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PEOPLE

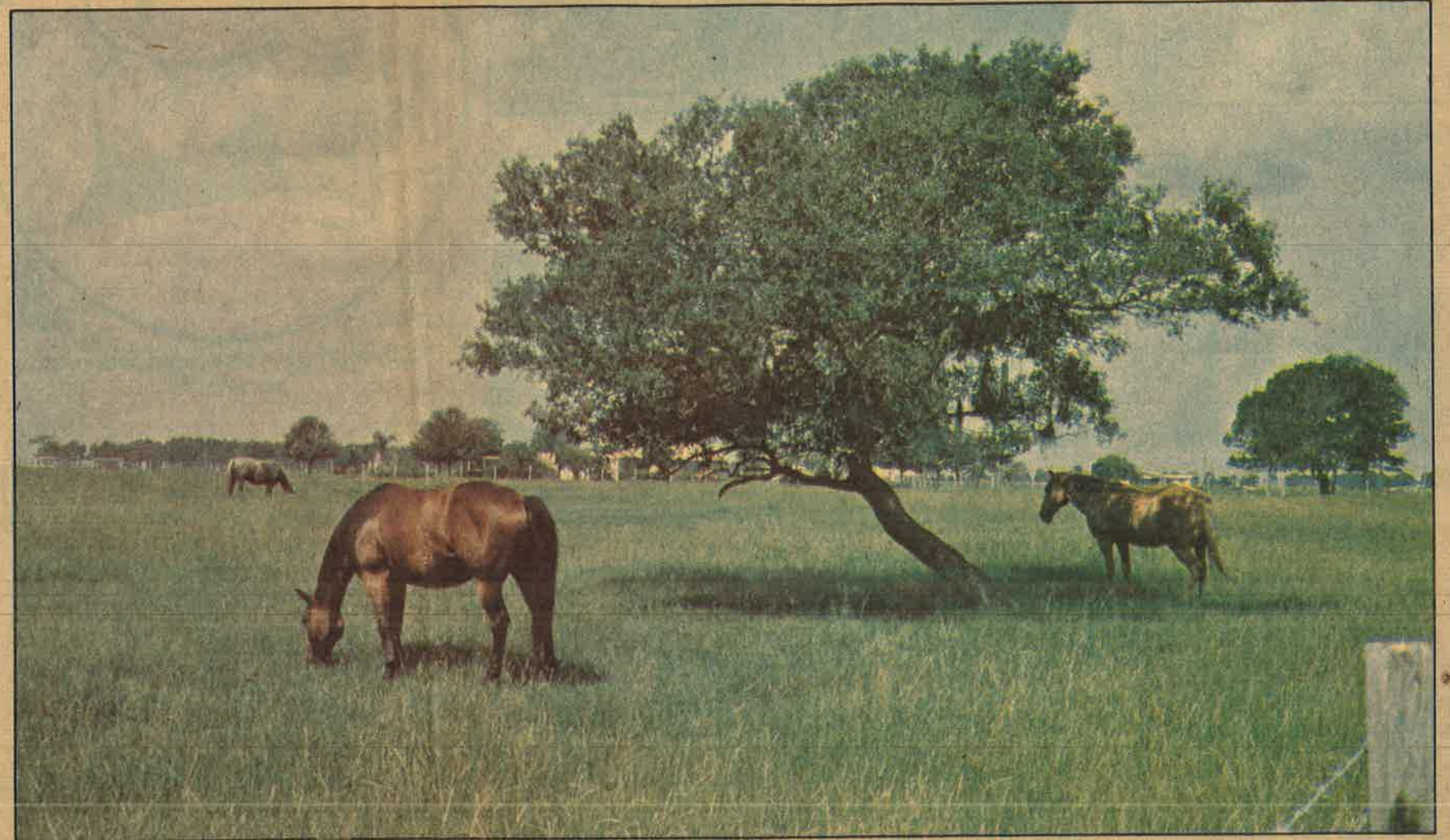
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SECTION

It's not a town, but Duette residents display lots of community spirit



Duette 4-H sign marks the place



Horse ranches, citrus and tomato farms and other agricultural endeavors are Duette's biggest land users

Bradenton Herald photos: CARSON BALDWIN

Farms, friendly folks — Duette's all set

"This is a place where there's friendly people; everyone knows each other. Everyone helps each other."

JAY KIRSCHENMANN
Herald Staff Writer

If you take a right at Parrish and head 19 miles east on Highway 62 you won't find a town, but you will find what long-time residents there call the community of Duette.

There's places with names like "Dry Prairie Baptist Church" and "Thunder Cloud Ranch." There is also plenty of fields, cows, citrus groves, an occasional house, a country store and even Florida's last one-teacher school, all tucked into the northeast corner of Manatee County.

SKETCHY HISTORY

The history of Duette is a little sketchy, as it was never incorporated as a town.

Locals describe it as about 250 people in a radius of 10 miles east and west, and 10 to 15 miles north and south. The Manatee County Election Office lists the Duette area as precinct 3, with 114 registered voters.

The origin of the name "Duette" is equally sketchy. Ada Bilbrey, the Duette School teacher and principal since 1958, said a Canadian visitor with the last name of Duette once stopped at the school, asking if anyone ever heard of his brother who headed that direction to settle down many years ago.

No one around those parts had heard of Mr. Duette, but some folks say they assume that's where the community got its



Ada Bilbrey is principal of Florida's last one-teacher school in Duette

name.

AREA WATERSHED

Duette is located between the east and north forks of the Manatee River. Both branches collect water and eventually join, leading to the county water supply held behind the Lake Manatee dam on the Manatee River.

It's an environmentally sensitive location and important land for Bradenton — the beginnings of what widens into the Manatee River, and the watershed for the county's drinking water supply.

That's why the county's voters recently decided to buy the

Estech phosphate company's land in that area rather than let it be mined. Fat 1970s land survey books and environmental impact studies labled "The Duette Mine" still sit in the county courthouse and in The Bradenton Herald library.

FARM PIONEERS

Many of the folks who live in the Duette community have been there a long time.

Secretary of Agriculture Doyle Conner knows that, and has contacted Duette native John Keen to let him know he'll receive the "Pioneer Farmers" award this fall

for keeping the Keen farmstead in the family for more than 100 years.

"My grandfather William Jackson and father Jacob G. Keen lived here; my grandfather's deed on the property was made out in 1882," said Keen, 68.

"I've lived here all my life, and still have the old log house I was born and raised in although I just use it for storage now," Keen said. "Two of my children are still in these parts; Silas Keen and Betty Glassburn. Their children are the fifth generation here."

Keen said that nearly 40 family members with the same last name



Grocery store operator Lucial Turner

parts of the county rent land near Duette more these days than years ago, Chancey said there are still a lot of local farmers living there.

Citrus and other agricultural farms continue to be the biggest land users in Duette. More horse ranches are also moving into the area, she said.

Keen's daughter, Betty Glassburn, has been a county school bus driver in that area for 10 years. She has been very active leading the 37-member Duette 4-H club.

4-H LIBRARY

Recently, her 4-H'ers managed to convince the Manatee County Central Library to begin a rotating 100-book program in the Duette School library. The library is open to the community and includes up-to-date encyclopedias and other reference books. The club received a third place state 4-H award for community pride because of the project.

Down the road from the school is Turner's County Store, a fairly new addition to the Duette area.

The year-old gas stop and grocery store is run by Lucial Turner, a Duette resident for 26 years.

Bradenton folk may remember her as the owner/operator of a restaurant called "Mom's" on 13th Street West. Herald outdoors writer Jerry Hill used to sit around there waiting for her homemade pies to come out of the oven, Mrs. Turner said with a laugh.

"I gave up the restaurant because of the drive," she said. "But I can't picture myself living anywhere else. I tell you, the community support here is something else. Everyone knows and helps each other here."

once lived near Duette. "Keen Road" and an area called "Keentown" appear on maps.

VERY NEIGHBORLY

Ask the locals and they'll tell you that the small town, er, community of Duette, is close-knit.

"This is a place where there's friendly people; everyone knows each other," said Pauline Chancey, a 57-year-old Duette native. "Everyone helps each other. Neighbors always lend a helping hand, and needs are always met. There is a very close community feeling here."

Although people from other