



Remembering Bob Crowder

Martin County recently lost a respected and much-loved community figure. Robert "Bob" Lewis Crowder passed away peacefully on October 23, 2025.

Bob's connection to the area began in 1956, when his family moved to Jensen Beach. A 1963 graduate of Martin County High School, he developed a lasting passion for the natural world, teaching younger students about conservation.



Sheriff Bob Crowder, 1972

He entered public service early, working as a dispatcher and relief jailer for the Martin County Sheriff's Department beginning in 1965 while attending IRSC. He later earned a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Florida Atlantic University and served eight years in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve. In 1968, he joined the Stuart Police Department, rising to detective by 1971. Appointed Martin County Sheriff in 1972, he served until early 1973.

After returning to investigative work, Bob became Chief of Detectives in Martin County in 1975. He later continued his career in St. Lucie County as Chief Deputy and Undersheriff. Elected Sheriff of Martin County in 1993, he served for two decades, championing modernization, professionalism, and accountability. He received the FBI's Advocate for Women in Law Enforcement Leadership Award in 2008.

After retiring in 2012, Bob and his wife, Debbie, made their home in the Appalachian Mountains of Georgia. He is remembered for his integrity, steady leadership, and lifelong commitment to service.



Robert Touta and Bob Crowder, Junior Conservation League members with sea turtles, 1961

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Seminole Reptile Gardens

Seminole Reptile Gardens was a mid-20th-century tourist attraction located on the east side of U.S. 1 at Central Parkway—today the site of the Martin County School Board offices. The park was opened by Gene Coppedge on May 30, 1954, after he leased three acres from Ralph Ulmer. It featured a Seminole Indian village, a gift shop, and guided tours and shows highlighting Florida's native wildlife.

A preview in the *Stuart News* (May 27, 1954) described an extensive collection of animals, including panthers, bears, raccoons, otters, deer, opossums, gray and fox squirrels, skunks, civet cats, foxes, wildcats, and a variety of native Florida birds such as the caracara and the flamingo—then still considered a native species. The attraction also included a snake pit displaying Florida diamondbacks, cottonmouth moccasins, and coral snakes, along with a prominent alligator pit that served as one of the park's main draws.

Despite its ambitious offerings, the enterprise appears to have been short-lived. After June 1955, no further mentions of Seminole Reptile Gardens appear in local newspapers.



Seminole Reptile Gardens crowd, c. 1954

Forgotten Photographers

Unsung visual storytellers played a crucial role in documenting the early life of Stuart and the surrounding communities. Working long before photography was widely accessible, these men and women captured everyday scenes, major events, and the growth of a young town. Though many of their names are little known today, their images remain some of our most valuable windows into the past. The following profiles highlight four such photographers whose work helped shape the historical record of the region.

Willis A. Ball

Some very early images of Stuart were taken by Willis A. Ball (1855-1938), who arrived around 1903. Ball operated a newsstand and a watch and jewelry repair shop on Railroad Avenue (now Flagler Avenue) next door to the original Lyric Theatre. The surviving photographs we can confidently attribute to him depict early buildings, water-front views, and scenes of pineapple harvesting. His name, scratched into the negatives, allows us to identify the work as his.



Col. O.O. Poppleton's Magnolia Apiary, c. 1905

Albert Ilion Waddington

Albert Ilion Waddington arrived from Pontiac, Michigan, in January 1926 and quickly secured steady photographic work. Among his first assignments was documenting the Martin County birthday parade on January 28 for the Chamber of Commerce. Over time, he received commissions from developers, newspapers, and even the local school yearbook.

After initially working from his home, Waddington opened "Stuart Studio" on Avenue C (now Akron Avenue) near Second Street (now Joan Jefferson Way). He moved at least twice before November 1929, when Waddington left Stuart. His work is recognizable today by the distinctive handwriting found on many of his images.

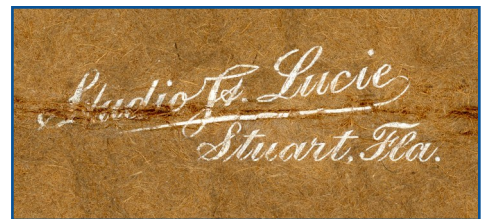


Martin County birthday parade, 1926

The Fraziers and Studio St. Lucie

When John Reuben Frazier (1881-1948) and his wife, Emma (1889-1968), arrived in Stuart in 1916, they launched a contest to name their new studio in the Feroe Building. The winning entry was "Studio St. Lucie." In October 1917, they relocated to "M.R. Johns' building, next to the Messenger office and where the Red Cross has been located" (*Stuart News*, 19 Oct 1917-proving, once again, that clear addresses are a modern blessing).

By March 1918, the Fraziers had opened "Day and Night Studio" in West Palm Beach, but they soon returned to Kansas to resume their photography business there. Although they shared a surname with local Frazier families, they were not related. Their portraits, often presented in folios stamped with their studio logo, are among their few surviving works in the region.



Logo of the Studio St. Lucie

Harald "Abe" Lincoln

Harald Anderson Lincoln (1880-1969) settled in Florida in 1909 after wrecking his boat along the coast. By 1915, he had purchased land in Palm City Farms, where he built both a home and an agricultural enterprise. Known for his experimentation with new crops, Lincoln also famously kept a pet alligator named "Mike" for twenty-five years before selling it to "Ugly Will Bill's Indian Village and Zoo" on U.S. 1 in Hobe Sound.

According to the *Stuart News* (9 Jan 1964), Lincoln reported he took photos because he was the only man in town who owned a camera. Only a small number of photographs can be definitively attributed to him, but the ones that survive are exceptional depictions of life in early Palm City.



Palm City post office and Palm Villa Hotel, c. 1920

Josephine Kitching Taylor's Recipe Book

Among the items added this month from the Taylor-Ashley family is Josephine Kitching Taylor's recipe book. Josephine Kitching Taylor (1895-1987) was a native and early pioneer of Stuart, Florida. Deeply involved in her community, she was a charter member of the P.E.O. Sisterhood chapter, an active participant in the Historical Society of Martin County, and a devoted member of the Methodist Church. A dedicated local historian, Taylor wrote numerous short histories documenting the people and events of early Stuart.

The only child of Walter Kitching (1846-1932) and Emma Jane Michael Kitching (1870-1951), Josephine came from one of Stuart's earliest families. Her father, Walter Kitching, was an early resident who opened a general store in 1897 following a long career as a merchant along Florida's coast. Josephine married John E. Taylor (1892-1972), who had worked for her father prior to their marriage. John later became a banker and businessman, establishing an insurance and real estate firm in 1937. The company, later known as Taylor-Ashley Insurance and Real Estate, continues to operate as a family business on Colorado Avenue in Stuart as of 2025.

This book contains both handwritten recipes, many of which indicate from whom she received the recipe, and several clippings. The recipes include chiefly desserts and salads. The cookies, cakes, and pies look delicious while the "salads" reflect food preferences that have changed over time. An index and table of contents has been created, located at the end of the PDF.

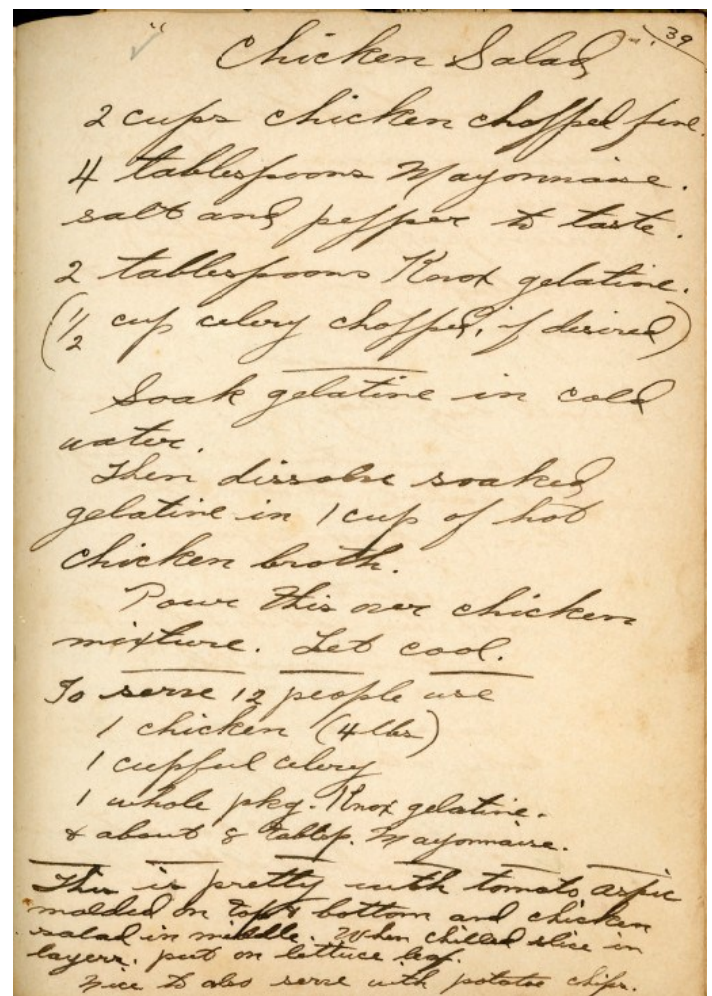
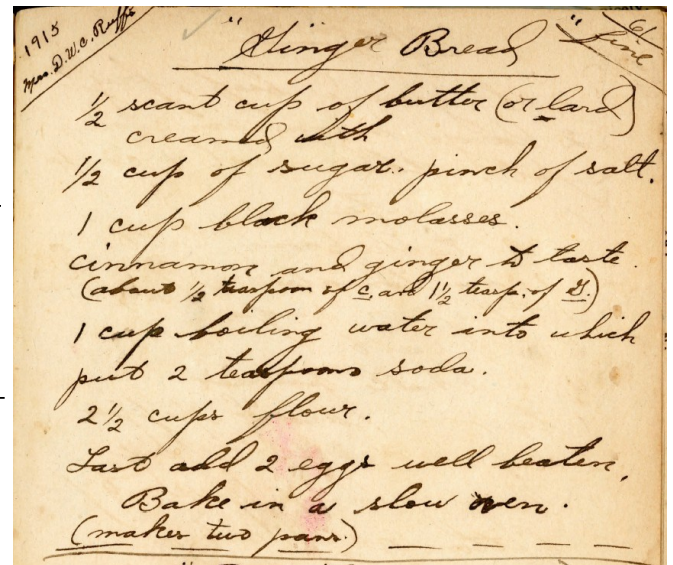
The recipe I most want to try for the holidays is the 1915 recipe for gingerbread, which Josephine received from Mrs. D.W.C. Ruffe. Unfortunately, I don't know if "soda" refers to baking soda or soda water, and I'm not sure what a "slow oven" is!

Ginger Bread

1/2 scant cup of butter (or lard) creamed with
1/2 cup of sugar, pinch of salt
1 cup black molasses
Cinnamon and ginger to taste
(about 1/2 teaspoon of c, and 1 1/2 teasp. of G.)
1 cup boiling water into which put 2 teaspoons soda
2 1/2 cups flour
Last add 2 eggs well beaten
Bake in a slow oven
(Makes two pans)

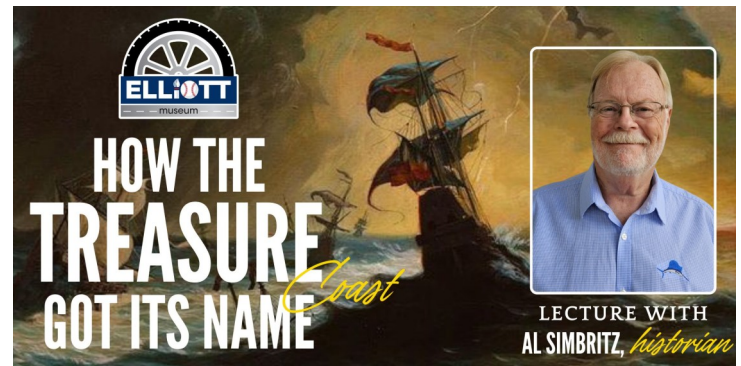
Chicken Salad

2 cups chicken chopped fine
4 tablespoons mayonnaise
Salt and pepper to taste
2 tablespoons Knox gelatin
(1/2 cup celery chopped, if desired)

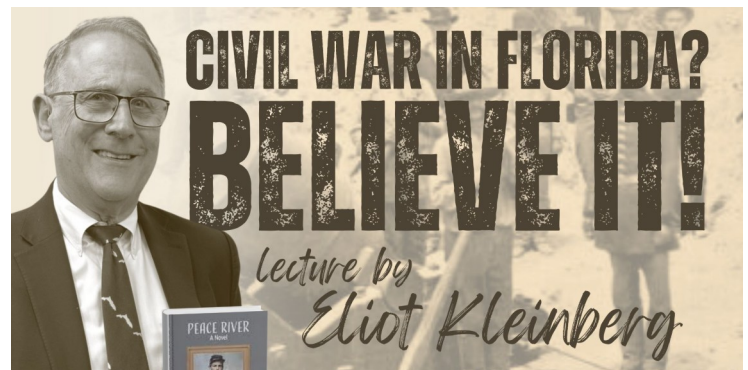


Soak gelatin in cold water. Then dissolve soaked gelatin in 1 cup of hot chicken broth. Pour this over chicken mixture. Let cool.

Local History Events



9 Dec, 1PM-2:30PM lecture with Al Simbritz
FREE for members | Regular admission for non-members



4 Dec, 1:30PM-2:30PM lecture with author Eliot Kleinberg
FREE for members | Regular admission for non-members



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

martincounty100.com

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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.](#)
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