



# HERITAGE ASSOCIATION

FRIENDS of the

PEARCE HOMESTEAD

Newsletter July, 2023 EDITION

## 2023 Heritage Festival

### A HUGE SUCCESS

#### Thanks to Volunteers and Sponsors

A new pole barn was added to the grounds, providing a stage for performers and shaded comfort for the audience. A range of entertainment was enjoyed in addition to the offerings of the many vendors. Boat rides, a champion hoop dancer, pirates and clowns entertained kids of all ages. The authentic Indian Village, Colonial Laundry Demonstration and the Cemetery talk were very popular. Pioneer skills including quilts were on display in the school house.



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More photos on page 3

2023 Leonard Bryant Photography

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Excerpted from a speech given by Heritage Association Board Member James Dean to explain the significance of the Liberty Tree dedicated at the Pearce Homestead (shown here)

The Highlands Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution, assisted by SAR color guards in Revolutionary uniforms, from all over Florida, dedicated a 450 year old Live Oak as a memorial to the original Liberty Tree in Boston. That old elm tree, planted in 1646 on the road into Boston by Sam Adams' brewery, was a gathering place for the Sons of Liberty, and those who opposed English oppression. The Stamp Act protests in 1765 and the Boston Tea Party in 1773 started under that tree. In 1775, the British cut down the Boston Liberty Tree, but its' spirit lived on as a symbol of American independence. The Pearce-Lockett Liberty Tree was 100 years old when the original Liberty Tree was planted.

[On to the 20th Century and more modern history]

As cars and trucks replaced steamboats, a bridge was needed to replace the ferry or steamboat, run by the Pearce family for two generations. No government agency stepped up to build a bridge - enter, Sydney Pearce. He hired the Champion Bridge Company of Ohio, to build a steel swing bridge. It was long enough to span the floodplain, and a turntable swung open in the center, to allow boats or masses of water hyacinths through. In 1935, Sid sold the bridge to the Highlands County, who moved it to Taylor Creek, and built a new bridge at the original location. The present bridge is named the William Sydney Pearce Bridge. After Sid's death, Edna took control of the ranch, from the days of the great cattle drives, to her herding or searching for lost cattle by helicopter. Edna Pearce, an extraordinary woman, was elected to the Florida legislature in 1949, and served until 1954 and was called the Lady of the House. In her campaign, she promised to get Route 98 paved to Sebring, and build a new bridge over the River. She accomplished both. She retired from politics in 1953, when she married English wool merchant James Lockett, whom she met on the Queen Mary.....When Edna died in 1991, her will specified that her home be set aside by the trustees as a historical site. She had put her home in a trust to protect it from developers. The Pearce Lockett Estate totaled 7,700 acres of land.....The Florida Water Management District took over and like most government agencies did not preserve the historical buildings and let the barn fall in.... ...When I moved my Jaguar parts business from Fort Lauderdale ten years ago, I discovered and fell in love with this magical time warp. Apparently at about the same time, so did Butch Thompson, a successful businessman from Venus, Florida. The difference was, I had to climb over the fence. He was able to buy and restore it, when a judge ordered it sold. Butch Thompson then began a massive ongoing restoration project, vowing to open and share this hidden treasure with historical groups and the general public. He built two open pavilions to replace the barn, replaced roofs and floors, and added sidewalks to make it handicap accessible. The house and schoolhouse are open to the public for special events. I truly feel Edna and her ancestors are looking with favor on Butch and his wife Donna, who has shared every adventure in his journey. When you visit, you will realize that Donna has quietly become the Lady of the House. .... There is an aura to the Pearce Homestead that can only be felt by visiting and working there. The Heritage Association invites the public and opens the gates in April. I strongly advise you to [visit] Bring your children and grandchildren, and step back to the 19th century..... Butch Thompson has opened this legacy to you. I invite you to take this opportunity, attend and become a part of the legend. To feel or sense this aura, walk the grounds, tour the house, stand under the ancient oaks at the steamboat landing. .... Twentieth century local legends such as George Sebring, Melville Dewey, Oliver Crosby and Edna Pearce Lockett are recognized; but only the very aware realize that a 21st century legend is forming at the Pearce Homestead. ...Now is the rare opportunity to be part of a legend, as it is being written. Attend the Heritage Festivals in April, but also, become a Friend of the Pearce Homestead, add your skills and talents, it takes many volunteers to put on a Heritage Festival and carry on a legend. Many more are needed to share this legacy with the public. Like a quilting bee or a house or church raising a hundred years ago, many hands are needed, but the rewards will live on for your children or grandchildren, or histories not yet written. . If you visit, you will be back again. There is a magic under these ancient oaks..... Savor the moment in this heart of Florida. Take home the spirit of centuries past, until you return again.





Photos courtesy of Leonard Bryant

**MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT:** The current Board of the Heritage Association consists of 8 volunteers from Highlands County and Okeechobee. We meet monthly to plan the annual Heritage Festival. If you are interested in taking a more active role in preserving the history of Highlands County, your input would be most welcome. There are many ways to help. We have officer positions to fill and there is a need to create committees to work on various aspects of the festival. With the help of just a few more people, there is so much more we can do to ensure that the Festival is well planned and runs smoothly. I think I speak for the board members when I say that we enjoy working together and consider it a privilege to work along side Butch Thompson to make the Pearce Homestead a site of living history for future generations. Board member, James Dean sums it up beautifully in his article on page 2. The Pearce Homestead is a wonderful place. We hope that one day a Pearce Family reunion could become an annual event. "Many hands make light work" Please consider getting involved. For meeting information, see our Facebook page or contact me at 813-482-4868 or [nfisk1949@gmail.com](mailto:nfisk1949@gmail.com) I would enjoy hearing from you.



# The FRIENDS of the PEARCE HOMESTEAD

Annual dues are now due for year 6/2023 to 5/2024

The Current membership for 6/22 to 5/23 is listed below.

You can become part of this elite group. Join today !!

## FRIENDS

Nancy Franklin  
Roberta Lake  
Kimball Love Kathleen King  
Carol Fields Leonard Bryant  
John & Electra Drury  
Steve & Shirley Harrell  
Okeechobee Historical Soc.  
Frank Thorley  
Kevin Depuy  
Marilyn Whitlock  
Rene Wells Linda Dolan  
Margaret Gleave

## PATRONS

Judith Bentley Ruth Bergman Linda Wells  
Anthony Papa Patriots Chapter D.A.R.  
Laura Young Marian Elmore Judy Brown  
Terry & Tom Mendel Linda Kolarik  
Lake Placid Golden Corral  
Pat Harrison Family Nancy Fisk  
Wendy & Maria Hagg  
Butch & Donna Thompson  
Nat'I Soc. of the S.A.R. of Highlands County  
Okeechobee D.A.R.  
Okeechobee S.A.R.

PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:

**The Heritage Association of Highlands County**

& MAIL WITH THE COMPLETED FORM TO : **P.O. Box 1531, Sebring, FL, 33871**

Yes, I am a Friend of the Pearce Homestead \_\_\_\_\_ \$25 (annual dues)

I want to be a Patron, accept my donation \_\_\_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_\_\_ OTHER

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

email \_\_\_\_\_