

# Preservation News

A Publication of the Lee Trust for Historic Preservation

Summer 2008 • Phone (239) 939-PAST

*Preservation... The Ultimate Recycling*

## Thank You To The Edison Theatre Partnership

It seems like every city has its own abandoned movie theatre, which was once a popular hangout for everyone. Many theatres are being recycled into apartments and office buildings. Thankfully, one of our local theatres, the Edison Theatre, located at 1533 Hendry Street in the River District of Downtown Fort Myers, is being adaptively used.

The Edison Theatre Partnership, which owns this historic theatre, is to be commended for its outstanding attitude toward preservation. The partners, Gerard McHale, Bob Tardiff and Gordan Duncan, recently invested a considerable sum to restore the sign and marquee to its original glory. They considered the sign a "work of art" and wanted to preserve it. Partner Gerard McHale a former member of the Fort Myers Historic Preservation Commission, stated "It was the right thing to do." We at the Lee Trust agree. Our motto is Preservation is The Ultimate Recycling.

The Edison Theatre was built in 1941. The first movie played was a double feature, Charlie Chan in *Rio* and *The Mystery Ship*. The theatre was popular prior to the launch of television, when the latest information about the war was delivered via newsreels.

Currently the theatre is home to many professional offices. The building was renovated in the 1980's by the local firm of Gora Mc Gahey Architects and Mr. Mark Anderson from Benchmark Construction.

If You visit the theatre today you will find the lobby walls lined with many old movie posters spanning 3 stories. King Kong and Casablanca, just to name a few.

Ms Jani Weaver, interior designer and owner of the Southern International Trading Company, is responsible for the new look. She adopted the original Art Deco theme using colors for the interior that resemble what was once originally there. She spent many hours researching the color choices. Lee Designs located on Palm Avenue in Fort Myers took the old sign down and carefully restored it. They scraped down many layers trying to find the original colors.

There is office space available for rent in the old theatre now. Anyone interested in working in an historic environment should contact Cindy at 337-4491 for more information.

The Lee Trust is excited and wants to acknowledge its gratitude for the restoration. More and more property owners are recognizing the importance of saving the past.



Top Left:  
Edison Theatre Then  
Bottom Left:  
Edison Theatre Now  
Above:  
Casablanca Poster  
From The Edison  
Theatre Lobby

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LEE TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION, INC.

The mission of Lee Trust is to preserve the sites and buildings of historic and archaeological significance to Lee County through both advocacy and acquisition.

## Lee Trust for Historic Preservation

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2008

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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 publishes its newsletter,  
Preservation News, quarterly.

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Lee Trust is a 501(c)(3)  
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extent allowed by law.

A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Division of Consumer Services by calling toll-free within the State of Florida 1-800-435-7352. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the State.

## Successful Welcoming and Book Signing

The Lee Trust for Historic Preservation held a party at The Bar Association on Friday June 6th for the welcoming of the new City Historic Preservation Coordinator Enid Terragrosa and for local author Gerri Reaves. The event was a great success with over 90 people in attendance. The Bar Association catered it and the food was scrumptious!



Left:  
Robert Gardner,  
Director of the Community  
Development Center  
and Enid Terragrosa

Below: Gerri Reaves



## Trust Supports Historic District Before Commission

Councilman Randy Henderson and architect W. Jeffrey Mudgett applied for a certificate of review for a proposed project at the corner of Bay and Dean streets within the Downtown Historic District. The project includes two fourteen story towers. The tallest building within the District is seven stories. The Secretary of Interior Standards require that any new construction within an historic district be in scale with the other structures in the district. A fourteen story tower is certainly not in keeping with The Secretary of Interior Standards. The matter came before the Fort Myers Historic Preservation Commission on May 29th. The Lee Trust feels very strongly that the city should abide by the terms of its historic preservation ordinance and require that any new construction in the historic district be in keeping with established standards for historic districts. President Bill Grace and attorney Andrew Dickman appeared before the Commission to support the Downtown District. Most commissioners appeared to believe that the proposal was out of scale and they voted to table the matter. They asked that the applicants modify their proposal and come back with something more in keeping with the District.



Both the City's Comprehensive Plan and the Downtown Plan, developed by Andres Duane, provide that no structure in the Historic District can exceed five stories.

The Trust believes that the Downtown Historic District has failed to thrive largely because developers consistently fail to embrace the Historic District and fail to plan their developments in a manner consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Downtown Plan. Frequently these developers are encouraged by various politicians. Councilman Henderson voted to pay large dollars to Andres Duane to prepare the Downtown Plan. He also voted in favor of the Downtown plan that states that no structure can exceed five stories.

The Trust will follow this proposal and keep you apprised.

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## The Chadwick House - By Gerri Reaves

In 1925, Clarence Bennett and Rosamond Lee Rouse Chadwick bought this newly built Mediterranean Revival house at 2532 East First Street. It was built to inspire confidence. With walls one-foot thick and a high elevation, it would be an elegant yet practical shelter during a storm. This house facing the river on Millionaires Row features a barrel-tile hip roof. The elegant curved railings still grace the front steps. Today the lovely Chadwick house is the law firm of Garvin and Tripp, a stellar example of the principle of adaptive re-use.

Clarence Chadwick revolutionized the banking industry in the early twentieth century by inventing forgery-proof paper for checks. By 1925, he was able to retire to South Florida on Captiva Island, which he had discovered in 1923 while on vacation. He sold his business interests, bought 400 acres on Sanibel and Captiva Islands, and set about creating a successful key-lime plantation. Eventually, he developed his own hardy type called the Chad lime. He also dealt in lands and securities, organizing the Chadwick Company and the Federal Realty and Development Company.

In the 1940s, he sold the plantation, and what we know as the South Seas Island Resort has replaced that early-Florida agricultural venture.

Rosamond Chadwick was a nationally known concert singer who continued performing after her marriage in 1913. Among her notable accomplishments was singing leading roles for the Chicago Opera Company for the 1919 to 1920 season. She was active in Fort Myers civic and community affairs as a founding member of the Garden Club and the Woman's Community Club. With her close friend Mina Edison, she worked toward city beautification.

Clarence Chadwick died in his home on First Street in 1947. The house was the JE Hubinger home before it became a law office in 1976.

*Acknowledgements: The Story of Fort Myers by Karl H. Grismer.*



Courtesy of the Florida State Photo Archives  
The Chadwick House in the 1920s



Symmetry, coolness... the Chadwick House today  
exemplifies the principle of adaptive reuse

### The Purple Martins Free In The River District

Nightly Performance of The Purple Martins  
In The County Parking Lot Across From The Bar Association Bistro  
Celebrate, Enjoy, And Marvel at The Dance of The Purple Martins

**Free Beginning At 7:45pm Until 9:00pm Each Night In July**

To Celebrate This Free Event The Bar Association Bistro  
Will Be Serving Virtual Purple Martinis (Champagne And  
Pomegranate) At Happy Hour Prices!!!!

**Join Us For Purple Martin Daze!!**

The purple martins are a flock of birds that migrate every year to Fort Myers to mate. They stay the month of July and head back to their native Brazil after the eggs have hatched. While in Fort Myers they do a mating dance every night just in front of The Bar Association Bistro. The dance is incredible and involves thousands of the purple martins. If you haven't seen this event you are doing yourself an injustice! **This will be the last time this will occur as the trees they roost in are scheduled to be cut down in August!**

### The Southwest Florida Museum of History is proud to exhibit renowned black and white photographer Clyde Butcher!

Clyde Butcher will debut at the museum  
August 14 - October 31 with a new exhibit,  
"Visions of Florida - A Clyde Butcher Retrospective."  
[www.clydebutcher.com](http://www.clydebutcher.com)

For more information, please call the museum at  
239-332-5955.

The museum is open  
Tuesday – Saturday 10am to 5pm.  
Southwest Florida Museum of History  
2300 Peck Street • Fort Myers • FL 33901  
[www.cityftmyers.com/museum](http://www.cityftmyers.com/museum)

## The Historic Lee County Throws Are Back!!



The Lee Trust has reordered these wonderful throws. They will be available in blue and cranberry. We will be selling them for \$49.50 available through the Trust Office and at many local museums.

Also available are Limited Edition Note Cards for \$8



And the Historic Building Plaques for \$55.00 each, including tax.

## Another Adaptive Re-Use 1803 Hough Street

This historic property, which was built in 1904, is located on one of the oldest streets in downtown Fort Myers. At 1803 Hough Street, the house was originally built from a kit purchased from the Sears catalog.

"This neighborhood will be the next Art District of Fort Myers," said J.J. Cochran of Century 21 AIM. Owner, Greg Knezevich said, "After hearing these words from our realtor nearly 2 years ago we have not looked back. Today we would like to think we are helping to make this a reality. With my wife Jessamin's exquisite taste stemming from her work as a fashion stylist in Madrid Spain, running the gallery is a welcomed venture. I graduated with a B.A in Philosophy from Rollins, a Liberal Arts College in Winter Park, FL., and have always had a profound appreciation for the Arts. Now Jessamin and I can give back to our community and help the arts flourish here in Ft. Myers." With the exhibitions changing on a monthly basis, The Art House will offer a unique setting for artists to show their works.

We hope that you will join us for our **Opening Night Reception, on July 19th, at 6-10 pm at 1803 Hough Street** "La Casa Del Arte" presents George Rodez and his Afro-Caribbean Series. "See you there!" Greg and Jessamin Knezevich, Owners.



1803 Hough Street was originally a residence and now it is a art gallery.

## Bonita Springs Historical Society Successful Afternoon Tea

An audience of 288 beautifully attired women sipping tea with tea sandwiches; and 20 handsome men in black tie who greeted and served, were silenced in the dramatic portrayal of Sarah Bernhardt in "La Vie Devine or Devine Sarah."

Janina Birtolo entered the stage as Sarah Bernhardt in period costume, in her leading role as Shakespeare's Hamlet played in 1874. She recounted the passionate life and career of the woman who became the first international superstar and may well have been the first woman to deserve the title diva.

Several valuable Antiques were auctioned and a Chinese auction of various gifts donated by our local merchants was part of this event. This is the third year The Bonita Springs Historical Society Afternoon Tea has been chaired by Rosalyn Stillwaggon.



Bonita Springs Pioneer Doris Wallam (center) with guests



# Save The Date!

Friday, December 5th

1609 Hendry Street • In The Courtyard

Please join us for a book signing with Michele Albion and nationally recognized local author, Ad Hudler • Appetizers, Beer and Wine will be served

## **Michele Albion Interview, Author of *The Florida Life of Thomas Edison***

**Q:** Why write a book about Edison in Florida?

**A:** Edison is an epic character. He was an inventor who literally changed the world with light and sound and over 1000 other patents. This book allows us to see him in the context of his Florida experiences. It's his life from a micro, instead of a macro-historical point of view. We see why he invented, how he interacted with his family and neighbors, and his love of the natural world. Edison is so enshrined in myth that his southwest Florida experiences allow us to look at him and his personality more closely.

**Q:** Was life different for the Edisons in Florida, than in New Jersey?

**A:** There was less scrutiny of the entire family in Florida. Their Fort Myers neighbors, for the most part, gave them their space. Edison and his family took day trips and overnights into the Everglades or to Sanibel and Captiva. On such trips there were no reporters, gawking spectators, or autograph hounds. They could truly be themselves.

**Q:** So the Edisons did not interact much with the community?

**A:** On the contrary. They knew their neighbors and cultivated friendships that spanned decades. Local friends were always visiting Seminole Lodge and Mina held many parties and events to benefit the region.

**Q:** Relations were always friendly, then?

**A:** As in all relationships, there were disagreements and disputes. In particular, Edison's sponsorship of the planting of royal palms in Fort Myers became a contentious issue. Eventually though, things did work out.

**Q:** Some of the stories you share are funny.

**A:** Edison had a wonderful, whimsical sense of humor. He had a gift for telling stories and impeccable timing when telling jokes. The inventor was also a terrible practical joker. April Fools Day at Seminole Lodge was quite the event for him and his family.

**Q:** You have wonderful photographs and maps. You also used literally hundreds of sources to craft your vision of the Edisons. How did you find them all?

**A:** Many sources were in the public domain, so I visited archives and libraries. Some were also very generously shared from private collections. Some were particularly challenging to hunt down. I had my brother find an article by German historian Emil Ludwig when he was in Munich. Southwest Florida residents were also very generous in sharing their reminiscences of the Edisons.

**Q:** Were there any that were particularly engaging?

**A:** It is always thrilling to hear how people remember the Edisons. One of the most powerful stories was shared by Mrs. Berne Davis who went with Mina Edison to a bird sanctuary. Her memory of the experience was both inspiring and spiritual.

**Q:** I understand you have four children ages 10 and under. How do you find time to research and write?

**A:** This is one of my greatest challenges. Writers need quiet and time to think an uninterrupted thought. As you can imagine, there is a dearth of that at my home. I have to be self-disciplined and I can't spend much time getting into the "zone" to write. I try to organize and research during the day and write at night—which is challenging because sometimes by the time my husband and I get the kids into bed I just want to flop down and watch t.v.

**Q:** So do you, watch t.v.?

**A:** Sometimes. I love *Bones*, which is about a forensic anthropologist who solves crime and I'm a *Law and Order* junkie. But usually I use that time to fold laundry. Exciting, isn't it?!

**Q:** What is your next project?

**A:** I am currently researching to write a biography of Mina Edison who I find an inspiring woman.





LEE TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION, INC.

## Membership Application/ Renewal Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

I am a:     New Member                       Renewing Member

Level of Membership:

- Benefactor - \$500 and up                       Contributor - \$50
- Corporate Sponsor \$250                       Family - \$30
- Sponsor \$100                                       Individual - \$20

In addition to my gift, a matching gift will be made by: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name of Company)

Make checks payable to Lee Trust for Historic Preservation and send to:

Lee Trust for Historic Preservation  
P.O. Box 1035 • Fort Myers, Florida 33902-1035

**T**ired of seeing our historic buildings torn down? Want to know more about historic preservation?

### Then join Lee Trust!

Lee Trust is a nonprofit organization formed to promote preservation and assist our community when historic resources are threatened. We have a Revolving Fund Program to buy threatened historic structures. We also provide assistance and seek to educate the public about our community heritage. Our primary sources of funding are membership dues, gifts and fundraising events organized by volunteers.

Membership donations are tax deductible. For more information about Membership contact Gina Taylor at [LeePreservation@embarqmail.com](mailto:LeePreservation@embarqmail.com) or (239) 939-PAST

## You Can Join At Any Time!



LEE TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION, INC.

Looking to the future with an eye to the past...

P.O. Box 1035 • Fort Myers, Florida 33902-1035

*Preservation...  
The  
Ultimate  
Recycling*

