



Martin Digital History

Newsletter of martindigitalhistory.org

August 2025

Project Updates

- We added 635 items to Martin Digital History this month, including Elliott Museum director Janet Hutchinson's progress reports for 1980-1985 and 1988-1989, more items from the Taylor-Ashley Collection, a binder on John Mann from Stuart Heritage Museum, and many items from Sandra Thurlow.
- We've also had new accessions from Lloyd Jones, the Martin County Sheriff's Office, and from the Historical Society of Martin County. We hope to include more on these donations next month.

Uploads to martindigitalhistory.org:

HSMC Progress Reports

This collection includes letters to members of the Historical Society of Martin County (HSMC) from the director Janet Hutchinson from 1980-1985 and from 1988-1989. The letters update members on events, plans, and museum attendance. The letters chiefly focused on art exhibitions at the Elliott Museum, but also included news on repairs to the Refuge, or new accessions. Also included are images of events, including exhibition preview receptions for members, the annual benefit cocktail party, and the annual Christmas Eve open house. Many of the people who attended these events may be familiar to you.



Janet Hutchinson (1917-2006), director of the Historical Society of Martin County from 1965 to 1992 and friend Emeline Paige (1904-2003), writer and editor for many publications, including the weekly Manhattan newspaper, *The Villager*, which ran her column "Scoopys" (ostensibly written by a local tomcat) for many years and continues with the musings of later "Scoopys."



Architect Peter Jefferson (1938-2015) and wife Joan Jefferson at the 14th Annual Benefit Cocktail Party, 13 Nov 1981. Peter Jefferson was significant in saving many historic buildings in downtown Stuart. Joan Jefferson served as a Stuart City Commissioner (1979-1983), Stuart's first female mayor (1987-1992), and coordinator of the Florida Main Street program.

Uploads to martindigitalhistory.org:

Taylor-Ashley Collection



Among the items uploaded this month is a magazine section published by the *Stuart News* in 1941, *Tropical Invitation*. It features many ads from local businesses and articles on fishing, real estate, and the St. Lucie Canal, a cross-state waterway.



A pair of interesting photos donated by Josephine Paradise (the Taylor-Ashley Collection) show the Bank of Stuart in 1913. Built in 1912 and still standing at 301 SW St. Lucie Avenue, Osceola Street looks a bit different today!



Uploads to martindigitalhistory.org:

Old Timers Club, 1953

On 22 February 1926, several hundred "old timers" and their descendants residing in the Treasure Coast had a picnic at the Fort Pierce Beach Casino. The Old Timers Club of the Lower Indian River met annually until WWII. It was reactivated in 1952 and changed its name to Early Settlers of Lower Indian River in 1961. We have recently added several Arthur Ruhnke photos of the 1953 meeting in Jensen Beach. Unfortunately, we do not have identifications, so please let us know if you recognize any of these people in these photos! Thank you to Sandra Thurlow for this donation!



Uploads to martindigitalhistory.org:

Little Laura & Big John, 1969

Did you know that a film was made in Stuart in 1969? It was based on the exploits of the Ashley Gang in the 1920s and starred Karen Black (portraying Laura Upthegrove) and Fabian (John Ashley). The streets were covered in sand and the restaurant in the corner space of the Osceola Building was made up to look like Stuart Bank, with the words "Stuart Bank" written on the window (although the original building didn't have that). Many locals were employed as costumed extras and the Elliott museum loaned several antique cars for atmosphere. People lined the streets to watch the filming. Thank you to Sandra Thurlow for sharing these Arthur Ruhnke images.



Uploads to martindigitalhistory.org:

Mrs. Lowery & the Big Train Ride

We have several photos of children boarding a train with their teachers. Mrs. Dora Lowery, and later Mildred Dumich, took their Stuart Elementary second graders on an annual train ride to Jensen Beach and then rode a bus back to Stuart. The children had to earn their own money for the ride, as well as write an essay on the experience. Sometimes, there were treats and tours provided by local businesses or the conductor. For many students, it was their first time on a train or a bus. We just added another image of this event, from 1948, taken by Arthur Ruhnke and donated by Sandra Thurlow.



John Mann

Every once in a while, we scan a photo that makes us want to know "The Rest of the Story." This photo of a man standing next to a large sign stating: "This Land Is Posted Against Any County Attorney Engineer Photographer Setting Foot On These Premises Without Permission of Owner John N. Mann" is one of those images.

John Mann was a prominent person in Stuart in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. After arriving from Texas in about 1936 and working as a butcher, he served as the Stuart Fire Chief from 1942 to 1956. During WWII, he also worked as a patrolman and city building inspector. After the war, he organized sports teams in the community. The *Stuart Sailfishers* baseball team won several pennants in the South Florida Coast-Glade league. John was also co-manager of the Martin County Veterans Athletic Association football team, president of the Martin County Rod & Gun Club, an official "weather observer" for the U.S. Weather Bureau, and member of many local organizations. By all accounts, Mann was a jovial, helpful person. He loved to hunt and also became an accomplished taxidermist. We have a photo of him with a two-headed duck (which was a perplexing image until we figured out it was taxidermy).

In 1957, Mann opened Johnny Mann's Outlet Store in the old Carlton Building, and won a seat on the Stuart City Commission; he also served as vice-mayor in 1959. Mann also began buying land, which leads us back to the previously mentioned sign. In 1965, residents in Palm City presented a petition to the county commissioners objecting to land at the corner of Palmetto (Martin Downs) and Murphy (Mapp) being used as a junk yard. The land belonged to Mann, and he had leased it to C.R. Ramsey. Both Mann and Ramsey were charged with zoning violations. They rebutted the charges, saying the land was legally a used car lot. After pleading not guilty, Mann posted this sign, which the county zoning director was not happy about. Ramsey was found guilty in December 1965 and paid the \$50 fine, but Mann fought to the bitter end, appealing the charges, and suing the county zoning director, even after the charges against Mann were dropped in May 1966. He fought for what he thought was right!

The Carlton Building

As often happens, one research rabbithole leads to another. When I read that Johnny Mann's Outlet Store was in the Carlton Building, I was disturbed that I didn't know where that building was. I checked our online collections for "Carlton" and "Outlet," but no luck. A search of the *Stuart News* archives (through newspapers.com) quickly revealed that the building, on the corner of Akron and Dixie Highway, was damaged when the Triangle Lounge, next door, burned down in December 1969. A binder on John Mann from Stuart Heritage Museum included a clipping with a clear shot of the Carlton after the fire. Alice Luckhardt's article, "Fire destroys Martin County's structures" (*Stuart News* 5 Feb 2014) states that the Triangle Lounge used to be the St. Lucie Bar. I found one image of St. Lucie Bar in our collections, in the background of an unidentified parade, pictured at right. A few other glimpses were found in a photo taken after the 1949 hurricane, and a 1930 aerial. Still, I kept digging.

I found that the Carlton Building used to be the Hotel Carlton, owned by Perry Carlton from about 1929. Remembering that we have a page from an unknown magazine with drawings of all the hotels (undated, but probably about 1926-1928, from the Stuart Heritage Museum), I pulled that up. And there, we find the distinctive building, with the name "Hotel El Belva."

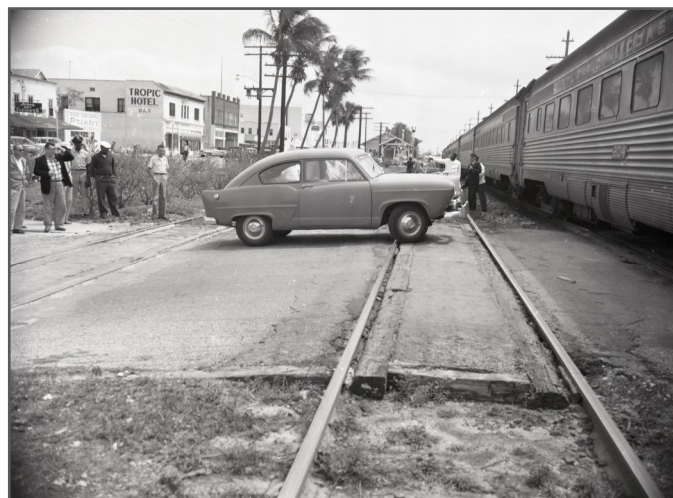
The Hotel El Belva opened in early 1924. Jack H. Harrison was the owner and proprietor, and it was built by Fred Walton and designed by architect William Manly King. King was a prominent WPB architect, and many of his buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Harrison started the Harrison Cafe in Stuart in around 1915, in a 10x12 tent on a rented plot that same corner with about \$50 (*Stuart News* 14 June 1923, p. 1). By 1924, he was building this \$40K hotel and restaurant.

And to make things more interesting, the image of El Belva hotel features a very familiar looking building alongside: the future St. Lucie Bar/Triangle Lounge. Was it originally part of the Harrison enterprise? The newspaper does mention a cafeteria AND a cafe, and mentions the hotel expanding in 1926. Maybe more research will help find the answers!



Henry J vs. the Train

Another image that made us ask "What is going on here?" is this photo by Earl Dyer Ricou (donated by Sandra Thurlow) featuring a little car on the train tracks just off Flagler Avenue. Train staff are pointing and people are standing nearby, appearing concerned. It looks like one window of the car might be smashed. Unfortunately, we aren't always able to solve all of the mysteries we uncover.



Dating the image was easy - the city bought the old Stuart Department Store (originally the Kitching & Eckess Store, built 1922) and remodeled it in 1954-1955 to be opened in September 1955 as the city hall, police station, and fire department all in one. Here, it's mid remodel.

Posting this in the *Martin County Memories & More* Facebook group, Boo Lowery noted that J.C. Anthony, a salesman for the Stuart News-Southeastern Printing Co. drove a blue Henry J. And indeed, that's the car. Amazing!



I couldn't find any report of a car vs. train confrontation in the newspaper, so this mystery is still unsolved. However, I did notice that the railroad crossings from Flagler Avenue have changed significantly, as seen in this 1959 aerial view. While in 2025 we have a crossing at St. Lucie Avenue, in 1959, there were two crossings—one a little north of the current crossing, and another crossing at Albany Avenue, right across from Stuart Heritage Museum. So the investigation still offered interesting information.



Martin County Celebrates its Centennial in 2025!
Check out the website for events and information!
martincounty100.com

Interested in Martin County history? Visit and
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[Sandy History Lady Blog](http://SandyHistoryLadyBlog)



What is Martin Digital History?

The mission of Martin Digital History (MDH) is to encourage the appreciation of Martin County's unique history by collaborating with participating community members and local organizations to collect, present, and interpret relevant digital content. This participatory archive, orchestrated by the Martin County Library System, is the result of the planning teamwork of several far-sighted community members and organizations, including Sandra Thurlow, Black Heritage Initiative, Stuart Heritage, the Historical Society of Martin County, the Library Foundation of Martin County, and many others. It is open for public participation.

- This newsletter will attempt to keep all informed about the project, including new participants and accessions, plans, events, etc. [Click here to subscribe to this newsletter.](#)
- More information: martindigitalhistory.org
- Support the project: <https://www.martindigitalhistory.org/participate>
- Feedback, comments, questions? Contact the archivist: Georgen Charnes, gcharnes@martin.fl.us

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