

SOUTH CENTRAL FLORIDA LIFE (/)

Caloosa Belle

(/labelle/)

Select a newspaper

MAIN MENU



A lynching in LaBelle

Posted Tuesday, December 1, 2020 12:15 pm

By Katrina Elsen**INI Florida**

Editor's note: This article was written in 1985 as part of a history series which appeared in the LaBelle Leader, which was later merged with the Caloosa Belle.

LABELLE — Like most frontier towns, LaBelle's history includes some violence and frontier justice. In the summer of 1926, a misunderstanding resulted in a lynching.

LaBelle was a pioneer town, settled by ranchers, farmers, sawyers, and shop keepers - a mixture of people who had come from different states and even from other countries. Black people were rare in the LaBelle area at the time. Residents who were in LaBelle at that time remember one lone black family who had a farm just outside of town.

"The City of LaBelle brought 1,200 blacks to LaBelle to build the streets," remembered Glenn Dyess. "I don't know what happened to that project or the money. They never did get the streets built. They said 1,200. I don't remember that many. They kept them at a camp, with

some old houses as a dorm and a commissary where they fed them.”

Most people in LaBelle knew each other at that time. A stranger in town didn’t stay a stranger long. The small farming community was understandably suspicious about such a large group of outsiders. One woman was especially wary of the blacks. She had lived in a logging town before moving to LaBelle. Her first husband had been killed in a dispute with a black man.

In the summer of 1926, a black man came to her door and she panicked.

“They say this man didn’t come through the front gate. He climbed over the fence, climbed over the back fence, and went to the back door. Some people say he was after a drink of water. I don’t know what he was after,” said Dyess.

The woman had been ironing that afternoon. She looked up and saw the black man at her back door. She screamed, and threw the hot iron at him. “He run,” said Dyess, “and she got ahold of her husband, and he thought the black man had tried to rape her.”

It didn’t take long for the story to get around town, or the men of LaBelle to begin a search for the fugitive. They caught him, put him in a car and headed downtown. At that time, the courthouse had not been completed, so trials were held at the Everett Hotel. Where the men planned to take their captive is unclear, since he didn’t wait to find out.

“By the time I got into town, they had already caught him,” remembered Ed Yeomans. “They were driving down the street and they had him on the floor board of the car. Whenever he would stick his head up, they’d shove him down.”

Near what is now the intersection of highway 29 and State Road 80, the man made his break for freedom. He managed to get out of the car, and tried to run.

“He started running. They said to the woman’s husband, ‘There he is. Go ahead and kill him.’ He didn’t shoot, but a lot of others did,” said Dyess. “Some of the younger fellers were hot headed. They finally put him on the side of the car and went on out of town and hung him.”

Most witnesses agree the man was already dead before they hung him.

“Circumstances looked like that’s what it was (rape) and they didn’t wait to have a trial,” said Only O’Banion. “They just didn’t wait to find out. They took my little brother and put him up the tree to tie the rope. I think that affected him. I don’t think he ever forgot it.”

“Mr. Rider was the judge here. He went down with some men and cut him down. You know a person has to be crazy to kill somebody. That’s the way those boys were, they just went a little crazy and started shooting,” said Dyess.

When everything had settled down, and the hysterical woman was calm enough to tell the judge what had really happened, at least a dozen men were arrested and taken to Arcadia. Some residents thought there may have been as many as 20 men arrested. The trial was held in LaBelle, in the Everett Hotel on Bridge Street.

The judge ruled that there were so many bullet holes in the man, it was impossible to determine which one killed him, and that there were so many people involved in the search and hanging afterwards, it was impossible to know who actually did the shooting.

The men who had been arrested were released. The tree that had been used for the lynching was painted black. And the town of LaBelle gradually forgot about the incident. The road work, however, did not continue. The road crews were so frightened by the lynching that they deserted their camp.

Keywords

lynching (/search_mode/keyword/browse.html?search_filter=lynching), labelle (/search_mode/keyword/browse.html?search_filter=labelle), history (/search_mode/keyword/browse.html?search_filter=history)

Comments

MOST POPULAR STORIES IN CALOOSA BELLE

Bass Pro to host free family fun events during March 13 tournament on Lake Okeechobee (</okeechobee/stories/bass-pro-to-host-free-family-fun-events-during-march-13-tournament-on-lake-okeechobee,16767>)

Hendry County Arrests (</labelle/stories/hendry-county-arrests,16708>)

OTHER ITEMS THAT MAY INTEREST YOU

Rare, endangered Florida orchid spotted in Hendry County (</labelle/stories/rare-endangered-florida-orchid-spotted-in-hendry-county,16828>)

Red hatters are dedicated to serving the community (</labelle/stories/red-hatters-are-dedicated-to-serving-the-community,16742>)

Honoring Medal of Honor Recipient Nicholas Cutinha (/labelle/stories/honoring-medal-of-honor-recipient-nicholas-cutinha,16584)

Hendry County provides new option for proper disposal of worn U.S. flags (/labelle/stories/hendry-county-provides-new-option-for-proper-disposal-of-worn-us-flags,16491)

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Observed from: Fort Myers, Southwest Florida International Airport



Fair, 77 °F

Mostly sunny, with a high near 80. Breezy, with an east wind 15 to 17 mph, with gusts as high as 22 mph. Get the full forecast (/labelle/weather-forecast/)

READ CALOOSA BELLE

E-edition (<https://caloosabelle-fl.newsmemory.com/>)

Read the latest print edition here.

Caloosabelle

Vol. 98 No. 9

Delivering Western Hendry County's News Since 1922

March 4, 2021

Historian asks for your help

By Danika J. Fornear
Caloosabelle

LABELLE - Theresa Hamilton Provenza has lived in LaBelle for 29 years, and is passionate about learning, documenting, and sharing Hendry County's history. She has happily shared her extensive materials with other history enthusiasts, students working on local history projects, other professors, and anyone who is interested.


She was born in the United States and educated in Canada. "I attended high school in Montreal and graduated from the University of New Brunswick. In my early married years, I and I lived in Barbados, the Bahamas and Miami. Later in life, I went back to graduate school and earned a master's in architecture at FSU." She added, "I am working for an architecture firm, currently working on a project on Sanibel, I spent 15 years as an adjunct professor at FSU."

Provenza has presented papers at the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) International Conference in Mexico City, and at the Society for American City and Regional Planning History (SACRPH) National Conference in Baltimore. Her work has also been published in the Journal of Planning History and Places, Forum of Design for the Public Realm.

Surrounded by unique family heirlooms, portraits, and other artifacts, Provenza explained, "Hendry County is unique and there are many, many stories to be told. There has been an unfortunate tendency to overlook Hendry County and the people who settled here. I would like its history to be seen from a new and fresh perspective. Not to re-invent the past but have the stories presented from a more encompassed, less biased viewpoint."



How did she become interested in local history? Well, Provenza said, "About 25 years ago, I volunteered at the Barnes Library. Doris Caldwell was the librarian, she was well taught and a wealth of knowledge about local history, especially genealogy. She had amassed a collection of documents, papers, and ephemera about the area. Doris Caldwell helped me."

See Help - Page 2



Honoring Nick Cutinha

Above - Marcha Warriors at the LaBelle Veterans park, March 2, 2021 honoring Nick Cutinha - 63 years after his battalion was ambushed when Nick led his men through the horror of seeing his men go down and covering for them until he was mortally wounded. He saved many of his own men and killed at least 15 of the enemy. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor and is buried in Ft. De Saut Cemetery. At right - Dan McKinney, who served with Cutinha during his military March 2, 1958, to the people who came to the Ft. De Saut Cemetery to honor Cutinha. Pictured with him are Ed Canadano, who was also there on that day, Bob Hudak and Ray Cutinha, Nick Cutinha's only surviving brother.

Flag Folding Ceremony at Swamp Cabbage Festival

The 55th Annual Swamp Cabbage Festival opening ceremonies started at 11:30 a.m. on Saturday, Feb. 27 in Bannockburn Park. Part of the opening ceremony was the folding of a flag that has flown over since in LaBelle. Rolling Thunder of Naples conducted the folding ceremony. At the end of the ceremony the flag was presented to Myra Johnson, who was representing the American Legion 120 of LaBelle by Joe Eassey. Pictured from left to right folding the flag are Spider Trantham, Jack Johannemann and Fred Trantham. While they were folding the flag another member of Rolling Thunder told the audience about the ceremony and what each fold of the flag meant.

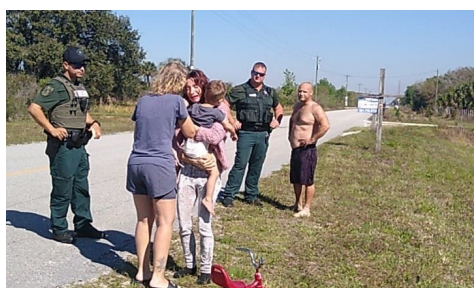
View this issue (<https://caloosabelle-fl.newsmemory.com/>)

Browse other issues (<https://caloosabelle-fl.newsmemory.com/>)

(<https://caloosabelle-fl.newsmemory.com/>)



(<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/newszapfl/>)

TRENDING REGIONAL STORIES

(/okeechobee/stories/do-you-know-this-little-boy,16438)

Do you know this little boy? (/okeechobee/stories/do-you-know-this-little-boy,16438)

Do you know this child?



(/okeechobee/stories/local-firefighter-sentenced-to-probation,16667)

Local firefighter sentenced to probation (/okeechobee/stories/local-firefighter-sentenced-to-probation,16667)

A local firefighter entered a plea of no contest to a battery charge.



Okeechobee man charged with DUI with damage to property (/okeechobee/stories/okeechobee-man-charged-with-dui-with-damage-to-property,16706)

(/okeechobee/stories/okeechobee-man-charged-with-dui-with-damage-to-property,16706)

After a traffic crash , a man was charged with DUI with property damage.



Locals recall fond memories at the 'sticky' Brahman Theater (/okeechobee/stories/locals-recall-fond-memories-at-the-sticky-brahman-theater,16770)

(/okeechobee/stories/locals-recall-fond-memories-at-the-sticky-brahman-theater,16770)

OKEECHOBEE- After an article on the Brahman Theater property being sold was posted on March 1, current and former Okeechobee residents reminisced on memories they had made at the longtime local ...



Brahman Theater property sold following lack of films in 2020 (/okeechobee/stories/brahman-theater-property-sold-following-lack-of-films-in-2020,16585)

(/okeechobee/stories/brahman-theater-property-sold-following-lack-of-films-in-2020,16585)

OKEECHOBEE- The Brahman Theater property was sold to the Williamson Cattle Company on Nov. 25 2020 for \$750,000 according to the Okeechobee County Property Appraiser's website.



[southcentralfloridalife.com \(/\)](#)

Okeechobee

107 SW 17th St., Suite D
Okeechobee FL, 34974
(863) 763-3134

LaBelle

22 Fort Thompson
LaBelle, FL 33935
(863) 675-2541

OUR SERVICES

[Advertise with Us \(/advertise/\)](#)

[Contact Us \(/contact-us/\)](#)

[Find Lake Okeechobee News \(/find-lake-okeechobee-news/\)](#)

[Our History \(/our-history/\)](#)

[Find Caloosa Belle \(/find-caloosa-belle/\)](#)

[Privacy Policy \(/privacy-policy/\)](#)

[Public Notices](#)

[Work for Us \(/join-our-teams/\)](#)

<https://floridaclassifieds.newszap.com/Adhunter/FL/Home/Search?majorClass=5000>

[Our Vision & Values \(/our-vision-values/\)](#)

[Subscribe to Our Newspapers](#)
https://diniservices.newscyclecloud.com/cmo_din-c-cmdb-01/subscriber/web/startoffers.html

[About Us \(/about/\)](#)

OUR COMMUNITIES

[Okeechobee \(/labelle/stories/okeechobee,9743\)](#)

[Clewiston \(/labelle/stories/clewiston,9747\)](#)

[Glades County \(/labelle/stories/moore-haven,9749\)](#)

[LaBelle \(/labelle/stories/labelle,9744\)](#)

[Immokalee \(/labelle/stories/immokalee,9745\)](/labelle/stories/immokalee,9745)

[Belle Glade/Pahokee \(/labelle/stories/belle-glade-pahokee,9742\)](/labelle/stories/belle-glade-pahokee,9742)

[Indiantown \(/labelle/stories/indiantown,9746\)](/labelle/stories/indiantown,9746)

© COPYRIGHT 2021 INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA INC.

POWERED BY CREATIVE CIRCLE MEDIA SOLUTIONS ([HTTP://CREATIVECIRCLEMEDIA.COM](http://creativecirclemedia.com))