

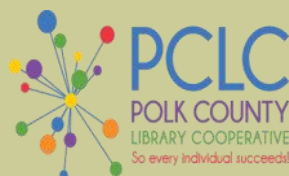


5 South Allapaha Ave., Davenport, FL 33837

Summer 2023

## News from 'The Port'

### Partners



### President's Corner



Hello Everyone,

Summer is here and the Davenport Historical Society has scheduled some activities to help with the "summertime blues," as some would say.

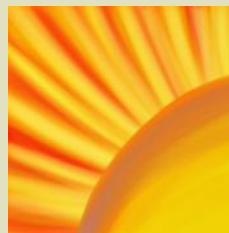
Our partners from the Polk County Library Cooperative have plans for the reading program for our students who are interested in showing "Kindness" to our local Police Officers and Firefighters. The first session begins on June 9th so be sure to get involved and connect with your community.

The museum's current exhibit is called "The Historical Home Tour", featuring all sorts of items and narratives about houses with interesting stories. We are looking forward to the next quarter's exhibition entitled "Fashion Through the Decades", sounds like fun!

If you are interested in Volunteering or would like to donate funds for our "Deck Project", please let me know or give me a call.

Have a wonderful summer and stay cool.

Freida Priest  
President of DHS



### Museum Hours

10 AM to 4 PM — Wednesdays

10 AM to 3 PM — Thursdays - Fridays

10 AM to 2 PM — Saturdays

### This is North Davenport

Inside the City of Davenport is a subdivision with an over hundred-year-old history, that's not an HOA, that's located on the city's north side (one of Davenport's gateway entrances), and that's a tight-knit community with neighbors who really watch -out for each other (*always have; always will*). Its name is Jamestown.

Actually, its name is Davenport but is called *Jamestown* by locals: possibly because it sounded better than the *Quarters* or the *Bottoms*, which is what Jamestown had been previously called in the early 1900's when it had floorless homes replete throughout its neighborhood. It was also possible because its developer named it after Jamestown's first street from City Hall, West James Street.

According to Judith Torgersen Thompson in her book ***The Heritage Trail from Horse Creek to Davenport***, there was an *Uncle James* in the neighborhood, one of the area's early settlers. It is possible that Jamestown was named after him. Most of the streets in Jamestown, you'll find, honor the early pioneers of the area. The name *Jamestown* would likely have not been different.

Jamestown actually started around the area of Lake Play, behind City Hall, about the time when the Parrish Turpentine Still opened in 1906. Twelve African-American families came to work there.

According to Ralph Dorsett, those African-Americans who worked in the Davenport industries had their homes moved from Lake Play to the north side of town, because "Black people didn't live in Uptown." *Uptown* is what the area around Lake Play was known as by those who lived in the *Quarters*. (By far that is not the case anymore. Progress.)

During the early 1900's, an era of growth and prosperity, Davenport included two large companies: Parrish, then later the Holly Hill Company. Due to the booming turpentine industry, by 1912, the population around Lake Play grew to around 100. But bad news was on the

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

way. Because the process of draining turpentine from slash pine killed the tree, the pine forests were disappearing. The stills had closed and the trees felled for lumber. But, with this bad came some good. Citrus trees were being planted and a new industry was being born.

By 1923, the Jamestown community became a reality when Holly Hill's vision to attract more laborers to the area was platted, the original Jamestown subdivision. Then in 1925, the Florida Development Company opened an adjacent subdivision on the east side of US Route 17/92. It was outside the city limits but still considered part of the community by the residents.

Today, Jamestown is a vibrant community with new homes abounding and day-time celebrations occurring frequently in its community park, excellent entertainment for seniors. Its heyday is once again, today.

### Jamestown Concerned Citizens

What started in 1996, went defunct and then started again in 2017, is a group named Jamestown Concerned Citizens, Inc. (JCC). Twila Steward, one of JCC's members said its vision is to advocate for the continued development of the north side of Davenport with the goals of affordable housing; improvements to Jamestown Park, especially a way to add off-street parking; and annexation of the east side of Jamestown, which will allow those residents the right to vote in city elections.

### Jamestown Park

Located at 101 West Murphy Street, adjacent to 17/92, Jamestown Park boasts celebrations and family events in its fully functional square. It features a kid's area, basketball court, private restrooms, barbecue grills, and electrical outlets to play music and dance the day

away. It is considered a regional park, as families from Loughman and other local regions patronize it.

Among the biggest events in the park are Christmas Eve and Juneteenth. Christmas is still celebrated the old Davenport way. It includes the giving of gifts, some as generous as bikes, to the neighborhood children, and the appearance of Santa Claus on a fire truck on Christmas Eve, candy bags to all the children he sees. Yep, *Santa* still does that in Jamestown.

Juneteenth a JCC-sponsored annual event, was originally called Heritage Day. It was organized for current and past residents and had always been a big hit. The last Heritage Day was celebrated in 2022.

### A Jamestown Juneteenth

The Juneteenth holiday, which was held for the first time in 2022, when President Joe Biden proclaimed the day a federal holiday. He said, "For 3 years, even after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, enslaved Black Americans in Texas remained in brutal bondage, immorally and illegally deprived of their freedom and basic dignity. On June 19, 1865 — over 2 years after President Lincoln declared all enslaved persons free — Major General Gordon Granger and Union Army troops marched to Galveston, Texas, to enforce the Emancipation Proclamation and free the last enslaved Black Americans in Texas."

It rained fiercely and almost all day, on Jamestown's first Juneteenth celebration in 2022 but not without the happy resilience of the celebrants. The joyous occasion carried on and will this year too, on its second anniversary of The White House proclamation. Come rain or sunshine, this year's Heritage Day will be in conjunction with the 1<sup>st</sup> Juneteenth Celebration in Jamestown Park on Saturday, June 17, starting at 2 PM until all the food is gone!







Lanora Barrett, Ralph Dorsett, and Twila Steward met to talk about Jamestown history. May 8th. Thank you!

### North-west Churches

Three churches call the west side of Jamestown home. They include St. Mark African Methodist Episcopal (built in 1952), Friendship Missionary Baptist Church (built in 1926), and Mt. Calvary Church (built in 1920).

### Jamestown Cemetery

At the east end of East Fuller Street, beyond a short gravel and dirt road, is Jamestown Cemetery, a 2-1/2 acre piece of land with grave-stones scattered near the entrance but organized in an area with newer plots. Unlike Evergreen Cemetery which the city owns. According to Ralph Dorsett, a member of the now defunct Progressive Men Club, five acres was donated by Robert Edwards to Jamestown citizens.



Gravestone of Wilfred Townsend, 1905-1965. Jamestown Cemetery.

Like Jamestown's eastern neighbors, across 17/92, the cemetery is not part of the City of Davenport but part of Polk County. JCC volunteers and Polk County sheriff's staff take care of it.

### The Old School

At one time Jamestown had a one-room classroom, notes local pioneer Lanora Barrett. How she knows? She went to it. "It went from kindergarten to sixth grade," she noted. The teacher, instead of grades like A's, B's, etc., would recognize the children by giving each gold stars on their papers. By the time Mrs. Barrett

reached the third grade, she began to take the bus to a new school in Haines City. They called us the "transported."

Mattie Walker was a teacher at that school from the 1940s to about 1950. She was also the first Black principal of Bethune School in Haines City.

(Continued on page 5)



*Davenport Historical Society, Inc.*

Preserving History and Nurturing Culture

## Membership Invitation

### Our Mission Statement

The Davenport Historical Society, Inc.'s purpose is to preserve the city's history and share this heritage by contributing to the records of the state of Florida and the United States of America in an effort that will embrace our past while working toward a brighter future for all of Davenport's citizens.

### Please join us.

#### Become a DHS Member

- \$ 15.00 Individual
- 18.00 Family
- 35.00 Business
- 75.00 Corporate
- 100.00 Lifetime Individual

#### Share Artifacts or Personal Stories

#### Volunteer Time to the DHS & Museum

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/ST/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete & mail to:  
Davenport Historical Society, Inc.  
c/o Kathy Linder  
PO Box 774  
Davenport, FL 33836

DHS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.  
Your contribution is tax deductible.



The Rosemary Steward home, located at 121 West Murphy Street, was originally built in Haines City and moved to Davenport by the Steward family before county records were published. According to public records, the year built was 1940.

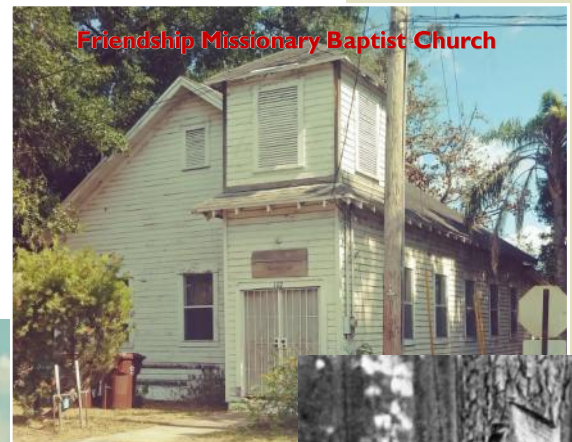
The north side's gateway entrance signage welcomes all to north Davenport, Jamestown.



Pics from  
"The  
Port"



Rosemary K. Steward  
1930-2005



Friendship Missionary Baptist Church



Mount Calvary Church, located behind Jamestown Park, sporting a new roof.

Turpentine worker cuts "cat face" into pine tree in central Florida, 1920's.  
Credit: Florida Memory Project.





### Other Historical Figures

Jamestown residents are generally active in their community. Their history shows it. For example, sitting at the corner of West Murphy and Rosemary Steward streets is the Steward home, built in 1940 and now currently owned by 13 family members for the purpose of preserving its historical value. *Mayor Rosemary*, as Mrs. Barrett said she was called, was an activist and advocate for her community.

She had a heart of gold and treated everyone equally. For that, she won the Martin Luther King Jr. Seniors Commemoration Award for her good deeds in the community. She is pictured at the center of page 4. Twila Steward, her daughter, is one of the owners of the home and is also a local activist and advocate. In addition, Mrs. Barrett and Mr. Dorsett are owners of the Steward home.

Other figures in Jamestown's history included Mrs. Nita Hornsby, who ran a dry goods store and warned the children against stealing but with a good heart. The children use to collect bottles to give to Nita in exchange for a nickel a soda pop bottle. There was also Lewis Roberts and Chastain Grocery Stores on the east side of Jamestown.

Lieutenant Walter Henderson was Davenport's first Black officer. During his time, he was the only Black officer in Davenport. At 30 years with the police force, Henderson set the record for longevity. He maintains that honor even today.

### For More Information

The residents of Jamestown have a complex and long history in Davenport and, certainly, all of it could not be covered here, although we tried. For more information, go to The Museum! We have a permanent exhibit on Jamestown. For references on this article, please go to our website at [Davenport.org](http://Davenport.org) and search for the Newsletters link on the home page.

## Mahalak Auto Group:

### Our Matching Grant Sponsor

Thank you Mahalak Auto Group (MAG) of Posner Park for coming forward to be our matching grant sponsor. Mahalak put up \$500 if DHS would come up with an additional \$500. We came up with more than the MAG's grant and are now over \$1,000 closer to having the funds to fix our back porch.

MAG runs seven different family-owned and -operated dealerships, four of which are in Florida, and one of which is in Davenport's Posner Park. The Posner Park location recently celebrated its 10th anniversary. Said Mike Mahalak, president of MAG, "We are always looking forward ... to making a difference by sponsoring local organizations." All MAG dealerships are branded as the Low Payment Kings powered by MAG.



MAG staff with Mike Mahalak and wife, Janine, in the center.

## Historic Homes Exhibit

Right now, in The Museum is a cozy spot. Well, actually a bunch of cozy spots. Come and see many of the historic homes in Davenport without having to step out into the heat. Our next exhibit, coming up in the Fall will be Fashion Through the Decades.

## Veterans Names Needed

To help us make a great event for this Fall's Veterans Day event, we are asking for the names of World War II veterans that you know who live in Davenport. Contact Freida to provide your names. Her number is 863-557-3452.

## Initial Immigrants

At right is an image of Train Conductor 53, Douglas Woodard, and a guest passenger. These two represent the fashion of the times and is included in The Museum's permanent exhibit.



The train brought the bulk of the initial immigrants to Davenport. Immigrants also arrived by horse-drawn carriages.

## Back Porch Memory



Pictured at left is the back entrance to the DHS Museum. Due to the age and damage, it is no longer usable. DHS wants to replace this entrance with a new deck with wheelchair accessibility. This project is being made possible with the generous donations of our DHS members and Mahalak Auto Group. Thank you to all.

## Front Porch Memories

Each month the Davenport Historical Society selects Davenport Pioneers to sit and chat about their memories growing up in Davenport. They sit in rocking chairs in front of a backdrop of a porch while they are being videotaped, recording histories like they have at the Library of Congress.

Our first "Front Porch Memories" Pioneers (January) included Bill Williams, Anne Weir Martin and Bayless Carnes III, from left to right in the photo below. DHS is in the process of editing their first sessions and hope to have them available soon.



## Meetings

Second Monday of each month at the Peter Rust Civic Center.

## Websites

- DavenportHistory.org
- Facebook: DavenportFLHistoricalSociety
- MyDavenport.org
- PolkHistoryCenter.org
- DES.PolkSchoolsFL.com
- DavenportHigh.Polk
- SchoolsFL.com
- VisitCentralFL.org



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Preserving History and Nurturing Culture

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TO: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## "FRONT PORCH MEMORIES"

**Visit with Friends and rock in our rocking chairs!**

**First Monday of each month at 1:00 pm**

**Peter Rust Civic Center, 1 S. Allapaha Ave. Davenport, FL**

***If you have lived in Polk County for more than 50 years and are 75 years old or older Davenport Historical Society wants you to share your history with us.***

***Once each month on the first Monday in the month at 1:00 pm DHS wants you to sit on the porch with two other pioneers and talk about your memories of growing up in Northeast Polk County. It's easy and fun to visit with other pioneers and reminisce about the old days.***

***There is no audience, just someone filming your oral history. Your Grandchildren will so enjoy these stories in years to come.***

***DHS has filmed a dozen or more of these fun events. We know you would really enjoy being a part of this project.***

***Call Joyce Hunter, Harriet Rewis Rust or Linda Dudney Tyler or stop by the Peter Rust Civic Center and let them know you want to be involved in saving NE Polk history.***

***Joyce: 863-221-5352      Harriet: 863-258-7800  
Linda: 863-863-514-0886***