

# Preservation News

A PUBLICATION OF THE LEE TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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LEE TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION, INC.

*“Preservation...the ultimate recycling.”*

THE MISSION OF LEE TRUST IS TO PROMOTE HISTORIC PRESERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION, ADVOCACY AND ACQUISITION.

## THE HALL OF FIFTY STATES, READY FOR A COMEBACK

*By Gerri Reaves (original version of this article appeared in The River Weekly News)*

The structure we call the Hall of Fifty States is actually only a segment of the Moorish-style Pleasure Pier built in 1927. The hall was a second-story auditorium space on the pier extended over the Caloosahatchee River just west of the existing bridge at Heitman Street.

The Pleasure Pier was the grandest amenity in Evans Park (the origins of today's Centennial Park) during the booming 1920s when the city invested greatly in public spaces and recreation. Park visitors enjoyed tennis and shuffleboard courts, concerts, a youth center, and more.

The City of Fort Myers completed the recreation pier, auditorium, and municipal pool at the pier's entrance in spring 1927, all for approximately \$129,000.

The Pleasure Pier served as the city's community and social center. Nationally known dance bands such as Paul Whiteman appeared there. It hosted the Edison Pageant of Light Coronation Ball, as well as concerts, lectures, and talent shows. However, due to the deterioration of the pilings, the hall was moved to Edwards Drive in 1943 and renamed the Hall of Fifty States. Some of the materials were recycled to build the Civic Center, which adjoined the west side of the hall.

The structures welcomed World War II soldiers stationed at Buckingham and Page Fields. The Chamber of Commerce, the USO, the Fort Myers Tourist Center, and City Shuffleboard Office were among the entities headquartered there at one time or another.



*Photo courtesy of the Florida State Photo Archives. The Hall of Fifty States originally was part of the 1927 Pleasure Pier on the Caloosahatchee River near the foot of Heitman Street. The hall was moved to Edwards Drive in 1943.*

The current debate over the fate of the Hall of Fifty States highlights the economic and cultural advantages of saving historic structures. After all, heritage tourism is a vital and growing segment of the nation's tourism industry, and plays an integral role in revitalizing downtown Fort Myers.

In his 2003 downtown redevelopment plan, city planner Andre Duany recommended moving and renovating the historic hall. At that time, he envisioned it among a cluster of civic buildings a few blocks away at the northeast corner of Bay and Lee Streets.

However, in 2007, the Civic Center and shuffleboard courts were demolished,

leaving the historic hall with a heartbreakingly bereft appearance.

And so it has stood ever since. But there's reason to be optimistic that this historic building will survive.

According to Jared Beck, principal planner for the city, "The City is actively pursuing opportunities for future use and restoration of the Hall of Fifty States." The Lee Trust for Historic Preservation is interested in preserving the hall, and the organization is engaged in ongoing talks and meetings with the city to that end.

Gina Taylor, executive director of the Lee Trust, is heartened that there's so much community interest in the hall. She says that should the Lee Trust be designated by the city, the organization is ready to champion the cause and raise the funds to rehabilitate the structure, with the goal of leasing the hall. She says that the principal concern, however, is that the building be preserved, whether by the Lee Trust or another organization ready to assume the responsibility.

Meanwhile, the 50- by 64-foot original maple-wood dance floor awaits the return of waltzers and fox-trotters. The elevated 24- by 50-foot stage longs for dramatists and other performers once again to tread its boards.

Decorative medallions over the columned north-entry porch shine in the afternoon sun, reminding us that fun by the river in Fort Myers has always been part of history and should continue to be so.

*Source: The archives of the Southwest Florida Historical Society; The Story of Fort Myers by Karl S. Grismer; and the Feasibility Study for the Relocation & Restoration of the Hall of Fifty States, prepared for the City of Fort Myers in June 2007 by BSSW Architects.*



*Photo by Gerri Reaves. Today the last remnant of the grand Pleasure Pier awaits restoration and a new role as a public space.*



*Photo by Gerri Reaves. One of four decorative medallions over the north porch roof.*

## BLACK HISTORY MONTH EXHIBIT

In honor of Black History Month, the Cultural Heritage Center currently has an exhibit entitled "Early African-American Pioneers of Lee County" on display at the Southwest Florida Regional Airport. This exhibit highlights some of the notable individuals and places from Sanibel and Fort Myers. The exhibit located at Door 5 West Atrium on the 2nd floor main level will be on display until the end of the month.

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For  
Historic Preservation**

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Lee Trust for Historic Preservation, Inc. was founded in 1993 and is dedicated to preserving and developing the heritage of Lee County and its municipalities.

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Lee Trust is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation and all gifts made to Lee Trust are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

## THE STUCKY HOME IN DEAN PARK

By Gerri Reaves (original version of this article appeared in *The River Weekly News*)

This historic home looks much as it did when it was built in 1924 by Harry Clarke Stucky and Mary Ellen "Nell" Evans Stucky on Providence Street in Dean Park. It is the only home in Dean Park that has always been owned by the same family.

The structure's decorative half-timbering and the steeply pitched roof are touches of the Tudor Revival architectural style.

The home's historic authenticity extends to its interior, for it retains the original floor plan. Only the kitchen, remodeled in the 1940s, has undergone major changes.

Many other original features typical of the period are intact, such as bathroom "chicken-wire" tile floors, built-in bookshelves, arched doorways, window seats, and hardwood floors. Even the underground cistern once used to collect rainwater remains on the property.

Harry Stucky is best known in Fort Myers for establishing, along with Virgil C. Robb and W.R. Lee, the furniture emporium that evolved into Robb & Stucky Furniture, which began in 1915 as Lee & Robb Furniture Company.

Ellen Stucky, the only child of Harry and Nell, lived in the house for 82 years, from the time it was completed until her death in August 2007. She was a true native of Dean Park, for she had been born in 1921 just around the corner at Michigan and Cranford. Her great-uncle and -aunt, Edward L. Evans and Carrie Belle Hendry Evans, both Fort Myers pioneers, lived nearby on Providence Street.

Ellen Stucky's cousin, John Hamilton Evans, Jr., currently lives in the Stucky home. He was born in Fort Myers, but grew up in West Palm Beach. He has delightful memories of visiting the Stucky household, which had "a very gracious atmosphere," he recalls.

On the market for the first time, the Stucky house is destined to be home to another lucky family.

Sources: Archives of the Southwest Florida Historical Society.



*Courtesy of John Evans for the Ellen Stucky Estate*

*Harry Clarke Stucky and Mary Ellen "Nell" Evans Stucky built this home in 1924 on Providence Street in Dean Park*



*Photo by Gerri Reaves*

*The home looks much as it did in the 1920s, minus the first-floor awnings*

## THANK YOU TO KARIN S. WOLFE

We would like to give a special thank you to Karin S. Wolfe who has taken on the arduous task of preparing nominations for both the Dean Park Historic District and the Gwynne Institute for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. She is working with the city planning office and Lee Trust in conjunction with her Master of Arts degree in Historic Preservation at the Savannah College of Art and Design. The nominations are expected to be completed and submitted to the SHPO by early Spring.

In September 2009 she began program work on-line through the Savannah College of Art and Design with a Master of Arts Degree in Historic Preservation. As part of her Historic Preservation Research and Survey course, Karin will be learning the process of nominating individual structures and historic districts to the National Register of Historic Places. With Ft. Myers being so rich in history and inventory in historic structures it was a natural choice for her to work in this area in conjunction with Lee Trust and the Preservation Office. The projects we will be focusing on for National Designation are the Gwynne Institute and Dean Park.

## HEART OF HENDRY EVENT



Heart Of Hendry Event was a tremendous success. Since the county made a proclamation for HEART OF HENDRY DAY the event may become an annual event.

## NEWS FROM THE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The March 11 meeting will take place at 7 p.m. in the meeting room at the American Legion on the corner of MLK Boulevard and Jackson Street. Senior Reporter Mike Walcher of WINK TV will be speak about the history of local television.



## CALADIUMS SALE!



For years, Caladiums were the signature fund raiser of the Burroughs's Home Society, raising much needed funds for the restoration and maintenance of one of our city jewels. This spring, the Lee Trust for Historic is sponsoring a Caladium fund raiser to help raise funds for endangered historic sites, throughout the city. You can help preserve an historic structure while beautifying your yard. Caladiums are easy to grow. They may be planted during the Spring or Summer as soon as the cold weather has past. You can plant in sun or shade, Caladiums remain beautiful to look at for months, and, unlike cut flowers that die soon after delivery. The perfect addition for your garden. Please complete the order form below and mail your payment to :Lee Trust for Historic Preservation, PO BOX 1035, Fort Myers FL 33902 by March 1. Caladiums will be delivered the last week in March.



**LEE TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION, INC**

Mailing Address: PO Box 1035 Fort Myers FL 33902  
(239) 939-7278  
Downtown Office: 1609 Hendry Street Fort Myers FL

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**CALADIUM ORDER FORM**  
**6-10 MIXED SIZE BLUBS \$6.00**  
**15-25 MIXED SIZE BULBS \$15.00**

Four Varieties Available  
 Last Day to Order: March 15      Order Delivery: Week of March 29

Fancy Leaf:	White	Pink	Red	Mixed		
Name	Address and Phone Number			Color Choice	#	Total

## FOUNDING FAMILY TREES AT PEEPLES COURT



The Bar Association's owner Ron Kopko, interior designer, generously donated his time and talent to personally decorate ten Christmas trees depicting founding families of Lee County. Not only was this a beautiful addition to downtown's Holiday Stroll event, it also raised funds that go toward Historic Preservation in Lee County. All ten Christmas trees were purchased by the highest bidder in the silent auction that was held for almost 3 weeks. A special Thank You to the Bar Association for their dedication and generosity to the Lee Trust.

## HISTORIC DOWNTOWN FORT MYERS CELEBRATES 20 YEARS ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Originally a Seminole War post in the mid 1800's, downtown Fort Myers grew over the decades to become the governmental, commercial, and social center of Southwest Florida. Unfortunately, like most cities throughout the country, downtown was not immune to the suburbanization movement of the 1960's and 1970's, and felt the detriment this had on historic communities.



Recognizing the importance of historic downtowns, the City of Fort Myers, citizens, property owners, and merchants committed to keep downtown a vibrant part of Southwest Florida. During the 1980's the Downtown Redevelopment Agency was established, and the Historic Preservation Ordinance was adopted, and by 1989 the first buildings in downtown began restoration and rehabilitation. Building on the momentum, the City achieved the monumental accomplishment in 1990 when downtown was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Since then the renaissance of historic downtown has continued, and today it is again a showpiece of Southwest Florida.

To commemorate the architectural, social, and cultural significance of historic downtown, the second annual Anniversary event was held on Saturday, January 16th, 2010 to offer an entirely free, family friendly event to showcase this historic community treasure.

The event, sponsored by the Lee Trust for Historic Preservation, Chris Tel Construction, and *The News-Press*, offered more than two dozen free activities for enjoyment on downtown streets. The event also received the special honor of a proclamation by Mayor Henderson, which recognized the critical element preservation has in revitalizing historic downtowns, the vital role preservation has in developing heritage tourism and its benefit to local economic bases, and the significant role preservation has within our community!

Event partners included the City of Fort Myers, the Fort Myers Redevelopment Agency, the Southwest Florida Museum of History, the Imaginarium Hands on Museum and Aquarium, the Edison & Ford Winter Estates, Iberia Bank, AIA Florida Southwest, and the Dean Park Historic District.

## THANK YOU TO LOCAL ARTIST GREG BIOLCHINI

The Lee Trust for Historic Preservation would like to thank local artist Greg Biolchini for his generous contribution of a painting that was raffled in December, with the proceeds benefitting Lee Trust. Greg Biolchini, Master Pastelist, P.S.A., has been featured in *The Artist Magazine* and *The Pastel Journal*. He is a contributing writer with demonstrations published in *Painting with Pastels*, *North Light Publication*, *The Art of Pastel Portraiture*, *Watson Guptill Publications*, and has work in *Pure Color: The Best of Pastel*. His paintings hang in many prominent public collections.

Greg has had thirty solo exhibitions, and his works have received awards in dozens of major competitions.

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## 2010 MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

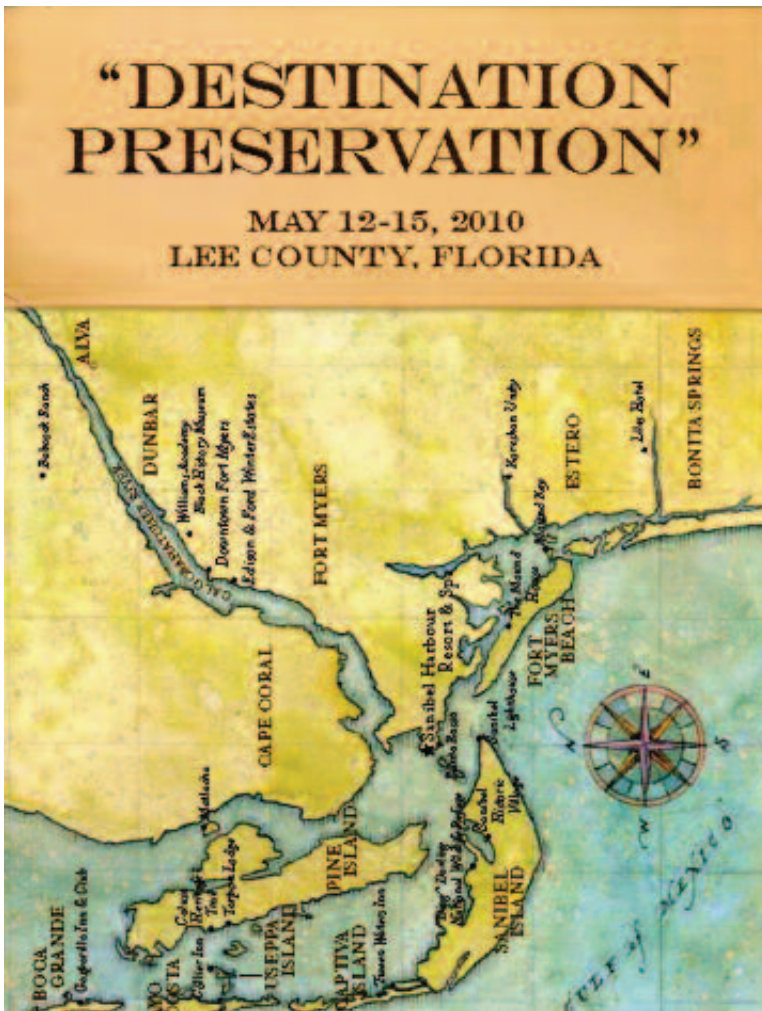
The Lee Trust 2010  
Membership is due in  
January. We need your  
help to continue  
our mission.

**PLEASE JOIN  
AT ANY LEVEL**

### HELP US SAVE THE HALL OF FIFTY STATES

Please send your donations  
to The Lee Trust For Historic  
Preservation, P.O. Box 1035,  
Fort Myers, FL 33901

“Preservation...the ultimate recycling.”



### THE HISTORIC LEE COUNTY THROWS!

They are available in  
blue and cranberry for \$49.50  
through the Trust Office.



Also available are  
**Limited Edition  
NOTE CARDS for \$8.00**



**HISTORIC  
BUILDING  
PLAQUES**  
for \$75.00 each,  
including engraving.

### LEE TRUST TO HOST BIKE NIGHT

The Lee Trust is delighted to be the organization selected to host the next BIKE Night in downtown Ft. Myers on March 13. We will be in the Budweiser beer wagon. We hope you will visit us and purchase a beverage to help raise money for the Lee Trust.