



Uploads to martindigitalhistory.org:

Boxwell Signs/City Sign Service Collection

We've added a new collection from the Stuart Heritage Museum featuring photographs of historic business signs. One highlight is the Boxwell Sign Company, founded by Charles and Louise Boxwell in 1939. Originally located in Stuart, the company moved to Old Dixie Highway around 1951.

In a 1955 Stuart News article, Charles Boxwell shared that the area's fishing and climate were what drew them to Stuart. The business was renamed City Sign Service of Stuart in 1962, when longtime employee Phil Corrie took over management. Four years later, in 1966, it relocated to a larger space at 100 Ocean Blvd. The company ultimately closed its doors in 1979.



Recent uploads to martindigitalhistory.org:

Higbee Go Cart Collection

Among the many fascinating artifacts housed at the Stuart Heritage Museum is a small but nostalgic collection of photographs featuring go-karts and midget cars—vehicles that once raced through the heart of Martin County.

On January 8, 1960, brothers Ed and Lee Higbee opened a local racing track dedicated to these miniature speed machines. Originally named the Higbee Midget Speedway, the track was renamed within a month to the Martin County Midget Speedway. Edgar Melvin Higbee (1908-1990) was the owner of Higbee Electric, a business he opened in 1953 on Ocean Boulevard before relocating to 327 Osceola Avenue (now 32 Osceola Ave). His brother, Lee Higbee (1920-1987), operated Lee's Hobby Shop, which moved next door to Higbee Electric in 1959. Interestingly, the Higbee brothers married sisters—Jessie and Evelyn Wortham—creating a tightly knit family enterprise.



The race track was located along A1A/Old Dixie Highway, just south of Stuart. Contemporary newspaper articles described its location as "near Golden Gate" and "behind the agriculture building." Local historians and members of the Martin Memories Facebook group recall it being just south of the Martin County Fairgrounds. A faint oval shape, possibly the remnants of the track, is still visible today on Google Maps. The quality of the track did not go unnoticed. From July 15-17, 1960, it hosted the second annual Florida State NTRA (National Track Rabbit Association) race, marking it as a premier venue for the sport.

Shortly after the track's opening, a local racing club called the Martin County Popsters was established. The club was led by Bernard Coker (president), Alan Decker (vice president), and Ray Mancil (secretary-treasurer). Board members included Ed and Lee Higbee, along with Glen Ulmer.

Despite early enthusiasm, by August 1961, the Martin County Midget Speedway had stopped advertising events. The Popsters continued organizing go-kart races for another year, referring to the venue as the Golden Gate go-kart track, and still locating it at the Fairgrounds. As for what led to the Higbee brothers' waning involvement in the sport, it remains a mystery—one more unanswered question in the story of Stuart's racing past.



Recent uploads to martindigitalhistory.org:

Martin County Service Men's Club Collection

As part of our ongoing efforts to preserve local history, we've curated a new digital collection featuring images of the Martin County Service Men's Club. These photographs, gathered over the course of the Martin Digital History project, offer a unique glimpse into the club's significant role during World War II.

Founded in June 1942, the Martin County Service Men's Club was established to provide a welcoming recreational and social environment for military personnel stationed in the area. Originally located in the Victory Hotel—formerly known as the Peacock Arcade—the club later moved to a purpose-built facility on Flagler Avenue in Stuart. Dedicated on October 10, 1943, the new building was constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and included a library, writing room, lounge, snack bar, patio, and a large hall for dances and social events. Radie Belle Krueger served as the club's Program Director, with many local women volunteering as "hostesses."

During the war, such service clubs were common across the country, typically operated by communities with support from the federal government. Many were affiliated with the United Service Organizations (USO), a coalition that included groups like the YMCA, YWCA, and the Salvation Army. However, records suggest that the Martin County Service Men's Club operated independently, as it was not affiliated with the USO. A separate USO Club existed in nearby Hobe Sound.

The new collection includes several photographs taken by the U.S. Army Signal Corps, which has documented military life and operations since 1917. These images offer a valuable visual record of the club's atmosphere and the services it provided to servicemen during the war.

After World War II, the building was transferred to the City of Stuart and repurposed as a community recreation hall and civic center. Today, it continues to serve the public as the Flagler Center of Stuart.



Refreshments table at the Serviceman's Club, c. 1944



Snack bar at the Servicemen's Club, c. 1944



Melda McCoy, wearing a crown, dances with a uniformed man while program director Radie Krueger looks on, 1944



Soldiers reading at the Serviceman's Club, c. 1944

Forgotten Businesses of Martin County

As we continue digitizing Sandra Thurlow's collection of negatives by photographers Arthur Ruhnke and Earl Ricou, we're uncovering fascinating glimpses of small businesses that once thrived in Martin County—many of which have faded from public memory. These snapshots of long-gone local businesses remind us of the innovation, determination, and entrepreneurial spirit that helped shape Martin County. Thanks to ongoing efforts to preserve historical archives, these once-forgotten stories are finding their way back into the spotlight.

Gold Coast Chinchilla Ranch

Glenn DeBerry, Harris Lowery Jr., and Charles N. Roberts launched the Gold Coast Chinchilla Ranch in December 1954. They operated out of the back of the Stuart Roofing Company building, aiming to breed chinchillas both as pets and for their pelts.

Their initial investment included twelve high-quality chinchillas, flown in from California. The plan? Grow the population to 200 animals over eight years and generate between \$5,000 and \$10,000 annually, with low upkeep costs. However, the business quickly vanished from the public eye—after 1954, it's no longer mentioned in local newspapers, leaving its fate a mystery.



In a photo by Earl Ricou, Glenn DeBerry (left) examines a group of chinchillas while his brother-in-law, Harris Lowery Jr. (right), gently holds one, 1954

Reddick Egg Farm

In the early 1950s, Palm City was home to a surprisingly productive egg operation. Ralph H. Reddick (1888–1977) and his wife, Redelia Leonhart Reddick (1896–1972), launched their egg farm in 1951 after getting married. Their hens laid an impressive 2,184 eggs a week on average and they supplied many of the local stores.

Tracking the Reddicks wasn't easy, as newspaper records only ever referred to them as "R.H. Reddick" and "Mrs. R.H. Reddick." Interestingly, three of Redelia's five children from a previous marriage later settled in Stuart or Palm City.



Redelia Reddick collecting eggs, 1954, by Earl Ricou

Kenneth Wright's Tropical Fish Farm

Kenneth and Grace Wright made their way to Stuart in the 1940s after a career in the traveling circus. They initially opened a photography shop on Osceola Avenue, which they ran for four years before selling it to Arthur Ruhnke in 1948.

Next, the Wrights purchased 10 acres on Casa Avenue, just off South U.S. 1, and started a tropical fish farm. By the 1950s, the business had grown to a sprawling 100-acre operation between Cove and Salerno Roads, eventually becoming one of the largest tropical fish suppliers in the world. They didn't stop at fish; the Wrights also sold exotic birds, aquarium gear, and flowering plants.



These photographs by Arthur Ruhnke, published in The Stuart News on June 12, 1952, show Kenneth Wright with a bird and the family around their concrete block fish spawning pools.

Stuart Heritage Museum Event

Panel discussion of Hobe Sound History

Tuesday, October 14th at 7 PM

The Flagler of Stuart, 201 SW Flagler Street, Stuart

Elliott Museum Event

Short film and an unforgettable live portrayal of Major General Thomas Sydney Jesup by Dick Kazmar

Panel with three passionate history keepers - Dick Kazmar, Derek Hankerson, and Laurie Corry as they share unforgettable stories of war, resilience, and the enduring Seminole legacy in Florida.

Wednesday, 1 October 2025 from 1PM to 2:30PM

At the Elliott Museum (825 NE Ocean Boulevard, Stuart)

Admission to lecture is FREE to members; non-members pay regular museum admission.

Martin County Genealogical Society Event

Doing A Deep Dive In Ancestry's Collections

Speaker: Annette Burke Lyttle, Certified Genealogist

October 17, at 1PM

Blake Library, 2351 SE Monterey Rd, Stuart

If you can't attend in person, you can watch via Zoom. Registration required at mcgsfl.org

Interested in Martin County history? Visit and subscribe to Sandra Thurlow's [Sandy History Lady Blog](#)



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

martincounty100.com

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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