



Uploads to martindigitalhistory.org:

The Ashley Gang

The "Notorious Ashley Gang" image was used as the frontispiece illustration in the book *The Notorious Ashley Gang*, by Hix Cook Stuart (originally published in 1928 by St. Lucie Printing Company, Stuart Florida). The photo includes identifications: (clockwise starting at top) John Ashley, Hanford Mobley, Clarence Middleton, Roy "Young" Matthews, Ray Lynn. The center image, labeled "The King and Queen of the Everglades" purports to be John Ashley and Laura Upthegrove.

However, the middle image does not actually feature Laura Upthegrove and John Ashley. According to researchers Stephen Carr and Chessy Ricca, supported by interviews with Laura's niece Lisa Upthegrove Murtaugh, author Hix Stuart paid Laura's sister Evie and her husband to pose for this photo. There is a similarly posed authentic photo of Laura Upthegrove and John Ashley; perhaps the goal was to reenact this image.



Uploads to martindigitalhistory.org:

Family Wedding Dress

Reading Josephine Kitching Taylor's handwritten memoir of her families' histories, I found a charming note about our donor's wedding: "She was married in her Grand Mother's and her Mother's Wedding dress." (PDF page 91) The collection also included a photo of the dress on Josephine Kitching Taylor. Coincidentally, a recent loan from the HSMC has brought more photos of all six women who wore the wedding dress. Thank you to the family for donating the dress to the Historical Society of Martin County for all to enjoy.



She was married in her Grand Mother's and her Mother's Wedding dress.



Josephine Kitching married John E. Taylor on 10 March 1914



Emma Elizabeth Taylor (1917-2001), married Richard Ashley on 10 March 1939



Josephine Marie Ashley married Walter Ronald Paradise on 22 November 1962



Judith Winifred Ashley married Larry Clark on 30 June 1972



Marjorie Elizabeth Ashley married Robert Houmes on 30 January 1972



Joy Paradise married Derek Tomei on 15 December 1990



Zola Clear Swarthout

Early in the Martin Digital History project, we were loaned a binder of photos labeled "Local History Photo Collection - Stuart" by the Historical Society of Martin County. One of the binder's images, by Arthur Ruhnke, featured these three laughing women, sitting on suitcases and wearing large silly hats, at the Stuart Sailfish Tournament in 1958. It's such a great image and we wondered who these women were. Then we found other images of the woman in the center, one with the Soroptimist Club in 1958, and another unveiling a portrait on Dr. Parker Day in 1961. She looked interesting, but with no name, we couldn't find out anything. Then Sarah had a breakthrough: she found a very similar image in the *Stuart News* of the Dr. Parker Day image - with names! She was Mrs. Zola Swarthout.

From there we were able to find a lot of information in the *Stuart News* (I love newspapers.com). Zola moved to Ocean Breeze Park with her husband, Gordon Swarthout in 1946. She wrote articles for the *Stuart News*, starting out with a column on events in Ocean Breeze Park and Jensen Beach, then worked as the Martin County correspondent for the *Miami Herald*, and finally as the author of a *Stuart News* column, "Personally Yours." Her articles detailed events and also drew attention to community issues, which assisted in getting things done. Zola was very active in Stuart community organizations, including as mentioned above, the Soroptimists, who were significant in saving the House of Refuge and establishing the Historical Society of Martin County. Zola's brother, Charles Val Clear, was the first director of the historical society.

A search of archive.org led to the discovery that Zola resigned from the Washington Committee for Aid to China in 1941 in protest of the circumstances surrounding a fundraiser she helped to organize (*Venona : Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* by John Earl Haynes & Harvey Klehr, 1999). As she later testified to the Special Committee on Un-American Propaganda Activities, the United China Relief fund had organized a Paul Robeson concert to raise money. They attempted to book Constitution Hall in D.C., which was blocked by the Daughters of the American Revolution due to Robeson being Black. Eleanor Roosevelt and friend Cornelia Pichnot made clear that this racism was un-American and they and the Chinese ambassador Hu Shih joined as sponsors of the event. However, when it was discovered that the event organizers had arranged for National Negro Congress, which allegedly had strong ties to the Communist Party, to receive 50% of the concert proceeds instead of going to the China charity as the publicity claimed (much of which was created by Zola), these sponsors, and Zola, terminated support. Zola was accused of being a communist for helping to raise funds for the event, a chilling event that could have ended her ability to make a living.

In Zola's obituary, it was noted that she was with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in D.C. in 1942-1945. The OSS was the precursor to the CIA. Having read many books on WWII and Virginia Hall, I immediately had to know more, in case our Zola was an international spy. A search of the National Archives brought me to her OSS declassified but undigitized personnel file, which I then obtained a copy of for an outrageous charge. It tells me that Zola started working for the government in 1935 for the Resettlement Administration, a New Deal agency that helped struggling Americans resettle in areas where there were better opportunities. When that organization became the Farm Security Administration in 1937, she joined the General Accounting Department. In 1942, she transferred to the Office of the Coordinator of Information, a department that existed for only a year and was an intelligence and propaganda agency, which then became part of the OSS in 1942. She worked there until May 1944, when she took an extended leave without pay due to a kidney infection and finally resigned with the job title of Assistant Accountant in Nov 1944, when she married Gordon Swarthout.

Alas, it does not seem that Zola was a spy in Europe during WWII after all.... unless those "leaves of absence" were really a cover story.



Form: REQUEST FOR SERVICE RECORD, Office of Strategic Services, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Washington, D.C. (April 14, 1942)

1. Name in full: Charles Val Clear

2. Date of birth: September 12, 1906

3. Date last appointed to this office: April 8, 1942

4. Date deductions began: April 8, 1942

5. Service claimed as follows:

Organization, Bureau, or Department	Position	Grade	Salary	Rate	Month	Day	Year	Month	Day	Year
General Accounting Office	Assistant Accountant	Junior	\$1440-\$1680	11	12	36				
Resettlement Administration	Finance Div.	Junior		12	9	55	9	16	36	
Administration	Washington, D.C.	Clerk	\$1440							

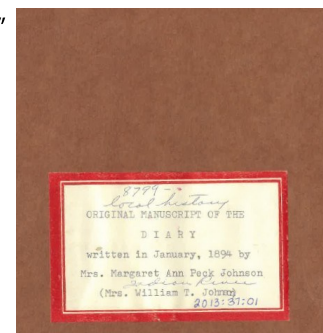
REMARKS: 2566 Reconverted O.C. 2 12/31/46

Diary of Margaret Peck Johnson boating down the Indian River and in White City, 1894



Thank you to the Historical Society of Martin County for allowing us to make the 1894 diary of Margaret Peck Johnson available on Martin Digital History. Margaret, her husband (William "Willie" T. Johnson), two children (Pearl and Sallie) boated from Cocoa, Florida down the Indian River to the St. Lucie Inlet, then west and north up the St. Lucie River to White City, Florida. Along the way, Margaret details the fish and game caught along the river and meals cooked (who knew that cabbage palmetto was "a very fine dish"?), their activities, people they meet, and towns visited, including a stop in Fort Pierce where the men helped Willie's father build a store for several days. Comments on the flora, including flowers, ferns, and orchids are made throughout.

The diary then details the family's lives settling in the newly established planned community of The White City (23 Feb 1894-12 March 1894). The family purchased two lots and there are several mentions of how nice Col. Myers was to them and activities in the community.



February 20, 1894 - We get up late. Willie pulls up the anchor and we drift about a quarter of a mile. There is a beautiful scene here with high bluffs of rock with beautiful ferns and air plants growing on palmetto trees. The air plants were in full bloom; some were purple, cream and crimson. We went ashore and Willie gathered me a crimson one and hung it up in the boat. He then cast out his net and caught some fish and among them was a toad fish. He could pump himself up and looked like a football and then gradually go away to almost nothing. I enjoy drifting very much. The water is clear as a crystal. There are hundreds of small fish in it. I have commenced my dinner, put my beans on and rolls ready to cook and then set sail for White City, about thirty-five miles. We see some lovely residences and passed through where Flagler is having his bridge across the river on his new rail road to Lake Worth. There were two pile drivers putting down the piles for it.

The boat got up late. Willie pulled up the anchor and we drift about a quarter of a mile. There is a beautiful scene here with high bluffs of rock with beautiful ferns and air plants growing on palmetto trees. The air plants were in full bloom some were purple cream and crimson. We went ashore and Willie gathered me a crimson one and hung it up in the boat. He then cast out his net and caught some fish and among them was a toad fish. He could pump himself up and looked like a football and then gradually go away to almost nothing. I enjoy drifting very much. The water is clear as crystal. There are hundreds of small fish in it. I have commenced my dinner put my beans on & rolls ready to cook and then set sail for White City about thirty five miles. We see some lovely residences and passed through where Flagler is having his bridge across the river on his new rail road to Lake Worth. There were two pile drivers putting down the piles for it.

The White City settlement was established in 1893 by Louis Albert Francois Pio (14 December 1841 – 27 June 1894). Pio was one of the founders of the Danish Social Democratic Party in Denmark. He fled to America because of persecution, and he and several other Danes attempted to establish a socialist Utopian colony in Kansas, but it failed (reportedly, he said it was all the women's fault for not getting along). He then had many jobs in America, including as a journalist and editor, and also managed the Florida Exhibit at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. At the fair, he met railroad tycoon Henry Flagler, who convinced him to promote a new town along the rail lines. Pio wrote pamphlets, articles, and advertised the community, targeting the Danish. The settlement was named "The White City" for two reasons: one, in commemoration of the World's Fair (the main street was also "Midway Road" for the same reason), and two, because the company would not sell land to Black people or employ them in any way. ("Florida's White City," *The Sun*, New York, 6 May 1894, p. 15) The U.S. post office also refused to recognize the article "The" as part of the name in 1894. Pio died in June 1894, soon after the community is established and just weeks after the end of this diary. Soon after, Col. Myers, so admired by Margaret, absconded with the community's funds. Settlers were left destitute, and then faced a "Great Freeze" in winter 1894-1895, which killed most of the crops. It took several years for residents to recover, apparently only with Flagler's help.

February 23, 1894 - ... Colonel Myers, the owner of this city got Willie to bring us up nearer the shore. He brought us and tied the boat to a large oak tree. It was covered with air plants and gray moss. There was a very sweet, stylish looking lady who came out to see us. She had arrived about half an hour before us. There are only four ladies in the town but more are expected every day. The Colonel met us at our landing and would have us go in town and gave us chairs to sit in and was so nice and good. He is a splendid looking man that weighs two hundred pounds. Think we will like this place very much. ... I felt highly honored to have the Colonel so polite to me. He is a millionaire and I so poor and homely. He seemed to take a fancy to us all.



It is unknown if the Thompson family experienced any of this hardship. They were back in Alabama for the 1900 Federal census, so it's likely they left the area. Even though I know that husband Willie's father built a store in Fort Pierce in 1894, I have been unable to track Willie past 1900; I do know that Margaret noted she was a widow in the 1930 census.

The diary was donated in 1871 to HSMC by Mary E. Cates in memory of her grandmother Margaret Johnson (the diary author) and the two little girls mentioned in the diary (Sallie was Cates' mother), and by the generosity of her first cousin, Wilburn McAlister (Pearl's son), who had the original diary for many years.



Uploads to martindigitalhistory.org:

Martin County Sheriff's Office

The Sheriff's Office, established in 1925, hosted "A Walk Through Time" event on May 28. Thank you for sharing some of your collected materials with Martin Digital History! They're now accessible to everyone and saved for secure preservation.



Deputies and dispatchers, c. 1975



Deputy Jack Garman, c. 2005



Martin County Sheriff Roy Baker at the Martin County Fair display, 1965

Stuart Heritage Museum

will host

Mike Rafferty, alligator trapper,
at the Flagler Center,
201 SW Flagler Ave., Stuart on
Tuesday, Sept. 9 at 7 p.m.
More info: 772-220-4600

Elliott Museum

**King Tut Returns
on Sept 20th**

Check their
calendar for a
complete list of
events.



Martin County Centennial Plaque Ceremony

Watch online:



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

Interested in Martin County history? Visit and
subscribe to Sandra Thurlow's
[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



This document may be reproduced upon request in an alternative format by contacting the County ADA Coordinator (772) 320-3131, the County Administration Office (772) 288-5400, Florida Relay 711, or by completing our accessibility feedback form at www.martin.fl.us/accessibility-feedback