

HISTORY  
OF  
BONFIRE MOBILE HOME VILLAGE  
620 MISTI DRIVE  
LEESBURG, FL 34788  
1959-2009

Compiled in 2008-2009 By Dotti Champion



## **COURT HOUSE RECORDS AND OTHER DATES AND INFORMATION**

According to the Court House Records, in 1959 Milton and Jewel Hooks, husband and wife, owned this property. On January 12, 1959, they sold it to Henry Morrison, a single person and Sarah Morrison, a widow of Leesburg. At that time it was called Haines Creek Cottages and Fishing Resort. (courthouse copies attached in Appendix)

On September 25, 1961, Sarah Horne, formerly Sarah Morrison, and Claude Horne, her husband, sold the property to Talmadge and Blanche Etheredge, husband and wife. (courthouse copies attached) There were only 6 or 7 fishing cottages.

On December 28, 1981, Talmadge and Blanche Etheredge sold the property to Dr. Ronald Cuning and Charlotte Cuning, husband and wife, of Montclair, California. (courthouse copies attached)

In 1980 or 1981 we joined The Federation of Mobile Home Owners of Florida, Inc. (FMO). The original president for Bonfire was Leo Harlan.

In 1982 we formed The Social Club in Bonfire to organize and carry out all of our social events. The original President was Harry Leonard.

On January 30, 1984, we became incorporated and the name of our corporation became BONFIRE COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION, INC. The original Board of Directors was: Glenn Williams, Leo Harlan, Don Boham, Alida Buckland, Vern Marsh, Foster Berry, Howard Goddard, Bob Cottier, and Ken Sangrey.

On August 4, 1993, the COOPERATIVE ASSN. purchased Bonfire from Dr. Ronald Cuning and his wife. This was done by the residents buying shares; thus becoming shareholders. The first shares were \$18,500.00. Shares have increased twice; once to \$19,500.00 and currently to \$23,000.00. (courthouse copies attached)

The Board of Directors at the time of the COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION'S purchase of Bonfire was: Mike Skeen, Al Zeunik, Roy Ranshaw, Fran Vogel, Richard Sutherlin, Wendell Zimmer, Don Rice, Ken Hall, and Lois Coney.

We paid \$4,343,000 to purchase the park in 1993. On January 13, 1996 the value was about \$1,000,000 more than we paid for it; don't know the value as of this date.

A Renters Group within the Park was formed after we purchased the park as about 40% of the residents were only renters; there is no such group anymore

## MORE IMPORTANT DATES AND INFORMATION

It was Talmadge and Blanche Etheredge who changed the name of Haines Creek Cottages and Fishing Resort to Bonfire Mobile Home Village. In fact at times they tacked on "Sales" after Village. Because they were selling mobile homes to residents as they came into the park. In papers it has been noted that the name varied from Bonfire Mobile Home Village and Sales to Bonfire Mobile Home Park to Bonfire Mobile Home Village.

It is not known of what date but sometime between 1961 and 1973 the park lost its name of Haines Creek Cottages and Fishing Resort. It was told by Blanche Etheredge that Talmadge went to the Miami area and he found a place by the name of "Bonfire" which he liked, and decided to claim the name for their park.

In 1973 there were no paved streets in Bonfire except for Lock Road. It was paved because it is a Lake County Road. So it was after that when the streets were developed and since there were families in the park with little girls, the streets were named after the little girls. Some were named after the Etheredge's granddaughters also.

In 1973 the Etheredges lived in a cement block house which was not located inside of Bonfire. It was on the north side of 520 Tammi Drive. The office was in their house. Later they moved the office to a double wide mobile at 629 Misti Dr.

The first clubhouse was an old recreation building which they bought from the city of Leesburg according to Blanche Etheredge. They put it down in the fishing cottages area which would have been around Kimberly Avenue. They used to have Christmas Parties and fish fries. She said that one time when they were away on vacation it burned down; this must have been around 1976.

In 1977 the clubhouse we now have was built as well as the swimming pool. But the new clubhouse did not have an office; the clubhouse was remodeled at a later date and the office was then moved from 629 Misti Dr. into the clubhouse.

In 1977 the Etheredges also put a new triple wide mobile at 615 Misti Dr. for their residence. This was just on the other side of the new swimming pool. They lived in it about two years and then moved out of Bonfire into Silver Lake Community in 1979.

Sara and Dave Griffin were the operational managers for the Etheredges most of the twenty years. They had also worked for the Etheredges on their farm in Alabama before the Etheredges came to Florida and bought this fish camp. On the Etheredge's farm they produced cotton, peanuts, other produce, and beef cattle. Sara and Dave continued to manage Bonfire from 1979 to 1981 while Etheredges lived at Silver Lake. After Etheredges sold out to the dentist in 1981, Sara and Dave stayed on for about one year with the dentist and then they left Bonfire. The dentist changed Bonfire from a family park to an adult only park.

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**Amideo, Hugh**  
**625 Misti Drive**

Hugh came to Bonfire in 1988. He came from Long Island, New York. He had a sister who was living in Ocala and he came to visit her and she asked him to move to Florida and suggested he be a little further south. So he came to this area and started shopping around with a realtor. He has lived in his present home every since he bought it from a doctor and wife. The doctor's wife became ill and they were forced to sell and return to the north. Hugh was very impressed that they left him everything inside. He said "All I had to do was bring my hat and coat."

Hugh has traveled a lot with some driving trips being 10,000 miles per trip; and he still wants to travel some more. He just renewed his passport so he can go to Canada again. He has also enjoyed bowling, bridge, and dancing. In his younger days, he worked in a dance studio in New York.

He said he influenced Mike Skeen to look into the residents purchasing the park; since when he first moved into the park, the rent was \$146.00 a month and the next month, the Doctor raised it to \$168.00. He said that back then a park owner could only raise the rent three (3) times and that most of the parks were owned by doctors and lawyers. So they would just buy and sell parks among themselves in order to be able to keep on raising the rent.

To Hugh, the most significant change has been the class of people that are here now compared to when he first came. At first he said it was a fish camp and many northerners would just come down for fishing and tournaments and then go back north. There was a lot of single widows in the park and not very well kept since they were empty most of the time. "The park has been up-graded a lot", he said. "It's a way of life" he said and he's been very satisfied living here in his retirement years.

Hugh had some health challenges in the winter of 2009 and his daughter, Joanne and her husband came and rented a place here in Bonfire to assist him. They took him home with them in April and he passed away in their home in New York on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009.

**Bennington, Ella**  
**842 Lock Road**

Ella and her late husband came here in March of 1987. They came from Newark, Ohio. They had rented here for 2 weeks in 1985 and for 6 weeks in 1986. They found the place to rent in 1985 because the home belonged to their son-in-law's parents. After renting for 2 seasons, they felt good about purchasing a place in Bonfire. They also had friends living in Tavares which helped influence their decision.

Both Ella and her husband retired from the teaching profession. They have four daughters and five grandchildren with none living in Florida.

She has been involved in the crafts in earlier years but not anymore. Also she helped with our library. Now she takes good care of her dog and does a lot of walking. Her dog and her fly back and forth to Newark, OH just as snow-birds do.

The size of our homes in our park and the pride of our owners has been the most significant change she thinks.

**Brubaker/Wade  
552 Tammi Drive**

Gertrude and Merrill Brubaker came to Bonfire in 1984 or 1985. They came from Preble County, Ohio, and bought the home at 552 Tammi Dr.

Gertrude's only daughter is Mary Louise Wade and she and her husband Bill have inherited Gertrude's home and are current residents of Bonfire since 1998; which was one year after Bill retired. Mary Louise has told this entire story.

Gertrude purchased here because her brother and sister-in-law, Cecil and Stella Turpin lived here as well as other families from Preble County. The Turpins had bought here in the early 1970's because some others from Ohio had come here to fish in this fish camp. Some of the others from Preble County who came were: the Shafers, Suggs, and Brandenbergs.

Mary Louise can remember coming to visit the Turpins when she lived in Rockledge, FL in 1971. The Turpins and Brubakers were snow-birds and enjoyed most of the social activities of the park every winter; the choir, bingo, crafts, bridge, the swimming pool and of course the potluck meals.

Gertrude became a permanent resident after Merrill died and lived here until 2000 when she required more assistance with daily activities. She died on February 11, 2008. Mary Louise states "Bonfire has always been a caring park with wonderful friends and neighbors and Vi Hackenberger is a wonderful example of the caring people in the park."

**Burrell, Sam and Lila Lee  
525 Tammi Drive**

Sam and Lila Lee came to Bonfire in 1989 from Indianapolis, Indiana. They chose Bonfire because they had long-time friends here.

They fished, and Lila Lee played the piano for the choir also. They've enjoyed the potluck dinners. She was instrumental along with others to get the gazebo which we have. She noted that it is decorated at Christmas time with a tree and the nativity scene. She stated that the social activities have grown into lots more activities than was here when they first came.

"The most significant change has become the landscaping of the park" they say.

**Dixon, Roy & Lolly/ Ken and Edna**  
**823 Lisa Circle**

One winter in the mid-70's Roy and Lolly came to visit a doctor friend and his wife who lived at 637 Misti Drive. In the following summer, the doctor who lived in their hometown of Arthur, Ontario, Canada, passed away. His wife then no longer desired to come to Bonfire so she rented her home to Roy and Lolly for several years.

In 1982 they purchased their own home at 823 Lisa Circle and continued to be snowbirds until 2007-2008. On February 27, 2008 Lolly passed away in Canada. Roy has not come back to Bonfire since then and Ken and Edna now own his parents place.

During the years Roy and Lolly were residents here they were involved in lots of the activities. They both loved to golf and dance. They probably never missed a dance at the clubhouse and were crowned king and queen of a valentine dance in 2004. They enjoyed cards and potlucks and most of the activities of the Social Club.

They were great party people and hosted lots of neighborhood get-togethers at their home. One of their neighbors, John Decatur, played a practical joke on them one Fall just before they arrived from Canada. They had a very small grapefruit tree in their yard which they had planted and John glued two grapefruit to the branches. They were so excited that their little tree had already produced fruit.....only to discover that the grapefruit were plastic!

Roy was a member of the "Can't Hardly Construction Co." of Bonfire and he loved to create things in his workshop. Lolly was also creative with different crafts.

A special occasion for them was in December, 2005, when they celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in our clubhouse and renewed their vows at that time also. It was a very legal affair.....as their daughter was married at the same time in our clubhouse. All of their family came from Canada to celebrate these two occasions. This included their 3 sons and 1 daughter and all the children and grandchildren. Also everyone in Bonfire was invited to attend. What a happy day that was!

The biggest change to them was that they were "young ones" when they first came and then as the years passed, they weren't the "young ones" anymore. Isn't it funny how that happens! That's the way life goes!

**Doolittle, Walter**  
**790 Sandi Drive**

In 1986 Walter visited his brother who lived here and he liked the park so bought his own place in 1987. He and his wife came from Watervliet, Michigan.

He has enjoyed the Bonfire Choir always and will be remembered for his solos in their many programs. He also enjoyed and participated in a group called "Class Act" at local nursing homes.



He really couldn't say what the most significant change in Bonfire has been, however, he did say that since his wife, Barb, died in 1997, he has been very lonely.

He left the park to go live with his daughter in March of 2008. He sold his home to Ray and Janet Sawyer who already owned at 628 Misti Dr .

Walter passed away on February 20, 2009, at Virginia Beach, VA. A memorial service was held at his Florida church, The Silver Lake Community Church. He had requested this a long time ago before leaving Bonfire.

**Evans, Marguerite (Marge)**  
**634 Misti Drive**

Marge's sister and husband, Dewitt and Geanette Davis, purchased the home which Marge lives in. It was new when they placed it on the lot of 634 Misti Dr in 1976. When Marge and her husband, Clyde, came to visit her sister, there were mostly single widows around Misti Dr and that side of Lock Road. Marge and Clyde bought the place from her sister in May of 1989.

Marge and Clyde came from Luna Pier, Michigan where they had lived for 56 years. Clyde helped to get Luna Pier on the map. It is a resort area and became a town in 1963. He was their mayor for 20 years. They were snowbirds until 2001, coming down for only 3 months some years and eventually 5-6 months.

They were involved with dances here, swimming, and chairing the Michigan Day. Clyde enjoyed helping with the big yard sale every Spring.

Clyde passed away on February 4, 2001, and Marge became a permanent resident in October 2001.

She has always enjoyed the warm Florida weather and all the nice people who live in Bonfire. She has volunteered on lots of committees in the past but says she is so thankful that younger people are retiring and coming here. She appreciates all the activities and work that they keep doing.

She believes that the biggest change has been the improvement in the appearance of the park; keeping it neat, clean, and beautiful. She didn't think the entrances used to be as attractive as they are now. Also the office used to be at 629 Misti Dr which was next to Jack and Marge Reynolds' place and there was very limited parking space so it was moved into its present location in the clubhouse.

**Fisher, Fay and Ruth  
665 Misti Drive**

Fay and Ruth Fisher came to the park in 1989. They came from Grand Blanc, MI and happened to discover Bonfire from an ad they saw in the Flint Journal Newspaper.

They have been involved in lots of activities of the park. They have had a pontoon and enjoyed boating, enjoyed golf, line dancing, and square dancing and helped with flea market sales of the park. Bowling, Bingo, and Billiards have also been enjoyed.

Fay has served on the Board of Directors for several years and is serving his second term as the president, being elected to the board again in January, 2008. He is a director on the Board in 2009.

Becoming a Cooperative Park has been the most significant change to them.

**Flory, Marion and Helen  
98 Jodi Avenue**

Marion and Helen came here in October, 1984. He was from Bloomfield, IN and she was from FL. Helen grew up in the Philippines; coming to the U.S. in 1950.

They live on Haynes Creek and acquired a permit many years ago to build their own private boathouse. Marion claims you can't get such a permit these days. They love boating and fishing, and he likes golf. Helen is an avid gardener and has a beautiful yard. Bonfire seemed to be the perfect place they were both looking for.

The most significant change that they have seen is the type of housing we now have in our Park.

**Fulmer, Dorothy  
684 Cindi Avenue**

Dorothy and her husband, Bill, live at 684 Cindi Ave. They are snowbirds from Fairborn, OH. She has written a story about a woman called "Miss Kitty" who lived in the park soon after the Etheredges bought it. Dorothy understood that Talmadge Etheredge knew her in Alabama and invited her to come to his fish camp and help him. She sold fish bait to the fishermen who came here.

The story is that she loved to fish herself and told lots of stories about alligators. She told how the alligators had tried to catch her for years so when she died, she wished for her ashes to be thrown in the creek so they could finally have her.

Her daughter was Elaine Dickson who lived at 686 Cindi Ave at the time. Where Miss Kitty lived was not revealed; but Elaine moved in with her to help her when Miss Kitty needed help.

Miss Kitty was around 100 years of age when Dorothy used to talk with her. She said Miss Kitty sat outside most of the time and chewed tobacco a lot. Dorothy says she never missed the jar when she spit her tobacco juice!

She always hand sewed a new dress for the New Years Eve Party. She loved to go and dance but Dorothy says she never saw her dance, as Dorothy did not go to the dances.

Eventually Elaine moved her mobile out of Bonfire to a place off of Rte. 44 and Dorothy and her mom, Mrs. Shafer, used to go visit her. Dorothy has tried to locate her in the past few winters but has had no luck in finding her. Dorothy wonders if she would have some pictures of the 1961 to 1973 time period.....a time long before her mother, Mrs. Shafer, lived here. None of our current residents lived here before 1973. Mrs. Shafer came here in 1986 and lived at 684 Cindi Avenue where Dorothy and Bill Fulmer live currently.

**Galbraith, Bob**  
**563 Tammi Drive**

Bob and his wife moved here in October, 1978, from Huntington, IN. They had started vacationing in a motor home in 1973. His wife was a legal secretary and could have a month's vacation so they were staying on the ocean side of FL at first. Then a realtor told them that it would be less expensive in Central FL so they happened to pick Leesburg in 1978. His wife continued to work for a lawyer in Leesburg until 1990. She was ill for 9 years and it was in 1999 that she passed away.

Bob said there were quite a lot of single wides in the Park when they came but they bought the double wide at 563 Tammi Dr where he still resides. He said they have always loved this Park and he is very thankful to have made this their home for all these years.

The Etheredge's owned the park when they came and they had a son who was a freshman in high school. He went on to become a chiropractor doctor and is still practicing in Leesburg. Bob says Dr. Etheredge has helped him tremendously and he highly recommends him.

Bob is interested in his family and his train collection, and is happy to be approaching 89 years young in 2008.

Bob passed away in early 2009.

**Ginley, Priscilla Donkin**  
**561 Tammi Drive**

Priscilla has lived in Bonfire the longest of any of our current residents. She and her first husband came in 1973 with their children as it was a family park at that time. They raised their children here. They came from Suddary, Ontario, Canada. She has lived in the same home all of these years.

Prior to Bonfire, they lived in Leesburg when their children were born. She worked as a nurse at Leesburg Hospital. They came to visit friends on Tammi Dr and Lock Rd who also had children and they liked the park and all the other folks they met, and the home on 561 Tammi Dr was available so they purchased it.

She did not get very involved in activities here because of her employment and meeting the needs of her young family. There were not as many social activities in the park at that time as there are now. But there was one man, Mr. H. Moore, who always provided fish for a fish fry and potluck and they were held every 2<sup>nd</sup> week of the month.

Priscilla's husband passed away and she married Vince Ginley on July 8, 1994 in Nova Scotia. He also was a resident of Bonfire at 836 Lock Road and had lived with his former wife 45 years until her passing in 1992.

You still see Priscilla riding her 3-wheel bicycle around the park with her friendly smile greeting you. She and Vince live here 6 months and in Canada 6 months.

**Ginley, Vince  
561 Tammi Drive**

Vince and his first wife of 45 years moved to 836 Lock Road in 1979. They came from Amherst, Nova Scotia. A guy from Vince's area owned the place and they rented it at first. After his wife passed away, he married Priscilla Donkin on July 8, 1994 in Nova Scotia. She owned the place at 561 Tammi Dr and he moved in with her.

Vince was very involved in getting the park incorporated. It happened in 1984 and then the residents bought the park from the dentist in 1993. By being incorporated he said it gave us the first right of refusal for purchase.

In the early years of the 1970's and the 1980's he and Priscilla remember that development was rather slow. The land was a swamp and a lot of improvements had to come about. But once we purchased the park in 1993, he said the pace changed. Sara and Dave Griffin were the operational managers when Priscilla came in 1973 and when Vince first came in 1979 but they left the park in 1982. He said they were very hard workers. There were 247 lots here at that time and he said Sara controlled everything with an adding machine and a typewriter. The Etheredges were the ones, though, that interviewed and gave approval for any residents to live here.

Before Etheredges bought the park in 1961, they were farmers in Alabama, and they came here to fish for a vacation. Sara and Dave Griffin worked for them on their farm and that is why they also worked for them after they purchased the park.

Vince has always been in the Bonfire Choir and has enjoyed the dances in the Clubhouse. He is also a pool player and a swimmer. He and Priscilla spend winters here and summers in Nova Scotia.



**Hackenberger, Vi**  
**554 Tammi Drive**

Vi and her late deceased husband, Hayes, moved here from Ohio in 1973. She is the 2<sup>nd</sup> longest resident of Bonfire. At that time they had two children, Chuck and Lori, who were in 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades and they attended Treadway School which is still nearby. At that time Bonfire was a family park which was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Etheredge and there were not many homes on the West side of Lock Road. The name of the park was Bonfire when they came. The Clubhouse and Swimming Pool that we now have, was not here yet. There were mostly campers and single-wides here.

They bought a new home and placed it at 554 Tammi Dr where Vi still resides. It was just a fish camp still when they came and they had no paved streets. Their address was R. R. Box #. As the park expanded and streets were added, the Etheredge's named them after the little girls who were living here with their families. So Vi's daughter, Lori, has a street named after her.

Haynes Creek still had the wooden bridge over it and Vi's children and some of Priscilla Donkin Ginley's used to jump off of the bridge into the creek and play in the creek under the bridge. She remembers the old store and gas station that was across County Route 44 near the bridge, and said they had the best bologna in the world. She didn't know if they made it there or what but it sure was delicious! George Gastfield and Son owned the store and gas was .20 cents per gallon but she didn't buy her gas there. When the road was widened, that was the end of the old store.

Vi says they moved here because her mother and father-in-law lived in Tavares and they wanted them to move to this area instead of being in Ohio. Not many of the mobile home parks welcomed children and since Bonfire did at that time, they moved here.

Vi's husband owned and operated a bicycle shop which was on Rt. U.S. 441 just north of the Cumberland Gas Station which is presently at the corner of CR 473 and 441 and across from Walgreen's. That bicycle shop is now further south on U.S. 441 and is known as Sun Cycles. Vi worked at the Sun Trust Bank for over 25 years besides being a wife and mother. Vi has also done a lot of volunteer work for the park in the years following her retirement from the bank. She has served on the Board of Directors for the park. She is also a seasoned bridge player and plays in the Monday Afternoon Bridge Club. For years she made the popcorn for Monday Evening Bingo, and also served as the "Sunshine Lady" remembering residents who were ill by sending greetings and cards.

Other residents have told about the "Christmas Open House" which Vi and Hayes used to have every Christmas Eve. Everyone in the Park was invited to it. They would put out an elaborate display of food and also have a bonfire for roasting hot dogs and marshmallows. They said Vi would make margaritas all night as long as people wanted them. It was at one of their Christmas Parties that Lloyd Johnstone first became Santa.

**Hall, Ken and Evelyn**  
**658 Misti Drive**

Evelyn came to Bonfire in 1983 and Ken came in 1988. Evelyn was living prior to 1983 in a motor-home in a campground in Eustis. She looked thoroughly around this area before deciding that this was the nicest place of all and she still thinks it is. Ken chose Bonfire because he had a friend living here.

After their marriage they purchased their present home from Fran Vogel and began improvements to their liking; even adding a nice looking garage door which is one of a kind in Bonfire.

They have enjoyed boating, swimming at our pool, and shuffleboard. Evelyn enjoys Bingo and card games. Ken was on the billiards team.

The most significant change to them was when the residents bought the Park from the doctor. Ken served on the first Board of Directors after it was owned by the residents.

Ken passed away in December, 2008, and Evelyn moved at once to an assisted living facility in Tampa, FL where she will be closer to family.

**Harlan, Doris**  
**206 Allyson Road**

Doris and her late husband, Leo, moved here in December 1979, immediately after they retired from their jobs in Indiana. They became permanent residents immediately. The first persons they met in Bonfire were Jack and Gaynell Linkfield. Their son, Steve, lived in Florida when they came. They also had friends from Indiana living in Bonfire.

They were both golfers and enjoyed the couples mixed league with the Linkfields and the rest. Leo was also an avid Bass fisherman and almost every day was out in his boat fishing. Leo was the one who got Bonfire into the FMO in 1981 and was the first president of the FMO Chapter in Bonfire. Many meetings were held in their home. They always lived in the same home where Doris still resides today. It was a new Ramada Mobile Home to them.

Doris is a seasoned Bridge player and has been in charge of the Monday Afternoon Bridge Club all of these years. She also plays in other groups in Lake County. She is a past librarian of our library and has served very capably in many other ways throughout the years; one being that she wrote articles about Bonfire and submitted them to the Leesburg Daily Commercial Newspaper every week. They had one day each week when they featured mobile home news.

Doris is mother of two married sons and has grandchildren and great grandchildren. Leo passed away in May, 2007, and this has been a significant change for Doris.

Since she has been a resident so many years in Bonfire, she has been a great asset to helping with this History Project. She remembers when there were many more alligators in the park and one time Leo even shot one on the road right by their home.

**Huner, Henry and Dorothy  
591 Kelli Drive**

Henry and Dorothy moved to Bonfire in May of 1983. They are snowbirds from Montpelier, OH which is in the Northwest Point of Ohio on the lakefront. It is a 17 ½ hour drive from here. They come here after Thanksgiving and go north around May 1<sup>st</sup>.

They chose Bonfire because they had friends, Robert and Ceilia Dielman, who were snowbirds living here. They came to visit them and then purchased their home.

Henry was a jeweler and watch maker; self employed. Dorothy was a nurse and she worked 25 years in the hospital; 23 of those were in the nursery. Then she worked five years for Henry without pay! ("but diamonds are a girl's best friend" she said.)

They have been involved in a lot of volunteer committees in the park: helped re-decorate the clubhouse, Henry digging ditches and pumping water due to pump failure. (Lake Tammi flooded), they were on monthly committees with 5 other couples and were in charge of all activities in a given month except for dances. Henry called Bingo on Monday nights and Dorothy was always involved in the crafts.

They said that when they first came, it was mostly just a fish camp down by Haynes Creek. The biggest change has been the residents buying the park and they were some of the original owners who bought a share at \$18,500. Changes really took place after that when new homes were placed on the lots, and improvements and progress has been steady ever since. They love their location on Lake Tammi and living in Bonfire. They love the warm sunny winter weather.

**Johnstone, Pat  
781 Lisa Circle**

Pat and her late husband, Lloyd, started coming to Bonfire in 1978. They were friends of Roy and Lolly Dixon and came with them the first time. For years they came as renters and then eventually they purchased the home where Pat lives now. They came from Ontario, Canada. Pat has been coming for 6 months every year since 1998. Lloyd passed away in January 2004.

Lloyd used to dress up as Santa Claus and bring gifts and joy to the residents. She related how one Christmas he made a little 4 year old girl so happy. She was visiting her grandparents and saw him walking down the street and she got very excited and came running out of the screen room to hug him around his legs, nearly knocking him over. As she did this she exclaimed "I knew you would find me, Santa!"

They were golfers and also got involved in the Social Club. It used to be that one couple would be the chairpersons for an entire month and they would solicit others to help them. Then they would be responsible for every social event during the month. They started having the Italian Nights. Pat served as an officer on the Social Board for two years. She has also served 6 years on the Board of Directors for the Co-op and she is serving as secretary currently in 2008 and a director in 2009.

The appearance of the park has been the most significant change in the park; however becoming a widow has been the biggest change personally. She also noted that it is significant that our mortgage since buying the park 15 years ago, has been reduced from nearly 5 million dollars to around \$350,000.

**Kesatie, Jake and June  
Conneaut, Ohio**

Jake and June moved here in 1983 and lived here as snowbirds for 23 years. They moved back to their home in the north in 2006. They lived at 913 Lisa Circle. They saw an ad in a paper that the home was for sale and that is how they chose Bonfire. Living on the lake, their nephews fished right from their yard and also caught turtles. They even had alligators sometimes laying in their yard. They lived here through the tail end of Hurricane Wilma. They saw many changes in the trees, shrubs, and flowers through the years but the most significant change was after the residents bought the Park. They said that people really began to improve the looks of their places.

Jake will be remembered for all his wood carvings and gifts of boots that he gave to many people. June will be remembered for being an immaculate housekeeper and gardener.

They both loved riding their bicycles; especially through the Riverside Community, which is a housing development very near to Bonfire.

**Leonard, Harry and Fay  
Bonfire residents from 1979 to 2002  
(Lenora Kesler's Sister and Husband)**

Lenora Kesler and her daughter, Judy Kneipple, of 663 Misti Drive were interviewed about the Leonards since both Harry and Fay are deceased. They were longtime residents of Bonfire and left in 2002 and sold their home at 639 Misti Drive to Wayne and Donna Matheny.

Lenora Kesler and her late husband, Stanley Kesler, used to come visit Harry and Fay Leonard and they would stay in one of the Haines Creek Cottages. That was what they were called here on our Bonfire property until Blanche and Talmadge Etheredge named our place Bonfire. Harry and Stanley enjoyed a lot of fishing together.

Lenora and Fay had an aunt who lived near Orlando so they had visited this area many times while they were growing up. When they both married, each of their husbands really



loved Florida, so a lot of time was spent here even though they were from Indiana.

Harry called Bingo here for many years, and Fay enjoyed playing bridge. Harry also was a good artist and the wood map of Bonfire at the corner of the Clubhouse was made by him. You can read about more of his art work in the Linkfield's story.

Harry did a lot of research about weather patterns and he found that with all the lakes we have around us, Bonfire is one of the safest places from hurricanes and tornados. The storms we had here in 2004 probably did more damage here than any had done in many many years. They were only storms; not hurricanes or tornados.

Harry and Leo Harlan formed the Board for the Social Activities in 1982 and Harry was the first president of the new board in 1982.

**Lewis, Joe and Dora  
664 Misti Drive**

Joe and Dora came to Bonfire in 1989 from Reed City, Michigan. They had been a few other places before here. They had operated a motel in Texas for about 5 years. They also lived in Englewood, Florida, but Joe liked to fish and he wanted to get away from the saltwater and into the inland somewhere. He said they were staying in Lakeside Village where they had some friends. He went out fishing and he asked Dora to find them a place. She told him they could have either a single or double wide and together they chose the double wide and then renovated it.

They have been involved in boating and fishing, shuffleboard, dancing, and Joe says he ran the kitchen in the Clubhouse and cooked there for quite a few years.

The biggest change he thinks is the residents buying the park and renovating their homes.

Another change for them is that Dora is now a resident at the Bayview Nursing Home in Eustis; since 2007.

**Linkfield, Jack and Gaynell  
800 Sandi Drive**

Jack and Gaynell came to live in Bonfire in February 1978. A friend from Indianapolis lived here and they came to visit them and decided this was the place for them. They came from Indiana and were snowbirds for only two years before becoming permanent residents.

They bought a new Benchmark Mobile Home and have lived at their present address all the years. There was only one place around Lake Lisa on Lisa Circle when they came and Sandi Drive was the dead end street the same as it is today but there were no homes on it. The

clubhouse and swimming pool were in the same place as they are now, but the pool did not have a fence around it.

For the first several years they were involved in everything in the Park and worked on lots of various committees. They started a couples golf league in 1981 and managed it until 1985. They had their own money in the league by having bake sales, cornbread and bean soup suppers, and auctioning off all kinds of items whenever there was a dance or some social event in the clubhouse.

Gaynell told that one of their money making projects was that Harry Leonard was an artist and he designed a patch for a cap which read "Bonfire Hackers". They bought a dozen caps and had the patches made and she sewed them on each cap. The caps cost \$5.00 and they sold them for \$10.00. Another project was that a man from Indiana lived on a golf course when up north, and he collected golf balls from the yards and put them in egg cartons and brought them to Bonfire to auction them off.

They had enough money that they would put on a free banquet for all the members in the golf league. They would have a cocktail hour and a catered meal in the clubhouse every March. They have donated to the history committee a photo album of pictures of the banquets.

They were also involved with a group of men who were members of the Masonic Lodge and the wives were included also. This group provided transportation to persons in the Park who had medical appointments and needed rides to them.

Jack did some fishing and they had a boat and formed a boat club here which lasted only about two years.

They claim that the biggest change affecting their lives was when the Etheredge's sold the Park to the doctor in 1981. He then began raising the rent and residents had to go through the doctor's mother whenever they had any issues or concerns.

**Mastowski, Bernice  
Formerly at 615 Misti Drive**

Bernice and Jessie Murdock bought this place in 1979 from Talmadge and Blanche Etheredge. It was a new home which the Etheredges had lived in for only two years and even though Etheredges were the owners of the park, they moved out of the park to the Silver Lake Community.

Bernice and Jessie were from Michigan and they came to Bonfire to visit Jessie's sister-in-law, Florence Larlow, who was residing in Bonfire. Florence lived close to 615 Misti Drive and when Bernice saw that this big home sitting on 2 lots was for sale, she bought it, as she loved the color of it and the bigness of it. It was the biggest home in the park at that time. From then on, people began putting double wides in the park rather than the single wides.

Their home was right beside the swimming pool and all the trees were cut down around the pool so that the leaves would not get into it. Then a fence was put around the pool and she was very glad of that; for safety.

She told about the Etheredges selling to a dentist in 1981 and then that we became a cooperative association in 1984 and then that we residents bought the park from the dentist in 1993. She stated that the homes began to look a lot better after people bought shares and started taking more pride in their appearance.

She said that the Park Board ruled, and that they and many volunteers made the Park what it is today. She said that they did not get very involved in the park's activities. She sold to Bobby Wolgan in 2007 and moved back North.

**Oliveira, Archie and Betty "O"**  
**679 Lori Drive**

Archie and Betty "O" are snowbirds from New Bedford, MA. They bought into Bonfire in 1987, and have lived always at the same address. They leave for the north in April and return at the end of October.

They have not been very involved in committee work but have enjoyed Bingo and Betty has enjoyed the arts and crafts. Neither have ever served on the Board of Directors.

They have loved Bonfire and like to do things anonymously for other people; like dropping off a meal or some goodies. Betty likes to live on the mysterious edge!

A friend of theirs was living here in 1985 and after they came to visit two times, they decided this was where they wanted to retire.

The change in appearance of the park is the most significant change to them.

**Pinkerton, Bill and Jean**  
**904 Lisa Circle**

Bill and Jean came to Bonfire in 1984. They came here to visit Bill's sister, Evelyn Hall, and Jean said "I think I could take living here" and that was all it took. They looked at a new mobile that another man had bought and had only lived in for a short time and they bought it. They have been snowbirds from Nova Scotia for 24 years.

Bill was a good at golf and got right into that and before long was even the chairman of it for our park. He had a banquet for the players at the end of the winter season and even invited all golf players in our park, even if they didn't play on the Mixed League or the Thursday League. He would buy the meat for the meal and then have the rest be potluck. They would have a 50/50 drawing and that would pay for the expense of the meat! After

many years, (approximately 10) he turned the golf over to John Parker, who is still in charge of it. Bill is also a great pool player and is chairman of that activity in our park presently in 2008.

Jean is quite a knitter and has made lots of beautiful throws, purses, and kitchen accessories and other miscellaneous items. She is also a seasoned bridge player and faithfully attends the Monday Afternoon Bridge Club in our park.

A couple of things that stand out in their memory is that we used to have a man who lived here who had a pest control business and he used to spray around all the homes in the park for \$3.00 or \$4.00 per house. They said he used a 3 wheel golf cart with his business. The other outstanding memory was that there used to be a wooden bridge over Haynes Creek. They think it was around 1981 when it was removed.

They told of a former resident, John Decator, who lived near them, who one day was sitting in his yard, when all of a sudden he noticed a 4 foot alligator fairly close to him. He got up very carefully and went to his house to where he just happened to have a big box that a new washer had come in. He brought it out and covered it over the gator. He called his neighbor over to tell her that he had a gator under the box but she thought he was joking. He lifted the edge and sure enough she was immediately frightened of it. The animal control man came to get it but the gator grabbed his pant leg first. It all ended without serious injury but shook up the neighbors quite a lot.

Then they also reminisced about their two daughters bringing 2 huge boxes of cooked lobsters with them on the plane. The girls had cooked them the night before their flight and had them packed in the proper cold storage boxes and kept them with them during the flights from Halifax to Boston and from Boston to Orlando. They knew if they would put them in baggage, they would never have arrived. They were offered \$500 a piece in the airport!!!! But they didn't sell them.

**Pocius, Virginia "Genny"**  
**106 Jodi Avenue**

Genny came to Bonfire from Massachusetts in March of 1981. Her boyfriend lived here and she visited him and then purchased the home across the street which was 106 Jodi.

She worked until 2004 so she never had time to get involved in activities and committees in the park.

Going from single wides to double wides in the park has been the most significant change to her. The park has been up graded a lot since she moved in.



**Reeve, Bert**  
**107 Jodi Avenue**

Bert and his wife, Jeanie, came to visit Nina Coburn and her first husband, who lived here, and they determined that they wanted to put a new mobile home at 107 Jodi Ave and they did. That was in 1981. He was an electrical engineer retired from Chrysler. They had lived in MI.

Bert played pool, swam every day, rode his bicycle 5 miles every day, and took care of his wife for years. She had lost her leg due to diabetes.

He thought the most significant change he saw was going from a fish camp to a nice mobile home park.

Bert passed away on February 21, 2008 and his wife passed away before him.

**Reynolds, Jack and Marge**  
**630 Misti Drive**

Jack and Marge came to Bonfire in 1989 from Springville, Indiana. Some friends of theirs had arranged for them to rent a new mobile home in Parkwood Oaks in Wildwood, FL in 1988. While they rented they were driving by Bonfire on their way to church in Eustis. One day they saw a "For Sale" sign in the window of their home so they stopped to inquire about it. So they bought it, fully furnished, and were snowbirds until 2008-09 when they have become permanent residents.

They went to the office and volunteered to help wherever there was a need, and soon found themselves busy. Jack became president of the Social Club and had that for approximately 10 years or so. While in office, the Social Club sponsored the adopt-a-chair event and the padded chairs we are using still are the results of that program. Persons bought a chair for \$25.00. They had 125 of the old metal chairs; which we still have 25 of them. They sold 100 of them to a group of people who were starting a new church. They were sold for \$2.00 each.

Marge got involved as the Choir Director and had that for approximately 8-10 years at which time she turned it over to Ann Ellis. During that time she had a group of about 30 persons who went to nursing homes to sing. At some of the choir programs here in Bonfire there was a meal served first and then the program followed. Men dressed in black and white would do the cooking and serve the meal.

Both Jack and Marge enjoyed shuffle boarding and going as Bonfire teams to other parks. They have also enjoyed singing together and have done that at several weddings and funerals. They sang a duet at Sharon Martin's retirement party held in April of 2008.

They are the parents of one son and one daughter and grandparents of three. All of their family except one granddaughter lives in Florida.

**Rice, Jean**  
**660 Misti Drive**

Jean and her late husband, Don, moved into the park in 1984 from Flint, Michigan. They first lived on Lock Rd and in 1991 purchased the home at 660 Misti Dr where Jean currently lives. They had friends living here who recommended Bonfire to them.

Jean has been in the choir, crafts, style shows, and volunteered for one month committees which were in charge of all the social activities in a certain month in the clubhouse.

She says the most significant change to her is when Bonfire became a resident owned park.

**Showers, Harry and Doris**  
**581 Kelli Drive**

Harry and Doris came to Bonfire in 1987 and bought their home through 4 STAR REALTY. The former owner was from Ohio. They were originally from Pennsylvania; a suburb of Philadelphia. However, they moved to Hialeah, Florida in 1956 and Harry worked for Eastern Air Lines as an A & E Mechanic. He retired in 1982, at which time they had lived in Florida for 26 years.

They then began to move around in their motor home looking for a new place and eventually in 1987 found Bonfire. They liked Lake County with all the fishing. They also had friends who lived in this area. They wanted to be near Orlando Area but yet they loved the country atmosphere here.

They enjoy Bingo and even were in charge of it for two summers.

They say there are two significant changes to them; one is that when they first came they felt like they were the "young" ones and now they feel they are the "older" ones. But also, they feel everyone is more proud of their property and the whole park these days.

**Smith, Harry and Marilyn**  
**511 Kimberly Avenue**

Harry and Marilyn came here in 1984 from Swartz Creek, MI and have continued to be snowbirds except for 9 years when Harry gave up retirement and went back to Michigan to become a Township Supervisor. His present residence is the 4<sup>th</sup> home he has had in Bonfire.

Harry's brother had a friend who lived here and that is how they came to be here. They have enjoyed golfing with the "Bonfire Hackers" Couples Golf League. Harry was part of the "Can't Hardly Construction Co." of Bonfire. Their logo was a broken hammer. Some of the members were: Kenny Dixon, Roy Dixon, John Decator, Bill Dunn, Dick Sutherlin, and Bill Pinkerton. They did a lot of small projects for residents.

Marilyn has been involved in many of the crafts and she enjoys painting. She also enjoys the ladies luncheons and other social activities. They attend the dances and other events in the Clubhouse.

The significant change that they have seen is the pride in ownership since the residents have bought the park. Harry has served on the Board of Directors since January, 2003.

**Smith, Rutheda  
751 Traci Drive**

Rutheda and her late husband bought their place at 751 Traci Dr in 1989 and moved in the following April after tax season, as she was employed by her brother's CPA Business and always worked for him during tax season. Her husband had been a sheet metal mechanic in their hometown near Toledo, Ohio. He passed away October 5, 2006.

They were snowbirds for 17 years. They sold their home in northwestern Ohio when they came to Bonfire as they had a home on a lake in northeastern Indiana. They would spend their summers at their lake home until 2006 when they became permanent residents of Bonfire. She has two daughters and a grand-daughter who has blessed her with two great-grandsons. They all live in Ohio.

How she found Bonfire was because they had a friend at their lake in Indiana who came to Bonfire to his place in the winter. His place was right across the street from where Rutheda's place is; however, he is no longer a resident here.

She said there were not as many homes here when they first came; she thinks approximately 20 homes have been added since they came. She says the park has been greatly improved in appearance in these past 20 years; she noted that at one time residents were getting help from the Co-op Board with new siding on their homes; but they did not.

Some of the social activities were enjoyed by her and her husband but she says they were never officers on The Social Board nor the Co-op Board. Cards have always been enjoyed and currently she serves as the chairperson of the Euchre Players.

**Sosbey, Bill  
786 Lisa Circle**

Bill purchased his home on May 25, 1985, and he has lived in the same home every since. He moved here from Perris, California. He visited this area and liked it.

He has enjoyed playing pool, has traveled, and taken cruises.

The most significant change he thinks is the buying of the park by the residents.

**Stone, Max and Lenora  
Alexandria, IN**

Max and Lenora came to Bonfire in 1981 and they lived at 663 Misti Dr at first. They are quite the decorators so after they re-decorated that home, they bought 659 Misti Dr and went to work on it. They came from Alexandria, IN and they found Bonfire because they were good friends of Harry and Fay Leonard who lived here at the time. They were snowbirds for 26 years and decided to go back to IN permanently because of ill health. They sold their home to me and my husband; Dotti and Merwyn Champion, in 2007.

Lenora was very involved with sewing crafts of all kinds, but specializing in bunny rabbits and country crafts. Max was involved with the golf. They never served on the Board of Directors, but were involved in some of the committees for special events.

They became special friends of mine and when I could not convince them to stay in Bonfire, they wanted to sell their home to my husband and me. We have visited them at their home in IN and they are doing fine. Since moving back North, they have been to Colorado to both their grandson's and granddaughter's weddings and they now have become great grandparents.

**Stuck, Lorin and Ruth  
666 Misti Drive**

Lorin came here in the Spring of 1979. He and his first wife came from the Battlecreek, Michigan area. She passed away in November, 1993, at 75 years of age. He married Ruth in 2001 and she had come from Indiana originally.

He found Bonfire when they were staying at the Blue Parrot Campground. They were looking for something a little more permanent and where there was water, as he loved to boat and fish. They liked all the trees at Bonfire and chose to come here.

He also liked to golf and was in charge of that for awhile. He also likes to play pool and they only had one table when he came. He found a second table for them and got the men in the park who were interested in pool to form teams just within our park. He was in charge of it for a time and then later on, someone else got them to play in tournaments with teams from other parks.

They used to participate in the monthly committees where one group would take care of everything social in that month. They did potlucks, dances, and other things.

The most significant change was the residents buying the park. He said, "before that our rent was going up by leaps and bounds."



**Waterman, Ruth**  
**701 Kimberly Avenue**

Ruth and her late husband, Frederick Sr. came to Bonfire in 1979 from Rochester, NY, and they/she has lived at 701 Kimberly Ave every since. Ruth had retired from a life-long career as a surgical nurse at Rochester General Hospital. Ruth is still a snow-bird and goes to Lima, NY every summer to be with family. She has 2 daughters; one is Deborah, who lives with her and the other is Judy Longhouse who also lives in this park in the winters. She also has 1 son and 5 grandchildren and great-grandchildren in NY. She has a grandson who is an Iraq Veteran and is now a policeman in New Jersey.

She found Bonfire because her husband's brother and wife, Alfred and Eleanor Waterman, lived here and they came to spend a week with them. While here, Eleanor told Ruth about 701 Kimberly being for sale. She went to see it, loved it, and bought it on the spur of the moment. After Alfred died, Eleanor continued to live here.

They used to come on the second day after Christmas and stay until around May 15<sup>th</sup> but then as time went on, they started going back north a little sooner; around May 2. She told of how she enjoyed fishing from the bank of the creek with a cane pole. There was a great blue heron that became her pet and she gave it the small fish she caught. She knows that the heron knew her and came by her side for at least 10 years. She named him "Oscar."

When they first came here, she said most of the homes were on the creek; there were moveable trailers and RV's to the north of them and mostly single-wides around the park between Kimberly Ave and Lock Road, as it was a fish camp. It was owned by the Etheredges until 1981 and they sold it to the dentist in California. She said he raised the rent every year so it was a good thing that we became incorporated and eventually were able to buy the park from him.

Ruth spent most of her time fishing but she also enjoyed bingo, potlucks, and craft class. The road going to Riverside Community now, used to be a sand road and there was a house on the curve, on the left, that used to have 6-8 peacocks. Ruth took a lot of walks down the sandy road to see the peacocks. She and her husband used to ride their bicycles a lot. There were lots of bicycle riders in the park and not very many golf carts.

Her husband had a stroke and never fully recovered from it, and he passed away in November of 1992. She continues to fish and has another blue heron these days. She rides a motorized cart to the creek and fishes from it. She still thinks of Bonfire as a family park since 2 of her daughters live here, and 2 brothers and a sister of her son-in-law also do.

**Williams, Doris**  
**788 Sandi Drive**

Doris and her late husband, Glenn, came to Bonfire in December of 1979 from Plymouth, New Hampshire. They became permanent residents right away. They knew friends from New Hampshire who lived here also. They first bought at 676 Lori Drive and lived there until 1986. She was going around the park selling tickets to a spaghetti supper one day and when she came to 788 Sandi Drive, where Dick and Betty Rockwell lived, Betty told her that she was going to sell her home and Doris decided right then that she wanted to buy it. She has continued to live at that address. They never had any children. Glenn was president of the Bonfire Cooperative Assn. in 1986. He passed away in 1989.

In 2001 Doris married "MO" Mabis. They were only married a short time as he passed away in 2003 and then Doris took back her name of Williams.

Doris has enjoyed going to the weekly dances at the Central Florida Dance Club in Eustis. She says there is no smoking, no alcohol, and no fighting. The music has been great and she has recommended some of the groups to the Bonfire Dance Committee which they then booked.

Doris has enjoyed a lot of the activities of the Social Club such as the potlucks, choir and choir programs, indoor flea markets, and some of the crafts.

She remembers when each home had its own mailbox. She also remembers when the streets were not paved but were just gravel and sand, and there were trickling streams running down Shannon, Cindi, and Jodi to the Creek. There also were not many street lights and Lora Lucas who used to accompany the choir on the piano, lived on one of those three streets just mentioned, so choir members would walk her to her home with the light of a flashlight, after choir practice. Vivian Alden was the choir director. Glenn and Doris both sang in the choir and Glenn was instrumental in acquiring a new piano from the Jones Music Company in the Lake Square Mall in Leesburg.

In the past she remembered that they had street potlucks when they lived on Lori Drive. Also she mentioned that her neighbors, John and Alice Smith at 679 Lori Drive had a motorcycle. How many had motorcycles back in '79??? Now there are at least 10 in Bonfire in 2009.

The up-grades in the park are a big change to her, but the most significant change is that she and Howard Blanding were married on July 15, 2009. Best Wishes to you both!!!

**Zeunik, Al and Mary**  
**507 Kimberly Avenue**

Al and Mary are full-time residents and they moved here from Spencer, Indiana in 1989. They had a camper on Kentucky Lake at Paris Landing, Murray, KY. Al was talking to a gentleman about renting someplace in Florida and this man knew of an Indiana State Trooper who owned 507 Kimberly Avenue and was wanting to sell it. The trooper was getting a divorce and was liquidating his assets so Al and Mary bought it from him.

Al was on the Cooperative Board of Directors at the time the dentist was wanting to sell the park. Bonfire residents had the first right of refusal. Al and Mary both worked on contacting the residents in a door to door campaign to explain the advantages of being a resident owned park. Mike Skeen and Bill Gorman helped the residents to know the procedure for buying the park. There had to be a fixed % of the residents agreeing to put in the share of \$18,500 each in order to purchase it.

Al and Mary have been very involved in the park. They served on a lot of committees with the Sutherlins and Burrells. They have both served on the dance committees and love the dances in the Clubhouse. They originated the Bonfire Karaoke. Mary sings in the choir. Al has served twice on the Cooperative Board of Directors.

They both worked for RCA; Al for 40 years and retired at age 58. Mary worked for them 12 years and met Al through work. She also worked in the cafeteria at Tavares Middle School until 2005.

They love their location and sitting on their screen porch watching all the boats and people go by. They love the consistent weather of Florida.....sunny every day. Al has been an avid fisherman. He could catch the daily limit of bass and grouper in the early days.

They do go north for about 5 weeks in the summer to southern Indiana. They miss all their snowbird friends who leave in the Spring and Summer to go back North.

Their list of significant changes goes like this: purchase of the park and boat docks added, upgrading of homes in the park, lots of old mobiles pulled out and new ones put in, most improved area is around Cindy Avenue and Shannon Avenue, clubhouse, pool, and roads. They mentioned how Mike Skeen offered \$500 to residents who would put new siding on their home and how this was a very helpful incentive. This was after we became resident owned of course.

**Zimmer, Wendell and Sara  
510 Kimberly Avenue**

Wendell and Sara moved into Bonfire from Indiana in 1989. They were visiting friends of Sara's sister and they fell in love with it here because of all the trees and the access to the water.

They both have served on the Cooperative Board of Directors. Sara was treasurer for a term and she also filled in at the office at times when we were between office managers.

They also have both served on various committees throughout the years. They served on monthly committees and helped out with projects whenever they could. Sara was a line dance instructor and also helped get the new equipment for karaoke.

The most significant change was going from a rental park to a resident owned. It became a hard sell to convince enough people in 45 days to pay the \$18,500 up front to allow Bonfire to become resident owned. Many feared it would not succeed and they would lose their money.

Sara says she feels very comfortable with the office procedures which have been put in place since we have become resident owned. There are many checks and balances which is good.



## A BIT OF HISTORY ABOUT LEESBURG AND HAYNES CREEK

Captain Melton Haynes arrived in this area in 1845 which was even before the founding of Leesburg. You will read more about him on the following pages. My original intent was to trace the land Bonfire sits on way back to the Indians and I have discovered that is almost what I've accomplished...Melton Haynes was commissioned as a Militia Captain to subdue the Seminole Uprising in 1849. Also according to the following pages about him, he also married Sarah Isabella Vaught in 1849 and she came from a family who owned a plantation on Haynes Creek. They perhaps raised cotton, corn, sweet potatoes, and oranges on their plantation.

The first mother in Leesburg is recorded as Mary Ellen Morrison Robertson, according to Emmett Peter's book, Lake County Florida a Pictorial History. Peter writes that Mary Ellen came here from South Carolina in 1848 at the young age of 15. She married John Marmaduke Robertson who was 26. Robertson's father was the first white settler in Lake County. Mary Ellen and John had seven children and she died in 1862 at the age of 29. There were no towns, roads, schools, stores, churches, or doctors in those days and Leesburg hadn't even received its name at that time.

The founders of Leesburg were Mr. and Mrs. Evander Lee and they were settlers here in 1857. That was 102 years before the first deed the courthouse had regarding this property Bonfire is sitting on. The courthouse told us that in the early days people were not required to register their deeds.

Just a few facts about Leesburg:

In 1858: Leesburg's first church services were conducted by a circuit rider in a brush arbor built of pine posts and thatched with palmetto fronds somewhere near Lake Griffin.

In 1859: The first school was conducted in the arbor used for Sunday worship.

In 1861: A small frame building was purchased for use as a school.

In 1875: The first newspaper, the Sumter County Advance, was printed.

In 1875: Some of the finest orange groves in the state were said to be on the banks of Lake Harris and Lake Griffin.

In 1927: The wooden bridge was built over Haynes Creek near Lisbon Area.

In 1957: Burrell lock and dam was constructed on Haynes Creek.

In 1961: Etheredges purchased Bonfire from Sarah Morrison Horne and her husband Claude Horne.

In 1981: Lisbon's new bridge was built over Haynes Creek.

In 2009: The Lockmaster of Burrell lock and dam is Steve Vincent. Two of our Bonfire residents are lock workers. They are Arthur Montesi and Ernest Kappotis.

## Captain Melton Haynes

Captain Melton Haynes left his enduring mark on the settlers of the Lake Region since his arrival in 1845. His popularity with the area's settlers grew due to his good will, hard work, and compassion. That admiration would continue throughout his life when his council and leadership were called upon - and he responded to the call!

A Civil Engineer by trade, Captain Melton Haynes surveyed much of the region upon his arrival, and homesteaded areas at Sunnyside-Eldorado in Leesburg, Orange Bend on Haynes Creek and Lake Griffin, and his famous Woodlea property on Lake Harris in Tavares. A home he built there in 1871 still stands today waiting for its opportunity to be preserved.

Some of Captain Melton Haynes' career highlights include introducing the "Sweet Orange" to the Lake Region when he arrived in 1845.

In 1849, after being commissioned as a Militia Captain to subdue the Seminole Uprising, he married Sarah Isabella Vaught, daughter of Joseph and Sarah Vaught who owned a plantation on Haynes Creek.

1854 & 1855 - Elected to the Florida House of Representatives representing Duval County. A *Bill*, created by a petition from the citizens to form a new county called *Haynes County* after Melton, passed House vote.

1863 - Confederate Cavalry Captain during the American Civil War serving in the command of Captain J. J. Dickson. Melton commanded Company H, 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Fl. Cavalry consisting of men from Sumter, Marion, Orange, and Volusia Counties.

1866-67 - When the Southern States regained full control of their state governments, the citizens of Sumter elected Melton Haynes as their State Senator.

Many business adventures included citrus groves, a general store, post office, dredging, real estate, surveying for the county, and a large shipping depot at *Lake Griffin* and *Haynes Creek* carrying fruit up the *Oklawaha* and *St. John's* to points north.

1868 - First Worshipful Master of the newly formed Mason Lodge 58 in Leesburg. In 1873, elected first Worshipful Master of Fort Mason Lodge 65, now called Umatilla. This is a great honor bestowed by his peers! Both lodges are still in existence.

1883 - Died. His funeral in Yalaha was reported as the largest ever seen in South Florida. Besides the Tuskawilla Steamer loaded with family and friends, the line of carriages were over a mile distant.



# Lisbon's draw was drawbridge



**Rick Reed**  
Brownsville

**A**s a way of celebrating Lake County's 120th birthday we began a series looking at Lake's early communities last June. Lake County was formed from portions of Sumter and Orange counties in 1887.

Our search for the town and cities we're looking at has been The South Publishing Company's Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory of 1886-87, which listed about 30 communities in Orange and Sumter counties that would soon become part of the newly formed Lake County.

We began with Acorn, today known as Fluker, followed by Missouri and then Atlatola, now Atlatola. We looked at Blountville in the middle of Lake County, on Lake Harris and just west of Yalaha, Cana, Chocoma and Cana. We moved out of the "C's" and into the "E's," which brought us to Etna and Etna. Next up was Fort

Marion, not the Seminole Indian War stockade but the community on the northeast corner of Lake Harris, followed by Glendale, Hawthornville, Helena, Hight, Indian Springs, Kinnet, Lake Griffin, also called Lanier, 50 acres and Lane Park.

We spent three weeks looking at Leesburg and today it's on to Lisbon, a community in the northeast of Leesburg on Haynes Creek that was known, years ago, because of its drawbridge.

But the ribbon of water running across Lake Griffin to Lake Harris wasn't known as Haynes Creek in 1886, even though Melton Harries was well known in the area bordering the east side of Lake Griffin.

The Gazetteer called it by another name.

"Situated on the Ocklawaha river, and on the line of the Florida Southern Railway Co., John and Lake Harris branch, 45 miles northwest of Orlando, the county seat," noted the Gazetteer.

So, at that time Haynes Creek was known as a part of the Ocklawaha, which entered Lake Griffin from the north before flowing southwesterly into Lake Harris.

When the Gazetteer was printed Lisbon was a part of Orange County, Orange Road, which was on the opposite side of Haynes Creek, or the Ocklawaha and still is, considered a part of Sumter County.

But by 1887 they both became part of Lake County. Lisbon was a town of 111 in 1886 and W.T. Laine was its postmaster. Laine, many postmasters of the day, Laine had his hand in several things. Oftentimes the postmaster owned the local mercantile and that's where the post office was located.

But Laine owned and ran the local hotel, the Lisbon Hotel. He was also the local agent for the Southern Express Company and the railway. In addition, he was listed as a vegetable and truck farmer.

Lisbon was a fledgling community in 1886 with a public school, a Methodist church, a hotel, three stores and two sawmills, according to the Gazetteer, which stated that Lisbon was first settled in 1884.

William Kennedy's History of Lake County, which was published in 1929, claims the area was settled much earlier.



Early settlers found natural orange groves in the Lisbon area and gathered them with sweet buds.

"Lisbon, between Leesburg and Grand Island, was settled by the W.J. Abolbrook family in 1854," published Kennedy. "They first settled at Warm Springs, Harriestown in Sumter County, coming there from Jones, Georgia, but the following year they moved to Lisbon and bought eighty acres from Spencer Thomas. They also bought out all his cattle and specialized in stock-raising for a number of years."

The Abolbrook family bought other land and also acquired government property and their little fiefdom totaled about 800 acres, according to Kennedy.

"Abolbrook and his sons cleared the land and cultivated cotton, sugar cane, corn and sweet potatoes for their subsistence, but their principal business was raising cattle and hogs."

Stock raising continued to be "quite an industry," according to the Gazetteer in 1886. And E.B. and Z. E. Abolbrook are mentioned in the Gazetteer's business listings. E.B. was noted as a stock raiser and Z. E. ran a general merchandise store.

Both Abolbrooks were listed as orange growers, with E.B. also listed as a vegetable and



Perhaps Lisbon's two saw mills looked like this one at Fluker.

truck farmer. E.G. Glenn was listed as general merchandise but the third shop owner wasn't listed. And J.S. Glenn, one of the 11 orange growers mentioned, was also listed as a druggist.

One sawmill was run by J.F. Williamson and the Francis Bros. were listed as running the planing mill. And J.S. Harman was mentioned as a contractor and builder.

While the Gazetteer doesn't say who taught at the school, Kennedy wrote, "The first school was taught by Warren Shore and the second teacher was Jackson House, of New

York. He terminated his teaching, however, when he enlisted for service in the Civil War, together with James and Thomas Abolbrook."

Kennedy closed his section on Lisbon by writing, "Now orange trees abounded in this section and were gathered with sweet buds about the time the Civil War commenced, so that the Lisbon of today has some fine groves and maintains two large and up-to-date packing houses."

1887 Road is a community newsletter in Mount Dora. To reach him call 352-1453 or e-mail him at 1887road@aol.com.



Here is a 1929 photograph of the drawbridge over Haynes Creek in Lisbon.

COURTESY PHOTO

# End nears for old Lisbon bridge 8-19-78

By JOE SANCHEZ

LISBON — It creaks, it rattles, it shudders and it's "slick" when it's wet and "icy" when it's cold. Few have a kind word for it.

But 50 years ago its wood was new and strong, and the Lisbon bridge crossing Haines Creek must have had its proud moments in the early days after its construction in 1927.

There are none now.

Today the people who live close to the bridge curse it, call it names and are convinced its time of usefulness is long past.

In spite of the repulsion for the bridge and the fear it brings to some who cross its narrow span, especially on a rainy day or cold morning, the bridge is not as dangerous as some may think.

Cpl. E.D. Crouse of the Florida Highway Patrol station at Fruitland Park said that since 1976 "we have had 10 accidents at the most on the bridge, and no fatalities in quite some time."

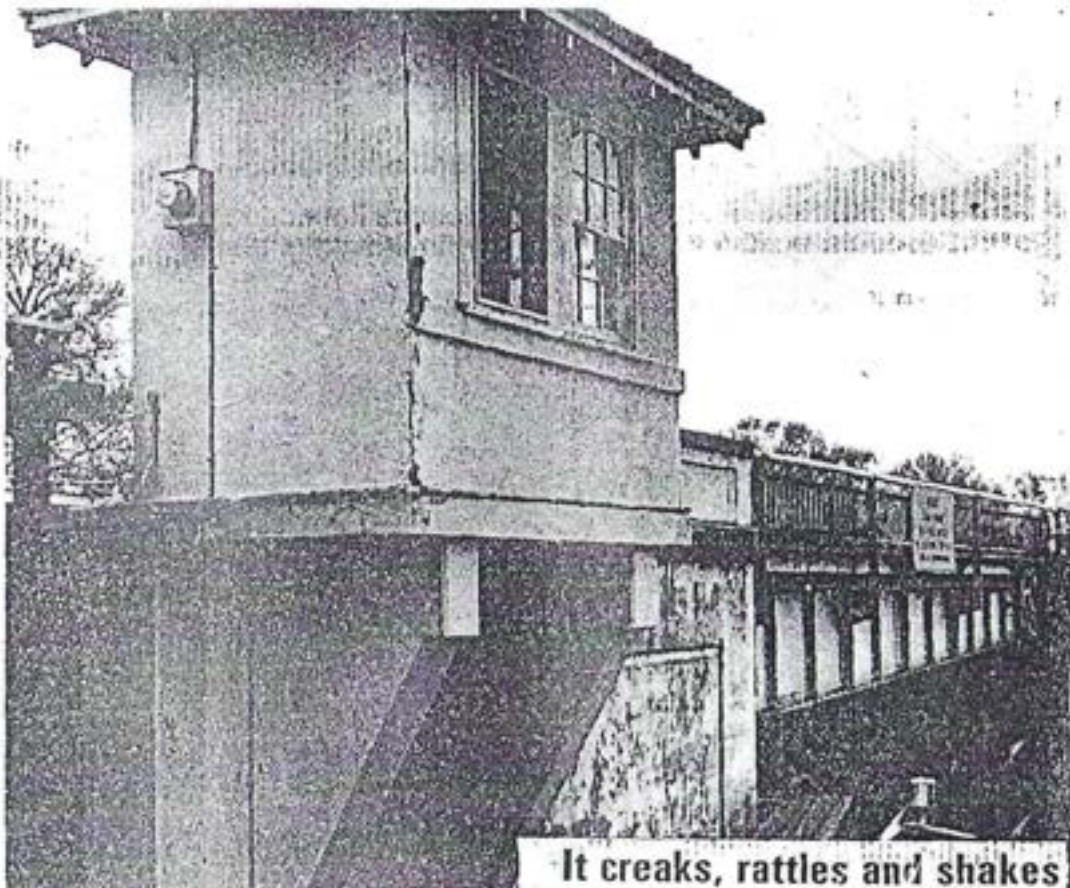
He conceded there are a few that are not reported.

Most of the accidents are minor; usually a vehicle sideswipes the bridge, he said.

"The problem with the bridge," he said, "is that it is old and narrow and people are afraid of it. There is a 35 mile-per-hour speed limit there, but people traveling daily find it very rough."

In January 1979 a contract is scheduled to be let for construction of a new concrete bridge "just to the north of the present structure," said Lt. McKelvey, deputy district production engineer for the state Department of Transportation in DeLand.

Although it will be a two-lane roadway, as is State Road 44 where the bridge is located, it will be wider than the present structure by several feet.



It creaks, rattles and shakes

Ray Powell/Leslie's Star

Bridge tender's quarters at Lisbon Bridge not staffed these days

1978



The new bridge will have a full shoulder width on either side and a sidewalk on the south side," McKelvey said.

A 22.1-foot clearance from the high water mark to the bridge will eliminate the need for a bridge tender, McKelvey said. Cost estimate of the new bridge is \$225,000.

It will require 1½ years to construct, he said.

The old one will be removed during the latter six months of the contract period of the new structure, McKelvey said.

Before the construction of the old Lisbon bridge the county put in a structure that had to be turned by hand to open it for boats to pass under, Mrs. Lena Gastfield recalled.

Mrs. Gastfield — who said "they keep busting up that bridge" — has lived in the Lisbon area since 1913.

Before this there was no bridge. Crossing Haines Creek meant pulling a ferry by rope to get from one side to the other, according to information from Ken Spear, Tavares, with the Lake County Historical Society.

But in 1927 a modern bridge — the present Lisbon Bridge — was constructed. It opened from controls a bridge tender operated out of the small building on the bridge's deck.

"It still is in usable condition," said John H. Balesden, maintenance engineer for the Department of Transportation in Leesburg.

"The DOT has placed it on three hour call. We had it opened Saturday (March 11) and Tuesday (March 14)."

For the past eight years calls have gone into the DOT office in Leesburg where they are relayed to a DOT employee who opens the bridge.

McKelvey said the bridge is being replaced because "it is old and is structurally inadequate and obsolete."

In 1977 the traffic on the Edisto side of the bridge (State Road 44 to Eustis) averaged 4,200 vehicles every 24 hours, McKelvey said.

To the west, on the Leesburg end of the bridge, the count was 3,700 vehicles.

It costs about \$5,000 a year to maintain the bridge. This does not include the cost for the tender, an "intangible" expense, McKelvey said.

Perhaps those who may have had a soft feeling in their hearts for the old bridge are all dead.

Certainly there are no kind words for it from those who live within hearing distance of its moans and groans as the machinery swings the bridge open.

"It's a damn pill," said Floyd Hanzhan, manager of Winston's Marina adjacent to the bridge. "It keeps me awake all night, rattling and rumbling. Why, when a big truck goes over it, it shakes, and when there's a cold snap it's dangerous."

"They patch on it every day it seems," said Mrs. Leroy Turner. The Turners own the Black Bass Resort, a stone's throw from the bridge.

"We do have a lot of traffic since they put in Mid-Florida Lakes and Tera mobile home parks," Leroy Turner said. "When the frost gets on the planks, it's very dangerous."

"It is a hazard," said Lou Cutbirth, office secretary for the Bonfire Mobile Home Park near the bridge. "Some of the boards are usually loose; it's way too narrow; in damp weather it's slick and in cold weather it's icy. When they're (DOT) working on it — which seems to be about

95 percent of the time — there's no way traffic ... Why, it looks very fragile to me."

Mrs. Gastfield, whose husband, George, was the Lisbon Bridge tender for 23 years, said: "They keep busting it up (vehicles that crash into it). Yes, it's noisy and it's dangerous and we very much are in need of a new bridge there."

So it goes.

No one, it would appear, has any compassion for the old Lisbon Bridge.

And sometime about the middle of 1980 workmen will begin the task of removing the wooden structure and the Lisbon Bridge — as it is known today — will creak and rattle no more.

1978

1984

Whistle stop



## Haines Creek last remaining Lisbon landmark

By Joe Sanchez

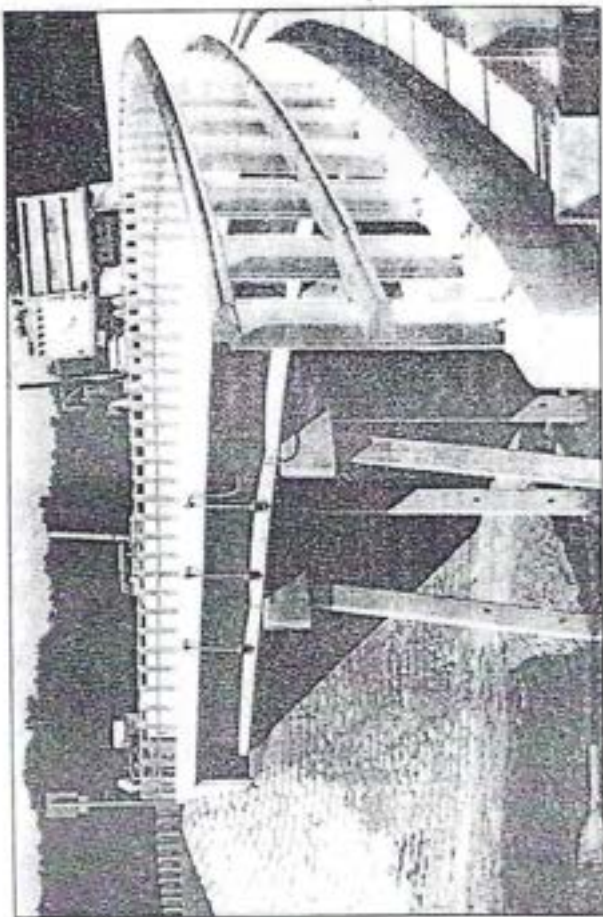
OF THE CENTRAL STAFF

13 May 1984

LISBON — Back in 1854, the W.J. Alsbrook family from Jones, Ga., bought 80 acres and began raising cattle along Haines Creek near what today is State Road 44.

Soon the family entered claims for government property to increase their land holdings to 800 acres, and William Kennedy, in his History Of Lake County Florida, said the family cleared the land and cultivated cotton, sugar cane, corn and sweet potatoes.

Lisbon's history is sketchy, but people who have lived in the unincorporated community for years remember the George R. Gastfield grocery and general merchandise store that was opened at the turn of the century and continued as a business until 1980,



RAY POWELL/STAFF

Lisbon's new bridge was built in 1981 after an old, wooden bridge was torn down.

when a new bridge was constructed across Haines Creek. The business at first was owned by J.C. Bryan, and goods were brought to a landing near Leesburg by the steamship Alligator. From there they were brought by wagon to the store.

Gastfield bought the store in 1918 and it remained a landmark in the Lisbon area until it was torn down. It was known for its colorful signs plastered on the unpainted clapboard sides that advertised county fairs, soft drinks, cigarettes and nickel candy bars.

Old-timers remember the sign inside: "Some pay when due; some pay when overdue; some never do; how do you do?" Under that was another sign: "Cigarettes on time, 30 cents."

Another of Lisbon's landmarks, the old wooden bridge that crossed Haines Creek, was removed in 1980 to make way for construction of the present concrete structure.

The wooden bridge was built in 1927. A bridge tender opened it for boat traffic with the controls he operated from a small building on the bridge's deck. Before this, there was another wooden bridge crossing Haines Creek.

Please see LISBON, 23