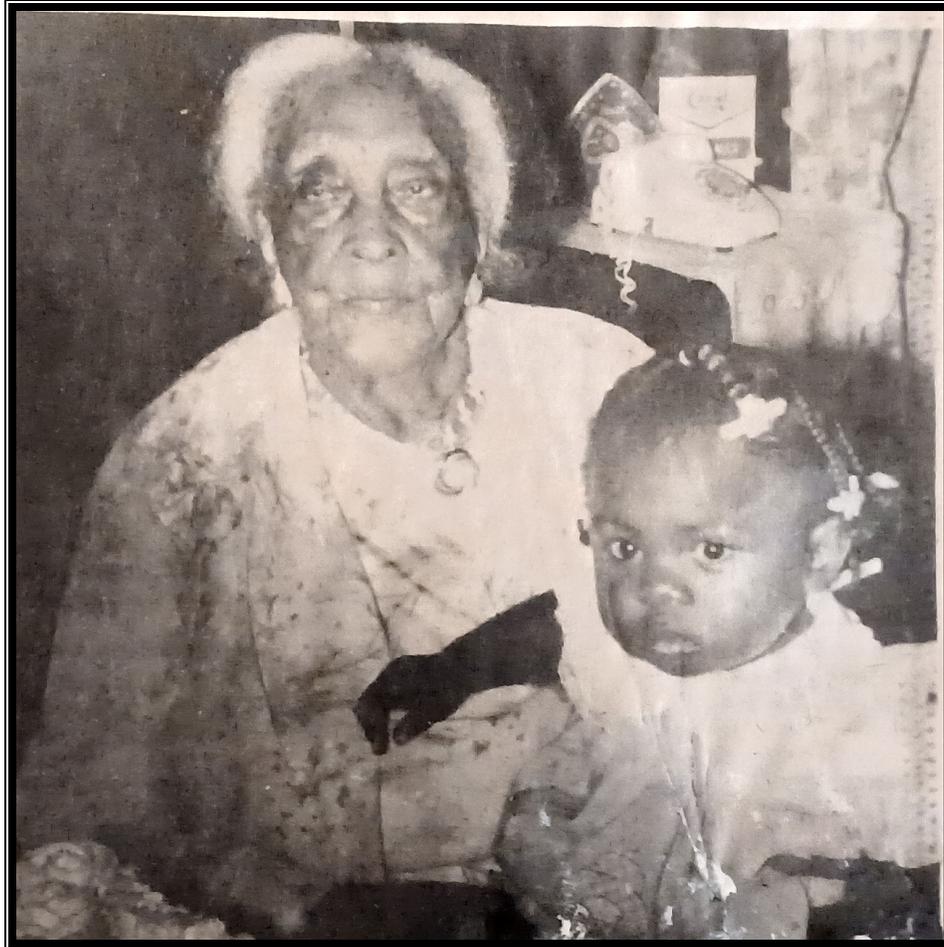
This article, found in a SBHS scrapbook, is a 1980 Times newspaper article published during Melbourne's Centennial Year. Thank You to Historian Weona Cleveland for permission to reprint and share it with you.

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## **Six generations all born in Brevard County**

By **WEONA CLEVELAND** Times Staff writer

Wednesday, November 5, 1980 The Times



**The oldest and the youngest of 396 family members living in Melbourne: Mary Lawrence, 105 years old, and great-great-great granddaughter, Shandria Meredith, 14 months old**

The Chamber of Commerce would certainly not approve of Mary Lawrence's description of Melbourne: "It was nothing but mosquitoes and horseflies!"

But then, Mrs. Lawrence doesn't worry about the Chamber of Commerce. She tells it straight. Just like it is. Or maybe, just like it was.

She remembers Melbourne from the year 1900. And back then, it was just mosquitoes, horseflies, dirt roads and 12 families.

Mrs. Lawrence was 25 years old that year of 1900.

And on Oct. 28, 1980, she celebrated her 105th birthday. At least that is the way her family figures it. Back in 1875, when she was born, they weren't issuing birth certificates much in Jefferson County, Fla.

Mrs. Lawrence's parents were Harry and Diane Norton. They were born into slavery and became freedmen when both were in their teens.

If born in 1875, as her family believes, Mrs. Lawrence was born during the administration of President Ulysses S. Grant and has lived through the administrations of 22 United States presidents. She was born six years before Booker T. Washington first went to Tuskegee Institute as a teacher, and 15 years after the birth of George Washington Carver.

She married in 1899 and she and her husband came to Grant by the Florida East Coast Railroad. Lawrence worked for the railroad in Grant, and the next year the couple moved to Melbourne. Their first child, Ethel, was born in Melbourne in 1900.

Lawrence continued to work for the railroad here. The couple purchased property south of Crane Creek for which, says Mrs. Lawrence, "We paid \$1 per lot."

Mrs. Lawrence recalls clearly that she joined Allen Chapel AME Church on June 10, 1900. and is its oldest living member. She remembers that all of her children were born at home and delivered by midwives. Mary Stone and Mary Brothers are the midwives she remembers.

She used to walk to Front Street to get her mail at the post office, as well as to buy groceries and other goods at the McBride Store or Claude Edge's store. She has never driven an automobile and has never flown in a plane.

Mrs. Lawrence operated a big rooming house on Lipscomb Street in Melbourne for many years. It burned in 1928. She also ran a nursery school and did washing and ironing. She even has one of the old-style seven pound irons that she used to heat on the stove.

A staunch church member and strong Christian woman, Mrs. Lawrence has never danced nor partied much, and has never taken a swim in the Atlantic Ocean, except to "dip my toes in."

She says she used to take her children across the Indian River to the ocean beach on the Beaujean ferry and they would enjoy the water while she watched over them.

Grandson Dewey Lanier, nicknamed "Buster Lawrence" by his grandmother, has done considerable research into the family history and genealogy. He took time off a while back and journeyed to north Florida where he talked with at least one old timer who had known his grandmother. He also talked with Mrs. Lawrence's 103- year-old brother, Arthur Norton, who lives in Floral City, Fla.

In addition to this background work, Lanier and other Lawrence family members have compiled some amazing statistics.

Mrs. Lawrence is Melbourne's oldest resident at the present time. She gave birth to four sons and five daughters, with only three sons and one daughter now surviving- She has 30 grandchildren, 84 great grandchildren, 52 great-great-grandchildren, and four great-great-great-grandchildren. As far as the Lawrences know, Mrs. Lawrence is the only person in Brevard who has six generations of her family living and all have been born in Brevard County. The most staggering statistic is that the Lawrence family and its various branches comprise a total of 396 members now living in Melbourne.

Mrs. Lawrence was honored at a birthday party at her home on Oct 25, with 142 people present for the occasion. About the only family member who wasn't there was Mrs. Lawrence's brother, Arthur Norton.