



South Brevard Historical Society, Inc.

Founded 1966

E Newsletter

SEPTEMBER 2020

DEAR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS,

Again, it is my hope that this Newsletter finds you, your family and friends well. This is always to be assumed but it seems important to “say” it at this time. Speaking of time, I don’t believe that any other summer has passed so quickly. Carl’s and my family album project is still at the beginning stage but upon finding four more boxes of cherished documents and photos we have already moved it to a larger table. The total house clean up and clean out is yet to be accomplished. I did note that replacing appliances and occasionally a car was a popular activity.....by necessity. Fortunately, we were able to replace our washer/dryer within only two months.

This is a good time to record these events of our time and how we are affected by them. Many of us, like me, neglected to ask parents and grandparents critical questions about “the times of their lives”. I started late and got a few bits of information but if only they had written journals or diaries how interesting and inciteful that would be. Future generations can appreciate this era through “his-stories” and “her-stories”. Official documents can provide a framework but our stories give the past meaning.

Please feel free to contact the Society or myself via the internet: contact@southbrevardhistory.org, or phone me at 725.4115. The SBHS and I welcome your comments.

Stay Well...Carol

Meetings and Programs

We will resume program meetings as soon as it is deemed safe. Unfortunately, we have been notified by the Melbourne Fee Avenue Library that the large meeting room will not be available until further notice with no suggested date being offered. We are looking for an alternative meeting place and have programs ready to schedule.

The Collection

I regret to announce that Collection Chairman, Jeff MacMakin, has resigned. His work to evaluate and reorganize Collection materials was greatly appreciated. That work continues, however. In anticipation that our future will not include a museum such as we previously had at the Henegar Complex, we are deaccessioning large items that might be used in a room setting display. Deaccessioned items will be offered to other non profit, historical organizations or donated to a charity. This is in keeping with our Collection Policy. We have loaned several items to Green Gables for display at the Wells House as well.

We do have a large collection of small, display case exhibit sized items remaining and hope that we can utilize those as part of our community outreach. In addition, Diane Newman will soon begin to organize our paper archives. They will become accessible and usable.

Website

We continue to receive occasional queries via access to our website. Often the answer is to refer someone to the proper resource or organization. The website will be a great way to share gems from the archive and become an even better resource.

Green Gables

Keep up with news about the Florida grant for purchase application and all the exciting activities being planned by going to: greengables.org.

Something To Do

If taking a drive is part of your “get out and get away” routine and you enjoy checking out historic sites the Brevard County Historical Commission publication “Historic Brevard” is something you may want to consult. If you don’t have a copy, how to get it and other information about our county is located at <http://www.brevardfl.gov/HistoricalCommission/Home>.

Newsletter: A Special Feature

As a Thank You for your continued interest and support we plan to include special articles of local interest in future E Newsletters.. This issue’s article was written by Diane Barile as a SBHS special feature article for *Senior Scene* magazine. Don Jennings began this during his term as president and Diane has continued on our behalf.

SEPTEMBER SPECIAL FEATURE:

Running Rum and Bootlegging Spirits

Huge profits and plenty of adventure supplied alcohol to thirsty Americans during the National Prohibition. In 1929, the first boat out of the just opened Sebastian Inlet was owned by Bill McCoy, a licensed sea captain. Bill and his brother were experienced boat builders who ran a coastal shipping business.

The destination as they sped to the Atlantic was to Nassau in the Bahamas, a frequent McCoy port of call. An old friend and business partner, Gertrude Lythgoe, kept a nightclub and warehouse there full of the top-quality English booze. Where else would you find the liquor craved by the alcohol-deprived Americans?

Because bottled cases of hooch on small vessels were bulky, noisy, and unwieldy to stow, the McCoy’s developed an efficient shipping method. Five bottles wrapped in straw were pyramided and sewn in burlap, muffling the sound of clinking glass. The bundles looked like smoked hams, thus the title given “hams.” A client could imbibe three “hams” for Christmas dinner and serve turkey.

Sometimes orders were dropped at West End or Bimini Island, close to Miami or West Palm Beach. A small boat would leave South Florida, pick up an order on Bimini, drop the load at a secret cove near the Florida East Coast Railway. The vessel could then check back into the port of departure from their supposed unsuccessful fishing trip.

Florida sent boxcars full of produce to northern cities almost daily. Altered citrus boxes or barrels for shipping tomatoes or fish held a shallow tray on top for produce above the imported “hams” hidden below—a sort of ham and tomato sandwich. With lucrative side deals for railroad workers, the special cargo was bound for New York and Chicago.

The McCoy’s, non-drinkers, were known for their honest dealings in quality merchandise. With their reliable reputation buyers were assured of the ‘Real McCoy’ and paid top dollar. Early in these escapades, neither the Coast Guard nor local sheriffs had boats fast enough to overtake the sleek craft redesigned or improved by the McCoy’s. Each year brought escalating speed, agility, and maneuverability by both the bootleggers and the government boats.

Outside the American territorial waters, the liquor ships could be met, quickly unloaded to smaller boats, and rapidly depart. Since the Coast Guard had no aircraft, rum could be flown inland to grassy runways. Float-craft airplanes could land on the Indian River before docking in Melbourne Harbor.

Souped-up cars ran night-time excursions to deliver “hams” and cocktail ingredients to the fancy casinos, hotels, and estates in the 1920s boom time Florida. The deluge of underground cash soon caught the attention of Al Capone who created warehouses to store “stuff” before shipment. Fishermen had sheltered coves for protection from storms. Those near the railroad made transfers simple.

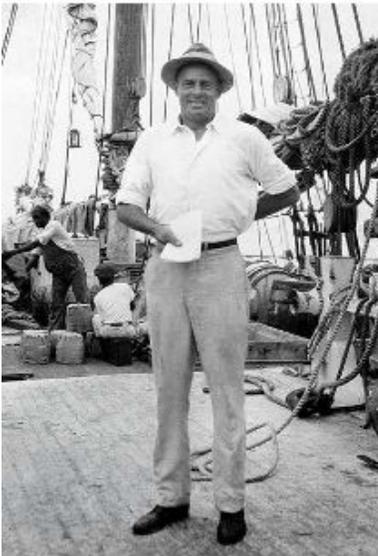
Stories circulated for years about meeting up with Al Capone during his drives from Miami to check on his business connections. One fellow swears he played pool with Capone at Shorty's Bar in Melbourne.

Soon, the Coast Guard and organized crime bosses both wanted to put an end to the McCoy exploits; one, for legality and the other, to squash lucrative competition. Bill, the "Real McCoy," met his end and was arrested by the Coast Guard off the coast of New York. His nine-month jail sentence was arranged at a comfortable New York hotel. Once released, he retired and never worked again. He died at age 71 in 1948 on his boat—The Blue Lagoon out of Stuart.



Souped-up contact boats carried the booze from the rum runners back to shore.

(photos appeared in *Boat U.S.* magazine/source *The Mariner's Museum*)



Bill McCoy on board his beloved boat, 1924.

Thank You to *Senior Scene* magazine for sharing this article. *Senior Scene* magazine can be found online at: <https://seniorscenemag.com/>. The September edition is now out.....check out Diane's most recent article.

P.O. Box 1064, Melbourne, Florida, 32902-1064

Visit us on:

www.southbrevardhistory.org

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8HAaqqBGAbz_GHMC3TZe-Q