



A Brief History of the Gainesville Gospel Tabernacle

By Melanie Barr

Historic Preservationist & Member of the Alachua County Historical Commission

The Gainesville Gospel Tabernacle, now the site of the Matheson Library & Archives building at 418 E. University Avenue, was built one row of brick at a time over five years. This branch of the Christian Missionary Alliance came to Gainesville in the late 1920s, and on May 3, 1931 the charismatic Reverend Harry Biddlecum preached the first sermon in a tent on this site.

He moved here from Orlando and lived in Dr. Sarah Robb's house when it was located immediately west of this site. Dr. Robb died in May 1937. By this time the walls of the church were high enough that Reverend Biddlecum could move into the apartment in the back of the church.

Dr. Robb had given her daughter and son-in-law part of the Robb property. It included the lot with the tent for the church. Emily Dorsey sold the lot to the church on October 31, 1932 at a price about one third of what it should have cost, according to Mrs. Dorsey's son.

Church members collected money for bricks from people shopping in the downtown square. A typical donation was a nickel or a dime. A dollar was considered a large contribution. The rows of bricks were laid around the tent by the members of the church.

One year after the lot was purchased the bricks were high enough to lay the cornerstone. On November 20, 1933 the Gainesville Sun reported on the impressive ceremony and noted that outstanding ministers from around the South spoke at it. In January 1935 the members borrowed money to put a roof on the church.

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Gainesville Gospel Tabernacle in the 1930s

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Reverend Biddlecum

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Even though he was a newcomer to Gainesville the Reverend had no trouble getting people to attend his services. Joe and Fay Silverman, a young, newlywed Jewish couple with no intention of converting to another religion, attended the services. According to Mrs. Silverman they would have heard every word of the sermon in their apartment at the back of the Dorsey House anyhow, and there was no TV and not much to do in Gainesville in the 1930s.

During the 1940s the walls were plastered, a pine floor was laid over the subfloor and the baptismal pool was built. The City laid the sidewalk in 1947. Church services went live on the air on WGGG starting in November 1948.

Reverend Biddlecum died in 1956. The next preacher only lasted for three years. Church members decided to sell the Tabernacle. It was listed for sale in 1960 and sold in 1962. One of the problems was the lack of parking.

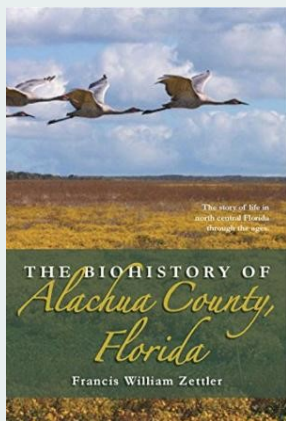
It was rented by a few different churches before it opened as the Barrow Family Antique Store in 1976. In 1982 Hope Meucci opened the Melting Pot restaurant in it after doing extensive renovations. It was sold in 1998 and the restaurant closed in 2009.

The Matheson acquired it in 2014, and with the help of a Special Category Grant from the Bureau of Historic Preservation it has been transformed into the Matheson Library and Archives building.

Images courtesy of Melanie Barr

2017 MEMBERSHIP GIFT

We are excited to announce that the 2017 Membership Gift will be a copy of Francis William Zettler's book, *The Biohistory of Alachua County*. Join or renew at the Contributor membership level (\$100) and receive this wonderful book. Stop by the museum to join/renew and pick up your free book!



LIBRARY & ARCHIVES FUNDRAISER AND RIBBON-CUTTING

The staff and Board of Directors of the Matheson History Museum cordially invite you to enjoy an evening of champagne and hand-dipped chocolate strawberries as we celebrate the completed renovation of the new Matheson Library & Archives building at 418 E. University Avenue. Melanie Barr, member of the Alachua County Historical Commission, will give a brief history of the building and Hope Meucci, former owner of the Melting Pot Restaurant, will also speak.

Proceeds from ticket sales and a silent auction will help us furnish and equip the former Melting Pot building with everything from tables and chairs to archival supplies to computers and shelving.

Tickets are \$75 and can be purchased online at www.mathesonmuseum.org or you can mail your check to the museum at 513 E. University Avenue, Gainesville, FL, 32601.

If you have any questions please call 352-378-2280 or email executivedirector@mathesonmuseum.org.



MATHESON HAPPENINGS

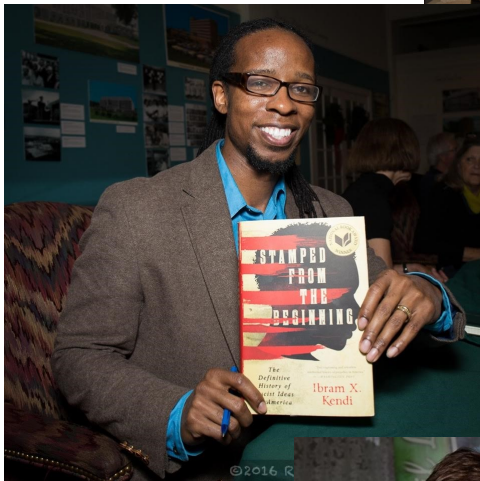
Thank you to Annie Morien of Red Hot Pepper Studios for these wonderful photos from our Holiday Open House & Local Author Book Signing! We had a great time and are already looking forward to the next one!



Kaley Behl and Karen Kirkman from the Historic Haile Homestead



Stefanie Samara Hamblen congratulating Patricia Moore, winner of the cookie contest.



Dr. Ibram X. Kendi with his book, winner of the 2016 National Book Award. He will be speaking at the Matheson on February 25.



Authors Michele Leavitt and Sandra Lambert

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

1867 Matheson House Docents:

Love history and meeting new people? Then come join the docent training program for the 1867 Matheson House!




Help us move!

We are looking for volunteers who are willing to help us move the books and archives into the new Library and Archives building across the street.



For more information about these opportunities please contact us at 352-378-2280 or executivedirector@mathesonmuseum.org.



MATHESON HISTORY MUSEUM'S

*Library & Archives
Fundraiser and
Ribbon-cutting*

16
FEB

\$75 in advance
Purchase tickets online at
www.mathesonmuseum.org

6
PM

EXHIBITION

River of Dreams: The St. Johns and Its Springs

January 21 to June 24, 2017

This original exhibition examines Floridians' past, present and future relationship with the St. Johns River and its springs. The exhibition includes original work by photographers Anne Ledbetter and Bruce Mozert; artifacts from Kingsley Plantation and the Silver Glen Springs shell mound; documents and images on loan from the University of Florida, George A. Smathers Library, Special & Area Studies Collections, and the Florida and Puerto Rico Digital Newspaper project; and images of the St. Johns River, Ocklawaha River and Silver Springs from the Matheson's photographic, stereographic and postcard collections.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Florida Founder William P. DuVal: Frontier Bon Vivant with Dr. James M. Denham

Thursday, February 2, 6pm - FREE

Remembering Paradise Park: Tourism and Segregation at Silver Springs

with Lu Vickers and Cynthia Wilson-Graham

Saturday, February 11, 2pm - FREE

Matheson Library & Archives Fundraiser and Ribbon-Cutting

Thursday, February 16, 6pm—\$75 in advance

Purchase tickets online at www.mathesonmuseum.org

Stamped From the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America

with Dr. Ibram X. Kendi

Saturday, February 25, 2pm - FREE

***The Gulf: The Making of an American Sea* Book Launch with Dr. Jack E. Davis**

Sunday, March 19, 2pm - FREE

Ocklawaha River History Paddle Tour with Lars Andersen

Saturday, March 25 - Costs vary

Contact Lars directly at riverguide2000@yahoo.com or 352-454-0611 to reserve your spot

Fake News, The Gainesville Sun, and the Cuban War of Independence with Paul S. Losch

Thursday, April 6, 6pm - FREE

Florida's American Heritage River: Images from the St. Johns Region

with Gary Monroe and Mallory O'Connor

Saturday, April 8, 4pm - FREE

A Writer's Life: Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and Women Writers Today

with Cynthia Barnett and other writers

Thursday, April 13, 6pm - FREE

St. Johns River History Paddle Tour with Lars Andersen

Saturday, April 22 - Costs vary

Contact Lars directly at riverguide2000@yahoo.com or 352-454-0611 to reserve your spot

River of Lakes: A Journey on the St. Johns River with Bill Belleville

Saturday, April 29, 4pm - FREE

Magnesia Springs in Alachua County, Florida: Then and Now with Robert F. Moore

Saturday, May 13, 2pm - FREE

Did you know?

BUY A BRICK FUNDRAISER

The Matheson is offering a unique fundraising opportunity for the new Library & Archives building. Museum members and supporters have the opportunity to purchase individual bricks that will line the porch leading to the front door of the newly renovated building. Bricks are \$250 each and the donor's name will be imprinted on the brick. This is a wonderful way to honor a loved one. Your purchase will help stock the building with tables, chairs, shelves, and storage racks. In addition, your donation is tax deductible. To order please visit www.mathesonmuseum.org/join-renew.html to download the order form and pay online.

Don't miss out! Become a permanent part of the Matheson's legacy and our community's history.



HISTORY PADDLE TOURS

The Matheson is thrilled to partner with Lars Andersen again - this time for two history paddle tours! These tours will give participants the chance to view up close two of the state's most beautiful natural treasures—the St. Johns River and the Ocklawaha River. The tour of the Ocklawaha River will take place on Saturday, March 25, and will include discussions about Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, William Bartram, and the Cross Florida Barge Canal. The tour of the St. Johns River will take place on Saturday, April 22, and will feature the history of William Bartram's travels. Costs will vary and to register please contact Lars directly at river-guide2000@yahoo.com or 386-454-0611. Lunch is included. Equipment rental is available.



Lars Andersen

Image courtesy of John Moran

HISTORY MYSTERIES

- 1) What cherished American author became one of the first to write about "surf bathing" in 1866?
- 2) Which springs helped determine the current location of the University of Florida?
- 3) Where are the headwaters of the St. Johns located?
- 4) Where was William P. DuVal born?
- 5) Which famous Florida bridge had to be rebuilt because of a tragic accident in 1980?

Answers: 1) Mark Twain 2) Boulware Springs 3) Indian River County 4) Virginia 5) Sunshine Skyway Bridge

We are so grateful for our 2017 Members and Supporters*!

The following organizations provide generous grant funding to support our mission: The AEC Trust, Capital City Bank, The City of Gainesville, The Florida Div. of Cultural Affairs, The Florida Div. of Historical Resources, and Visit Gainesville.

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