



HERITAGE ASSOCIATION

FRIENDS of the

PEARCE HOMESTEAD

The Heritage Association of Highlands County, Inc, was formed to preserve and promote the history of Highlands County through events and activities.

A primary project has been to as-

ist in the preservation of the 17 acres that comprise the Pearce Homestead.

The 2021 Heritage Festival commemorated the division of DeSoto County into five counties in 1921. Highlands County is one of those five.

The [Friends of the Pearce Homestead](#) is a new organization, whose purpose is to support and assist the Heritage Association to present events that foster an appreciation of Florida history.



HISTORY TIMELINE

- 1821 Florida became a territory of the United States
- 1837 Ft. Basinger built as headquarters for General Zachary Taylor
- 1874 John M. Pearce moved his family from Fort Meade to the Pearce Homestead
- 1897 Wood frame house was built by Martha, widow of John Pearce
- 1910 Sid, son of John & Martha, donated the land and building of the Ft. Basinger School House

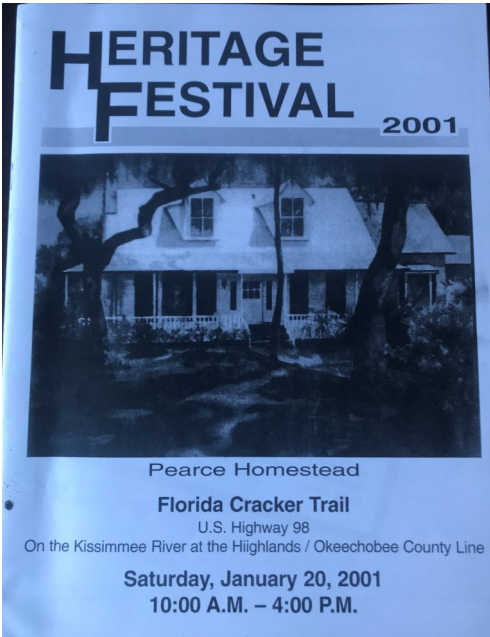


2023 Heritage Festival

April 15 & 16

A Celebration of History

at the Pearce Homestead



This Pearce Family History article is reprinted from the Heritage Festival booklet printed in 2001 (cover is at left). At the start of the new millennium, three annual festivals were held at the Pearce Family Homestead, the 2001 Festival being the third in the series. It was intended that the Festival would continue as an annual event to promote the project that was to be a Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) in Florida’s Heartland. That “grand scheme” did not materialize, due to lack of funding.



The Festival was revived in 2021 in celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the formation of Highlands County. The Pearce Homestead is, again, privately owned and through the generosity of the present owner, the property is open to the public for special occasions and events scheduled through the Heritage Association of Highlands County. The Heritage Festival provides the



opportunity for the sharing of our natural resources, history and folklore and takes us closer to fulfilling the original promise to assure that future generations will gain an appreciation of the past and enjoy this special part of our state — the Florida Heartlands.



PEARCE FAMILY HISTORY

John Mizell Pearce, founder of the present-day Pearce Homestead, settled with his parents in the Peace River Valley around 1846. In 1858, he married Martha Lanier, a direct relation of Sidney Lanier, the famous Southern poet and musician. John left his cattle business to serve in the Confederate Army in 1863, returning to Fort Meade at the conclusion of the Civil War. At the death of his father Levi in 1874, he moved his family to the location of the present Pearce Homestead site.

John was deeded 157 acres through the Internal Improvement Fund of the State of Florida in 1880. This land included the abandoned Fort Basinger General Zachary Taylor had built between 1837 and 1838 as his headquarters. At the end of the War in 1842, the Fort was closed to be reopened during the Third Seminole War as a supply depot and transfer point, closing for the final time at the end of the War.

As John increased his acreage, he expanded his cattle herd to what was to become the Pearce Cattle Empire. In addition to running the cattle business, John Pearce operated a ferry, the Mary Belle, across the Kissimmee River. He also served as Deputy Sheriff for the eastern part of DeSoto, and for many years, was the only law enforcement officer in the lower Kissimmee Valley. John and Martha's nine children were familiar with the family's cattle business and several settled on the Ft. Basinger property.

In 1894, William Sidney (Sid) Pearce married Marvia Virginia Hollingsworth of Arcadia. They had four children; Leonard Clifford, Ruth, Pearl and Edna Mae. When Sid's father died in 1897, leaving his estate to his family, his wife Martha and son Sid assumed responsibility of the business. Martha built the frame house that remains today as the Pearce Homestead.

At his mother's death in 1911, Sid purchased the main house and surrounding land from the estate and managed the business. Sid followed in his father's footsteps in law enforcement and the ferry business. He donated the land and building for the Fort Basinger School in 1910. He also built the first bridge across the Kissimmee River in 1916. Sid was very active in civic affairs but cattle ranching was the primary family focus. The ranch's brand, P-4, represented the fact that Sid was the fourth of his parent's children. Sid's wife Marvia died in 1932 and Clifford, the eldest son, worked with his father in the business until 1934, when he was killed in a car accident. Clifford was survived by his wife, Clara, and four children.



The era of Edna Pearce Lockett will be presented in a future newsletter

You have the opportunity to become a charter member of
the **FRIENDS of the PEARCE HOMESTEAD**—



an organization devoted to the preservation and promotion of the property as an historic treasure and example of pride in the legacy of the Florida Heartland.

When you become a friend of the Pearce Homestead you:

- ◆ Become a member of the community of Floridians interested in preserving the way of life that is uniquely Florida
- ◆ Provide financial support for maintenance and improvements to the Homestead
- ◆ Receive first notice of scheduled events and activities
- ◆ Can be a part of sharing the legacy of this property by volunteering at events such as the Heritage Festival



TO JOIN Friends of the Pearce Homestead

Detach and Mail with your donation to Heritage Assoc. P.O. Box 1531, Sebring, FL, 33871

Friend _____ \$25 Patron _____ \$100 email _____

Name: _____ Phone _____

Address _____ Zip _____