



Buried Alive, Left to Die

It was late on the night of December 17, 1968, when Jane Mackle heard a knock at the door of a motel room outside Atlanta.

Jane had driven north from Miami to bring her daughter home for Christmas. Twenty-year-old Barbara Mackle, a student at Emory University, had fallen ill during the Hong Kong flu outbreak spreading across college campuses that winter.

Within moments of answering the door, the nightmare began.

The intruders were career criminal Gary Steven Krist and his accomplice Ruth Eisemann-Schier. Armed and methodical, they stormed the room, chloroformed Barbara, and tied Jane to a chair before disappearing into the freezing Georgia night with the unconscious college student.

By morning, Barbara Mackle had vanished without a trace

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The Story of General Development Corporation

General Development Corporation helped shape the history of modern Florida and played a central role in the founding of Port St. Lucie — a city that began as little more than a dream, and thousands of acres of undeveloped land.

During the 1950s, brothers Robert F. Mackle, Frank E. Mackle Jr., and Elliott J. Mackle used money inherited from their father, Frank Mackle Sr., to enter the Florida land development business. In 1958, they formed General Development Corporation through a merger between Mackle Bros. and the Florida Canada Land Company, led by businessman Louis Chesler.

The company revolutionized land sales in Florida by popularizing installment payment plans for homesites in planned communities. Through aggressive national marketing campaigns, General Development attracted thousands of buyers from northern states looking for affordable retirement and vacation properties in the Sunshine State.

GDC created several large Florida developments, including Port Charlotte, North Port, Port St. Lucie, Port Malabar, and Sebastian Highlands. Of these developments, Port St. Lucie and North Port eventually grew into incorporated cities, while several others remained primarily residential communities.

General Development Corporation

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As part of the company's branding strategy, the word "Port" was used in the naming of most of its developments to create the image of prosperous and established commercial centers.

In naming Port St. Lucie, the developers combined the county name "St. Lucie," which originated from the early Spanish settlement Santa Lucia, with the word "Port." The city was officially incorporated in 1961 — despite having virtually no permanent residents at the time.

The developers believed the new community needed a major attraction to draw visitors and future homeowners to the area. To accomplish this, they constructed the famous Port St. Lucie Country Club. The resort featured a five-star Hilton hotel, two swimming pools, tennis courts, three golf courses known as the Saints, Sinners, and Wilderness courses, along with boating, fishing, sailing, and more than 250 furnished villas complete with maid and lawn service.

After opening the resort in 1961, General Development expanded further by purchasing River Park and what is now known as Indian River Estates from publisher and businessman Gardner Cowles.

The Box Underground

Investigators quickly identified Gary Steven Krist as a suspect. During the investigation, agents uncovered a strange detail: Krist had experience building ventilated containers and underground structures.

Then came the break that changed everything.

A Georgia man contacted authorities after purchasing a small trailer from someone calling himself “George Deacon” — one of Krist’s aliases. Inside the trailer, the buyer discovered suspicious papers and diagrams.

The material pointed investigators toward a rural area in Georgia.

Suddenly, the FBI believed Barbara might still be alive — buried somewhere underground.

The Search for Barbara

Hundreds of FBI agents, police officers, and volunteers flooded the woods.

The search became frantic.

Port St. Lucie and General Development Corp.

In 1962, the Mackle brothers sold their interest in General Development Corporation and formed the Deltona Corporation. Following their departure, Louis Chesler assumed leadership of GDC, and later Gardner Cowles also guided the company before eventually selling his interests.

At its height, General Development Corporation became the largest homebuilder in Florida, constructing more than 100,000 homes and helping establish multiple Florida communities during the 1960s.

However, the company later faced serious legal and financial troubles. During the 1980s, four GDC executives were convicted in connection with fraudulent real estate sales practices involving overpriced homes sold to customers — many of them elderly buyers from northern states seeking retirement properties. The scandal severely damaged the company’s reputation, and General Development eventually declared bankruptcy in 1990.

Despite the collapse of the company, its impact on Florida remains enormous.

General Development Corporation may have failed, but Port St. Lucie did not. What began as an empty development in 1961 has grown into one of Florida’s largest cities. Today, Port St. Lucie ranks among the largest cities in the state both in land area and population, growing from zero residents at incorporation to more than a quarter of a million people some 65 years later.





Men clawed through dirt with bare hands. Others used shovels, sticks, and anything available to probe the earth. Every minute mattered.

Then, shortly after dawn on December 20, rescuers heard something faint beneath the soil.

A banging sound.

Agents dropped to the ground and began digging furiously.

After tearing through layers of dirt, they uncovered a pipe leading downward. Moments later, they reached the buried box.

Inside was Barbara Mackle — exhausted, drenched in sweat, severely dehydrated, but alive.

She had survived underground for 83 horrifying hours.

When the lid opened, fresh air rushed into the coffin-sized chamber for the first time in nearly three and a half days.

Barbara's first words reportedly were:

"Am I glad to see you."

The nation watched in relief as rescuers carried her from the woods to safety.

For a time, General Development Corporation became the largest land development company in Florida. Their projects introduced thousands of families to affordable homeownership opportunities across the state.

Among the Mackle brothers' greatest accomplishments was the creation of Deltona in 1962, which grew into one of Central Florida's largest communities. The company also played a major role in the development of Port St. Lucie, Marco Island, and several other Florida communities that continue to flourish today.

Mr. Mackle served as chairman of the Deltona board until 1977. Afterward, he became president of the Farrand Corporation, continuing his leadership in business and development.

Robert F. Mackle passed away on May 4, 1983, in Key Biscayne at the age of 71.

Today, his legacy remains visible throughout Florida in the communities he helped build and the generations of families who made their homes there.



Frank
Mackle Jr.,
Louis
Chesler,
Fred
Dickinson,
Bob
Mackle,
Gardner
Cowles,
Elliot
Mackle III



St. Lucie River Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution

Two hundred fifty years. Two and a half centuries this great experiment has endured. It's worth asking: did the founders ever imagine it would last this long? At a time when the idea that people could govern themselves was almost unheard of, they chose to believe it could be done—and more importantly, that it should be done.

They stood before God and their fellow citizens and pledged their lives, their liberty, and their sacred honor. They risked everything for a principle larger than themselves. And through courage, sacrifice, and conviction, they not only secured independence but set into motion an idea that would echo across the world. Today, more than a hundred nations have embraced some form of representative government, a testament to the enduring power of that vision.

Yet, as time passes, memory can fade. The struggles, the sacrifices, and the profound significance of those early years can become distant, even forgotten. That is why this marker matters.

This dedication is more than a piece of metal or stone—it is a bridge between past and present. It calls us to remember what was, to honor those who came before us, and to reflect on the cost of the freedoms we often take for granted. It reminds us that history is not just a collection of dates and names, but a story of ordinary people who did extraordinary things—people who stood up, spoke out, and fought for an idea greater than themselves.

And here, in Port St. Lucie, we see that same spirit carried forward. The pioneers of this community shared the very traits of their ancestors—resilience, courage, and determination. They transformed swampland into opportunity, facing harsh conditions, dangerous wildlife, and an uncertain future to build a place they could call home.

Port St. Lucie was incorporated in April of 1961, during a tense and uncertain moment in American history, the same week as the Bay of Pigs invasion, followed just a year later by the Cuban Missile Crisis. Yet even in those challenging times, its early residents pressed forward. In true American fashion, they took miles of ranch land and just a handful of homes and, in a few short decades, built a thriving city—one that now stands as a vibrant community of more than a quarter of a million people.

As we dedicate this marker, we also dedicate ourselves—to learning, to remembering, and to carrying forward the principles that have sustained this nation for 250 years. The experiment is still ongoing. Its success is not guaranteed. It depends on each generation to uphold it, to protect it, and to believe in it.

May this marker stand as a lasting reminder: of where we have been, of what has been sacrificed, and of the responsibility we all share to ensure that this experiment in self-government continues to endure for generations to come.



Congratulations to the Daughters of the American Revolution for the outstanding ceremony dedicating a commemorative plaque honoring the 250th anniversary of our nation.

For those who were unable to attend, the event was held at Port St. Lucie City Hall on Saturday, May 16, 2026, at 11:00 a.m.

The plaque is now permanently displayed at the entrance to City Hall and may be viewed during regular public hours at:

121 SW Port St. Lucie Blvd.
Port St. Lucie, Florida 34984

The Port St. Lucie Historical Society extends its appreciation to everyone who participated in this meaningful tribute to America's semiquincentennial celebration.

The Port St. Lucie Historical Society invites everyone to visit the Port St. Lucie History Museum and Education Center to view the beautiful decorations prepared by the St. Lucie River Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in celebration of our country's 250th anniversary, stop by and enjoy this patriotic display honoring America's semiquincentennial and the rich history of our nation and community.

Celebrating the 250th Anniversary of Our Nation

In honor of the 250th anniversary of our nation, the Port St. Lucie History Museum and Education Center proudly hosted a special traveling exhibit from the Mel Fisher Museum titled *Florida and the American Revolution*.

This fascinating exhibit explores Florida's unique and often overlooked role during the founding of the United States and throughout the 250 years of our nation's history. Visitors are introduced to the complex political and cultural relationships between Florida, England, and Spain during the era of the American Revolutionary War.

Unlike the thirteen colonies that rebelled against England in 1776, Florida remained loyal to the British Crown. The exhibit explains why many Floridians chose to support England and examines the hopes, concerns, and challenges facing the people living in Florida during this turbulent period.

The exhibit also highlights how Florida returned to Spanish control following the Revolutionary War before eventually becoming a territory of the newly formed United States and later achieving statehood.

Through artifacts, historical displays, and engaging storytelling, visitors gain a deeper understanding of Florida's important role in the early history of our country.

If you have not yet had the opportunity to visit the museum and experience this remarkable exhibit, we invite you to come see what you have been missing. It is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our nation's semiquincentennial while learning more about Florida's unique place in American history.



BarbaraAnn & Keith Smith



Donnita Graben



Bobbie Williams,
Lt. Col. US Army



Rochella Riordan

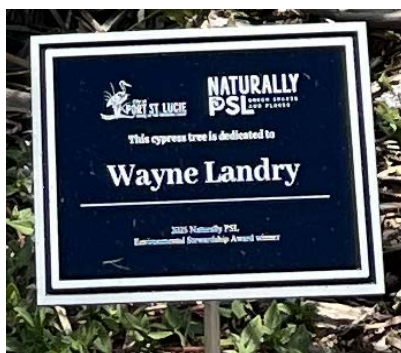
CITY NEWS

The City of Port St. Lucie celebrated their 65th birthday celebration, Saturday April 25 at The Port District. There was live music, birthday cake and lots of fun.

Mayor Shannon Martin along with Wayne Landry, City Ambassador kicked off the celebration.

A community celebration featuring:

Naturally PSL Environmental Stewardship Awards, Food trucks, Live entertainment, Children's activities.



A Note from the Chair Nate Spera

Dear Members and Friends,

Thank you for your continued support of the Port St. Lucie Historical Society and Museum. Because of your involvement and generosity, we have enjoyed a very active and successful few months.

In April, we hosted a well-attended gathering featuring St. Lucie County Property Appraiser Michelle Franklin, who provided an informative and engaging presentation. We are grateful for her participation and for everyone who joined us for the event.

The Museum has also remained active in our community through several outreach initiatives, including engagements with local home owners' associations, the St. Lucie County Historical Society, and St. Lucie County schools. These opportunities allow us to share the rich history of our city and inspire future generations to appreciate and preserve our local heritage.

In addition, the Historical Society played an important role in coordinating the City of Port St. Lucie's 65th Birthday Celebration on April 25 in the Port District. It was a wonderful occasion to celebrate our community's growth and recognize the people and events that have shaped our city's history.

As you can see, there is a great deal happening at the Society and Museum, and we are excited about the months ahead. We will be hosting another gathering on October 14, and we hope to see many of you there.

B16 June 4, 2026

ST. LUCIE VOICE | COMMUNITY

www.stlucievoice.com

AMERICA 250! Daughters of the American Revolution dedicate marker at City Hall



Far left: The Marine Corps League, Jack Ivy Detachment. Near left: City Councilmember Anthony Bonna Sr., Honorable Mayor Shannon Martin, Kathy Bradley, Rochella Kierdan and Barbara Ann Smith. Inset below: The America 250 Marker.

On May 16, the Saint Lucie River Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution dedicated an America 250 marker at Port St. Lucie City Hall, commemorating 250 years of American history and honoring our nation's Revolutionary War patriots.

The Posting of the Colors was performed by the Saint Lucie River Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution. The Invocation and Benediction were given by Mark Zook. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Luke, Benjamin and Nathan Bradley. The Preamble to the Constitution was read by Tim Winant, and the National Anthem was sung by Lonnie Kirsch, Regent of the DAR Okeechobee Chapter. A 21-gun salute was fired by the Marine Corps League, Jack Ivy Detachment, and "Taps" was performed by Master Sergeant Richard Marion (Ret., USAF).

Speaker Donita Graben, curator of the Port St. Lucie Historical and Educational Center, highlighted the local people, places and events that contributed to our nation's founding, and the historical significance of the marker. Lt. Colonel Bobbie Williams (Ret., U.S. Army) spoke about the individuals who helped secure our nation's freedom. Bradley Keen, director of Port St. Lucie Parks and Recreation, received a special DAR America 250 Commendation Certificate and medal for his integral role in making the dedication possible. Additionally, Robert Lamb was recognized for his help in securing funds for the project.

Special awards were presented to Gold Star parents Mr. and Mrs. Mark Zook in memory of their son, Cpl. Ian T. Zook, USMC. Recognition was also given to Warrant

Officer 2 Donald Spivey (Ret., Army), Master Sergeant Richard Marion (Ret., USAF) and SK2 Cherie Portinga (Ret., Navy). Local dignitaries present included Port St. Lucie Mayor the Honorable Shannon Martin, City Council member Anthony Bonna Sr., Angel Robertson from the office of U.S. Rep. Brian Mast, and Haleigh Howell from the office of U.S. Sen. Rick Scott.

Representatives from area Veteran Service organizations were in attendance, as well as other DAR chapters, including the Okeechobee Chapter (Okeechobee County), the Cora Stickney Harper Chapter (Fort Pierce), the Halpatiokee Chapter (Martin County), Lighthouse Point (Jupiter) and Major William Lauderdale (Plantation). This public ceremony and memorial marker dedication celebrated the Saint Lucie River Chapter's ongoing work in historic preservation, education and patriotic service. ■

— CONTRIBUTED

First Port St. Lucie Historical Society History Bus Tour a Great Success

The Port St. Lucie Historical Society's first-ever History Bus Tour was a tremendous success, with all 56 participants enjoying a fascinating journey through the history of our community.

The tour departed from the Port St. Lucie History Museum and Education Center at 10:00 a.m., where guests began their adventure by learning about the area's early days, including the historic Burt Pruitt Fishing Camp, one of the first destinations in what would eventually become Port St. Lucie.

As the tour traveled through the city, participants learned about the development of Port St. Lucie and the role of General Development Corporation in shaping the community's growth. Along the route, guests were introduced to many of the people, places, and events that helped transform the area from ranchland and wilderness into the vibrant city it is today.

One of the first stops was the iconic Shell Bazaar, the oldest continuously operating business in Port St. Lucie. Visitors enjoyed time to shop, browse the unique stores, visit Honeybee Hollow Apothecary, and relax at the Gator Glaze Restaurant, where complimentary coffee and pastries were provided.

The tour then continued to the oldest section of Port St. Lucie, where participants learned about publisher Gardner Cowles and the founding of River Park. Guests visited several historic sites and gained a deeper understanding of the community that predated the incorporation of Port St. Lucie.



PSL History Museum



Shell Bazaar



First History Bus Tour



From there, the group traveled to Clover Park, home of the St. Lucie Mets and spring training headquarters of the New York Mets. Participants received a special behind-the-scenes tour led by Kasey Blair, Senior Director of the St. Lucie Mets, who shared the history and operations of the facility.

After exploring the history and development of St. Lucie West, the tour concluded with a visit to the newly renovated Sandpiper Bay All-Inclusive Resort. Guests enjoyed a complimentary lunch while learning about the resort's amenities and its role as one of the area's premier destinations. The visit was a perfect ending to a memorable day.

Following lunch, the group returned to the Port St. Lucie History Museum and Education Center, bringing to a close a successful inaugural tour that celebrated the rich history of our community.

The Port St. Lucie Historical Society extends its sincere appreciation to all of the volunteers, partners, and organizations who helped make this event possible. Special thanks go to the Shell Bazaar, Clover Park and the St. Lucie Mets organization, Sandpiper Bay All-Inclusive Resort, and everyone who contributed their time and expertise to the tour.

Based on the enthusiastic response from participants, the Port St. Lucie Historical Society looks forward to hosting future History Bus Tours and continuing to share the stories that make Port St. Lucie such a unique and remarkable community

Clover Park



The Ladies of Del Web



Sandpiper All – Inclusive
Resort



**If you are interested
in joining the next
bus tour follow us at
PSLHISTORY.ORG or
become a member of
the PSL Historical
Society.**



2 of the Upcoming Events




Thursday, July 16, 2026 from 6:00pm to 9:00pm approx.

The Saints Pub, 2601 SE Morningside Blvd., Port St Lucie, FL 34952



for Great Food, Music, Fun and Prizes!

For the benefit of PSL Historical Society!







Online Savings Package for 1

Online Savings Package for 2





Presented by Richard and Michelle Oakley. For more information, or to schedule your charity event, please call Rich at (720) 936-7223 or Michelle (720) 480-7447. Start and end times are approximate. Come early for a good seat!



Stitch-in-time
Quilters Celebrating
America's 250th



The Port St. Lucie History Museum and Education Center is hosting the first annual Historical Quilting Exhibit.

For More Information, please call L. M. "Butch" Post at (772) 380.2300. Additionally, please email "Butch" at butchpost@msn.com if you are planning on entering a wall-hanging.

Port St. Lucie Museum and Education Center
2456 SE Westmoreland Blvd., Port St. Lucie, FL 34952
www.pslhistory.org

How to Make *Your* Quilt Block

Follow these simple steps:

1

CHOOSE YOUR INSPIRATION

The Port St. Lucie History Museum and Education Center is hosting the first annual Historical Quilting Exhibit.

What makes you think of 250 Years of America? Turn your idea into a colorful quilt square.

2

CREATE YOUR BLOCK

- Quilt wall hanging will be between 10"-13". Each entry must be a finished Block not exceeding 13" square.
- All entries must include red, white, and blue, colors of the US Flag.
- Entries may not have any flag in their design.

3

SEND IT IN

This exhibit is open to ALL LOCAL QUILTERS. 13" stands for our 13 colonies. Please bring to the PSL Museum before or at the Reception, in your honor, October 26th, 2026. They will be hung for everyone to see from Nov. 2nd until Nov 16th. Nov. 17th is pickup day. All St. Lucie County Quilters Guilds and St. Lucie County residents are invited to participate.








Visit www.pslhistory.org/special-events for more information

The Port St. Lucie Historical Society is a 501 (c) (3) Public Charity. All donations are deductible to the extent allowed by law and 100% of all proceeds go to the Museum

This beautiful Grandfather Clock was donated by Historical Society Members John and Barnette Moore.



Thank You to Our New Members!

I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all the new members of the Port St. Lucie Historical Society. Your support is what makes the Port St. Lucie Historical Society, and the Port St. Lucie History Museum and Education Center possible.

Through your membership, you help preserve our community's history, support educational programs, and ensure that future generations can learn about the people, places, and events that shaped Port St. Lucie.

If you are not yet a member, we invite you to join the Historical Society and become part of our mission to preserve and share our local heritage. You can also leave a lasting legacy by purchasing an engraved brick in our "Legacy in Stone" brick garden.

To learn more about membership opportunities or to purchase a commemorative brick, please visit PSLHISTORY.ORG.

Thank you for helping us keep Port St. Lucie's history alive.

Future Events

"Legacy in Stone"
Brick Garden Dedication **Saturday**
July 11 at 10:00 am

Bus History Tour
(September)

The Gathering-
October 21st

A Night in a Haunted
Museum (October)