

Historical Society of Martin County

The Elliott Museum

La Florida – The Rivers, The Savannahs,
and the Sea

Exhibit, July 2020



Mission

The mission of the **Historical Society of Martin County** is to collect, preserve, interpret, share, and educate the public about the historical artifacts and the rich history of the St. Lucie River region.

The House of Refuge Museum at Gilbert's Bar and the **Elliott Museum** support this mission through the conservation and protection of historical artifacts, artwork, and archives in their care and through permanent and temporary exhibits that impart our local history, culture, and ideals.



La Florida - The Land of the Flowers

Thus Ponce de Leon named Florida in 1513 from the Spanish word *florido*, which means *full of flowers*. Spanish Florida was the first major European land claim and settlement in North America during the European Age of Discovery. Since that time the natural beauty of the land, the lush grandeur of the vegetation, and the splendor of the sea have captivated colonists and inhabitants. They have also inspired artists. These works of art from the permanent collection of the Elliott Museum illustrate the majesty, the force, and the timelessness of our natural environment.



This watercolor offers an impressionistic view of Spanish architecture set amidst palm trees. Ms. Osborne teaches at the Pensacola Museum of Art and is past President of the Southern Watercolor Society.



Relics of the Past
ca. 1980
Bernice Osborne
1983:96



A local artist, Ms. Matheson also taught art classes at the Elliott Museum and served on the Board of Directors of the Historical Society of Martin County from 2008 – 2013. She also directed the Studio Art Center in Palm City, Florida.

Coconuts
ca. 2005
Marlee Matheson
2020:18

The Rivers, The Savannahs, and The Sea

The Treasure Coast of Florida is named in reference to the discovery of treasure from the Spanish Treasure Fleet lost in a 1715 hurricane. The area is shielded from the Atlantic Ocean by narrow sandbars and barrier islands that protect the shallow lagoons and rivers, most notably the Indian River and the St. Lucie River. The Indian River is a 121 mile long lagoon originally named *Rio de Ais*, after the Ais Indian tribe who lived along the east coast of Florida. The St. Lucie River is a 7 mile long estuary known as the ecological jewel of the Treasure Coast. It was named after a late 16th-century Spanish fort, *Santa Lucia*. Inland from the sea savannahs of pine and palmetto abound. The term Savannah, from the Spanish *zavana*, refers to tropical grassland with scattered trees.





Born in South America, Ms. Cremin is accomplished in several materials including acrylic, watercolor, and oil. Her style is a blend of realism and neo-impressionism. Krueger Creek is a tributary of the St. Lucie River in Stuart.

Krueger Creek
ca. 2000
Susana Cremin
2004:99

Ferries operated across the St. Lucie River from 1913 until 1918, when the first bridge was built. G. Curtis “Curt” Whiticar came to Stuart in 1917. In 1947 he founded Whiticar Boat Works, which continues under family ownership to this day. After retirement he created numerous paintings of local waterways, boats, and wildlife until his death at the age of 106.



Days Last Crossing – St. Lucie River

1978

G. Curtis Whiticar

1996:04



This scene depicts a fish house that Charles D. Blakeslee ran on the south side of the St. Lucie River. G. Curtis “Curt” Whiticar came to Stuart in 1917. In 1947 he founded Whiticar Boat Works, which continues under family ownership to this day. After retirement he created numerous paintings of local waterways, boats, and wildlife until his death at the age of 106.



Blakeslee Fish House Around 1900
1998

G. Curtis Whiticar
1996:81:01

A winter resident of Hutchinson Island, Ms. Polhemus was a member of the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association and the Cranbrook Women's Committee in Michigan. Thirty of her atmospheric paintings comprised the 1981 season opening exhibit at the Elliott Museum.



Fish House

ca. 1980

Charlotte Polhemus

2006:03:11



Mr. Green retired to Stuart from New York. These seascapes illustrate his love, “Not the open ocean but the place where land and water meet.” His artwork was exhibited at the Elliott Museum in 1978.



Windswept
ca. 1975
Raymond C. Green
2001:100



Mr. Green retired to Stuart from New York. These seascapes illustrate his love, “Not the open ocean but the place where land and water meet.” His artwork was exhibited at the Elliott Museum in 1978.

Seascape
ca. 1975
Raymond C. Green
1978:54

Known for her portraits and seascapes, Ms. Putnam has taught at the Vero Beach Museum of Art. She received the Laurel Award from the Cultural Council of Indian River County in 2009.



Gale Force

1990

Marlene Evans Putnam

1994:80

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Upcoming Squall

1990

Marlene Evans Putnam

1994:79



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Calm Sea, Rough Coast
ca. 1975
Raymond C. Green
1993:14

Ms. Bowman relocated to Jensen Beach from Philadelphia. She was well known in local art circles for her landscape painting.



Bass Country

1992

Ruth Bowman

1999:29

Ms. Bowman relocated to Jensen Beach from Philadelphia. She was well known in local art circles for her landscape painting.



Silent Savannahs
1998
Ruth Bowman
1999:16



Ms. De la Vega was born in Cuba and came to the United States in 1961. The random beauty of light and nature influences her landscapes. She was the featured artist of the Stuart Artfest in 2015.

Palms
ca. 2000
Cristina de la Vega
2006:03



Mr. Fisher began his career at the Miami Marine Laboratory as an underwater photographer, later expanding to include nature and wildlife. He then turned to painting capture these images and memories. In 2005 he won 3rd Place at the Annual Art Show at the Cultural Courthouse in Martin County.

Wave Swept Beach
ca. 2005
Ed Fisher
2006:03:03

The Pineapple Plantations

In 1879 Captain Thomas E. Richards, a shipbuilder from New Jersey, started a pineapple plantation along the Indian River in an area he thought so beautiful that he named it Eden, after the Garden of Eden. From these beginnings the planting of pines, as the settlers called them, became a thriving industry. Within ten years an estimated two million pineapple plants were in cultivation and by 1895 Jensen Beach was known as the *Pineapple Capital of the World*. Schooners first took pineapples to Baltimore, Maryland before shipping was expanded by railroad.

In 1887 William Merwin, an oysterman from Milford, Connecticut, built Edendlawn Plantation. The pineapple industry collapsed at the end of World War I and the plantation was converted to a nursery and fernery. After World War II it was refurbished and became one of the most popular restaurants on the Treasure Coast in the 1950's.



An award winning watercolorist, Ms. Makowski served as the Arts Studio and Exhibits Coordinator of the Elliott Museum for 8 years. In 2019 she received the 2nd in Show Award from the Florida Watercolor Society.



Bromeliad Pineapple Kin
ca. 2005

Robin Lee Makowski
2006:03:11

Edenlawn Plantation started as a Pineapple Plantation in the late 19th century and developed into a tropical nursery by World War II. After the war it became a residential cottage colony. This scene depicts one such example by local artist Ms. Gray.



House and Garden – Edenlawn Plantation
ca. 2000

Margaret Gray
2006:08

Penney's Sunset Menu Cover

Albert Ernest "Beanie" Backus



Beanie Backus was born in Ft. Pierce and is nationally known for his vivid Florida landscapes. In 1925 he attended Parsons School of Design with his lifelong friend Arnold Dumond "Duke" Merwin. The Merwin family owned Edenlawn Plantation for 3 generations. When Edenlawn became a resort colony with a restaurant in the 1950s, Backus paintings of hibiscus were used as menu covers and a series of his sketches of cottages were used as promotional postcards.

An eclectic and experimental painter, Mr. Halsey served on the Martin County Council of the Arts and as President of Art Associates of Martin County. Mr. Halsey turned his attention to painting after a distinguished career in finance and industry.



Eden Grove
ca. 1990
John Halsey
1998:38

Pineapple Basket ca. 1920

This handmade wire basket was used to harvest pineapples in Eden on the Indian River north of Jensen Beach.

Gift of David and Patty Childs



Pineapple Crates ca. 1900

These handmade wooden crates were used to harvest and ship pineapples during the pineapple boom at the turn of the 20th century.