



Past and Present

Newsletter of
The North Florida Genealogical Society

January 2026

sgesjax.org

Letter from the President – Alana Masters

Happy New Year!

I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday and enjoyed time with your family and friends. Our society had a pretty busy 2025! In addition to our monthly meetings...

- ◆ We officially changed the society's name.
- ◆ We participated in several events such as the Jacksonville Historical Society's History Fair and attended the 248th anniversary of the Battle of Thomas Creek.
- ◆ We were the speakers for other organizations such as the Rotary Club.
- ◆ We held several fundraisers including a bus tour of San Marco, Avondale, and Riverside and a tour of the Scottish Rites building.
- ◆ Our library had a new roof installed.
- ◆ A new computer was purchased for our library and other computers were upgraded where possible.

We have some exciting things planned for 2026, so be sure to keep an eye out for our newsletters each month!

P.S. Please remember that our society is entirely run by volunteers. If you are willing to be a part of keeping our society going, please let us know! This is a friendly reminder that you can bring your own laptops or tablets to the library as you can still access Ancestry and records only available at a FamilySearch Affiliate Library.

Upcoming Meeting Information

**NFGS Jan. 10, 2026 Program
Watson Realty
4194 San Juan Avenue
10 am - 11:30 am**



I Have a Civil War Ancestor... Now What?

Join Brian Rhinehart — professional genealogist, speaker, and owner of CivilWarRecords.com — for an engaging look at how to uncover and understand your Civil War heritage. A graduate of the Boston University Genealogy Research Certificate Program and a regular researcher for the TV show *Finding Your Roots*, Brian brings extensive experience to the topic. As a direct descendant of eight Civil War soldiers, he specializes in research and record retrieval for Civil War and War of 1812 service members at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and has retrieved military files for hundreds of clients.

Research Day at NFGS Library
Saturday, January 17, 2026 from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm



We are pleased to announce that we are planning on having the **NFGS Library open for research on Saturday, January 17, 2026 from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm** in an effort to make it available to those who are unable to come on Wednesdays. This is an opportunity for new and longtime members to become acquainted with what the library has to offer.

- More than 7,000 books and other materials relating to family and US history with an emphasis on Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Virginia, South Carolina, and North Carolina.
- A large multi-year collection of quarterlies from lineage and genealogy societies throughout the country.
- Local cemetery censuses.
- Telephone directories for Jacksonville starting in 1947 and surrounding areas.
- Also that you can bring your own laptops or tablets to the library as you can still access Ancestry and records only available at a FamilySearch Affiliate Library.

In order for this to be a regular occurrence we need volunteers willing to staff the library. If you are interested please contact the NFGS Library by any of the methods below.

By email: sgesjax@att.net please include the Subject Line: Volunteer at the Library

By snail mail: PO Box 7728, Jacksonville, FL 32238-7728

In person: Library is open on Wednesdays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm.

Phone number: (904) 778-1000

Bronson-Mulholland House Tour
Saturday, February 7, 2026 starting at 11:30 am
100 Madison St., Palatka



Saturday, February 14, 2026 starting at 10:00 am

When: Saturday, February 14, 2026 from 10:00-11:30 am

Where: Mandarin Branch Library, 3330 Kori Rd., Jacksonville, FL 32257

Speaker: Peggy Jude



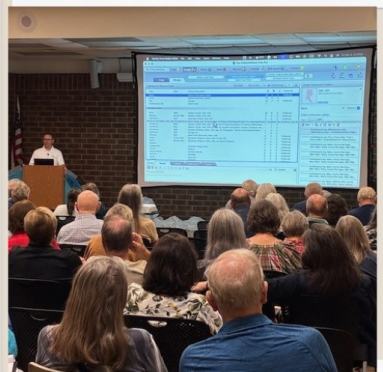
Peggy Jude has been conducting genealogical research for family and clients for over 40 years. She specializes in and teaches five areas of genealogical interest: DNA, genealogical technology, genealogical methodology, Swedish genealogy, and preserving family history and family heirlooms.

Topic: **What Can I Do With My DNA? 13 Things You Can Do With Your DNA**

So you took a test, and you know your ethnicity. You are related to who you expected. Now what? Explore all the things you can do with your DNA from the basics to more advanced options.

NFGS Sponsors Mark Olsen

Mark Olsen delivered a clear and engaging presentation on the latest updates to Family Tree Maker, highlighting new features, improvements, and tips to help users better manage and sync their family trees. Approximately 70 attendees from across Northeast Florida participated in this informative event, sponsored by the North Florida Genealogical Society (NFGS). The strong turnout reflected the high level of interest in staying current with genealogy software tools.



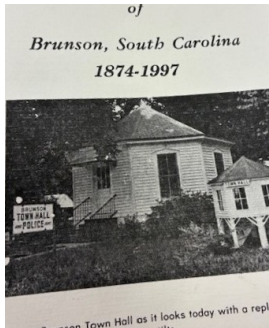
WOLFSON'S TOY DRIVE

Georgia Pribanic, NFGS Board Member, delivered numerous toys in support of the Wolfson Children's Hospital toy drive, part of Watson Realty's annual community outreach. This donation was a heartfelt thank-you to Watson Realty—and especially to Lori Reynolds—for her continued generosity in making the community room available for NFGS events.



NFGS Dec 13th Program

The North Florida Genealogical Society's December 13 meeting was a warm and memorable gathering. Members shared cherished family heirlooms and the stories behind them, bringing personal history vividly to life.



The program was followed by time to enjoy good food, fellowship, and a small holiday gift from the Society as a token of appreciation to our members.

Our White Elephant gift exchange added lots of laughter and friendly competition to the event. Each gift could only be stolen three times, which made the choices even more strategic and fun. The clear hot ticket of the day was the Civil War puzzle—it was in such high demand that it reached the steal limit in no time!



From our members:

FELIZ NAVIDAD - Remembering Our Heritage

The History of the First Christmas Celebration in
North America



Don Pedro Felipe de Mulleño

PREFACE: The early history of Florida and Spanish exploration of what is now the United States of America is seldom taught in public schools. It is unfortunate that so much of what we learn focuses on the British colonization efforts, but the truth is the Spaniards were here long before other Europeans. The first Christmas celebration was held on January 9, 1539 in a Native American village of the Apalachee Nation known as Anhaica, 487 years ago. This location is now within the city limits of Tallahassee, Florida.

Que la verdad sea conocida por todos

In May 1539, Spanish explorer and conquistador Hernando de Soto landed in what is known today as Shaw's Point, Bradenton, Florida. De Soto named the spot Espiritu Santo, meaning Holy Spirit. He arrived with nine ships carrying over 620 people, 220 horses 12 Catholic priests, craftsmen, engineers, farmers, merchants and their families.

De Soto's expedition originated from Spain to Cuba; He landed on the Gulf Coast of the Florida peninsula in what is now Manatee County. His mission under the direction of

the Spanish Crown, was to colonize La Florida, convert the pagan natives to Christianity and discover gold.

The Spaniards traveled 300 miles up the Gulf Coast before reaching the Native American village of Anhaica Apalachee, which was one of the principal villages of the Apalachee Nation. The Spaniards arrived in October 1539 setting up a winter encampment where they would remain uninvited by the Apalachee until March 1540. This site is near what is now the Historic Capitol in downtown Tallahassee, Florida.

It was during this encampment that De Soto and his colonists celebrated the first Christmas. It was far from the festive celebration it has become today. The conversion from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar has changed the official Christmas Celebration from January to December. On September 29, 1582, King Phillip II of Spain adopted the Gregorian calendar.

The Apalachee had been forced from their homes and were angry; they constantly ambushed these strangers who had taken over their land, leaving the Spaniards very little time to let their guard down and celebrate.

Although not recorded specifically in Spanish Archive Documents, it was the time of the Spanish Inquisition and strict adherence to all religious Christian ceremonies was required by law in Spain and all of the Spanish Colonies. La Florida was a Crown Colony of Nueva España. There is no record of any other Christian expedition, with the appropriate clergy being within the borders of what is now the United States prior to the De Soto expedition.



The Apalachee were fascinated with the Christmas Mass as they observed with curiosity and often mimicked the behavior of the Spaniards. The Spaniards misinterpreted this behavior by thinking the Native Americans wanted to be Christians. The Apalachees had no interest in converting to Christianity; they were very satisfied with their own religion. The circus had come to town and they were simply amused.

When springtime came in 1540, the Spaniards provisioned themselves with confiscated Apalachee corn and headed north. De Soto's decision was based on native stories of gold smelting in Yupaha, a settlement to the north of Anahacia. Since De Soto never found any gold, perhaps this was the best way the Apalachee could think of to get rid of them.

For three generations, more than 1500 Apalachee and Spanish colonists lived together at what is now Mission San Luis. It preceded missions in California and Texas by more than 150 years. The blending of Native Americans and Europeans resulted in a new culture throughout the area as La Florida remained the prize Crown Colony of Nueva España.

For 288 years, La Florida was a foreign country adjacent to the British Colonies and then the United States. Florida and Caribbean Islands were traded like pawns in a chess game to settle disputes and wars between England and Spain. It was never what is best for Floridians – it was always what is best for Spain. It was never what is best for Colonial Americans – it was always what is best for England.

In 1821, the Adams-Onís Treaty ceded La Florida as a territory to the United States under the presidency of James Monroe. As early as 1834, Floridians petitioned the US Government to join the Union as two states, East Florida and West Florida. This petition was denied. The Floridians were told to settle their differences and re-apply for statehood as one state. After several years of negotiations, the officials in St. Augustine and Pensacola finally agreed to establish a new site for the state capitol – half way between the two rival cities. Ironically, this site was the same location as the original Apalachee village of Anhaica and is now known today as Tallahassee, Florida.

On March 3, 1845 Florida became the 27th State to join the Union under the presidency of James Polk. "Not until the year 2055 will the American flag have flown over La Florida as long as did the flag of Spain." (Michael Gannon – Florida: A Short History, 1993)

Que la verdad sea conocida por todos



Respectfully submitted by:

Don Pedro Felipe de Mulleño, Callahan, La Florida

09 de Enero, 2021,©

POST SCRIPT: Archaeologists, Anthropologists and Historians all agree this event happened at the reported location, but they disagree on the exact day, and some say it could have been January 7,8, or 9, in the year of 1539 or 1540. “Que recordemos siempre con honor y dignidad”

REFERENCES:

Jennifer Viegas, “America’s First Christmas Happened in Florida”

Published December 12, 2012

Blythe Newsome, “First Christmas in La Florida at Mission San Luis”

Tallahassee Democrat, December 29, 2012;

Jason Dehart, “North America’s first Christmas” Tallahassee Magazine, December 2012

Peter P. Mullen presentation series: “Promoting History & Culture of the South”,

Published Januray 9, 2021, ppmullen39@yahoo.com, Callahan

Contact me for additional info: Peter P. Mullen, Callahan, Florida,

Leave message @ (904) 879-4931, ppmullen39@yahoo.com

Via in-person or ZOOM

Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels

Sons of Confederate Veterans



Would you like to see your story in one of our future newsletters? Then please submit your article to:

By email: sgesjax@att.net – Subject Line: Newsletter

By snail mail: PO Box 7728, Jacksonville, FL 32238-7728

In person: Library is open on Wednesdays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm.