



# SARASOTA COUNTY TIMES II

Creating an awareness of the rich historical heritage of Sarasota County, Florida

September 2020

[HSOSC.com](http://HSOSC.com)

## Back to School Time!

### Remember these?

We ran across a treasure trove of visual memories and thought you'd like to reminisce:

**Quick tip:** To help entertain the kids/ grandkids and stuff their little heads with historical tidbits, check on [The Past and the Curious](#). Of course, you could be any age and enjoy listening to podcasts such as *OK Bloomer* and *Shop Windows and Old Underwear*.



## Back To School Time: Another Local Educator, Emma Booker

Our [blog post on Mary McLeod Bethune](#) was our best-seller this month, so we thought it would be interesting to highlight Sarasota's very own Emma Booker.

**Who was this woman so esteemed that *three* local schools were named after her?**



Emma Edwina Booker (pictured on the left with Eugenia Mitchell on the right) is one of the most instrumental and memorable women in Sarasota history. Her legacy remains strong in the three schools in Sarasota County that are named after her: Emma E. Booker Elementary, Booker Middle and Booker High School.

Emma came to Sarasota in 1910 at a time when education for blacks in Sarasota was rare and at times non-existent. Blacks in Sarasota were not permitted to attend "white" schools. They were taught to read out of a few very old books. Usually family members and other members of the community would teach.

When Emma E. Booker came along, she was very instrumental in renting a hall and starting Sarasota Grammar School, so that black children would have a place to go to school. She became its first principal and taught several of the classes. In 1925 she led a procession of students and teachers from the old Knights of Pythias Hall to a new school built next to the railroad tracks at Lemon and Thirteenth Street ( now Seventh St.) by the Rosenwald Fund. This new school had four classrooms and an auditorium. Mrs. Booker inspired many of her students to continue their education and give back: teachers, business people, nurses, and sports players.

She did not have a degree to teach, but continued to go to school, determined to finish college, regardless of all the obstacles that she had to overcome. After going to school for almost fifty years Emma finally earned her bachelor's degree.

Mrs. Booker taught in several other cities and towns as well. Her pay was between \$25-50 a month! (*Courtesy allaboutsarasota.com*)

[More on Emma Booker](#). This article speculates on why Sarasota lost Ms. Booker to St. Petersburg.

[More on Booker High School](#).

More on the history of Booker High School and its iterations will be *coming soon* in the [HSOSC Articles Archive](#).

**Did you know there was once a Sarasota High School on Main Street?** [Learn more on our blog](#). And of course SarasotaHistoryAlive! has a wonderful [article on the city's schools](#).

## Links you'll "Like"

There are a lot of Facebook pages with interesting posts about our area, our state, even our nation's history. So many, in fact, you might be overwhelmed!

Here are some Facebook resources we follow:

<https://www.facebook.com/FPANwestcentral/> FL Public Archaeology Network.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/143436509613278/> A Tropical Frontier group: This one has great stories of pioneer times, mostly focused on the east coast of Florida. The group's moderator, Tim Robinson, has lots of interesting books you can buy. [See them on Amazon.](#)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/728446937193111/> I Remember Sarasota: Lots of fun

photographs, but skip the comments unless you enjoy people bellyaching about the past and not stepping up to help the Historical Society protect, preserve, and present what's still here.

We follow the Venice Museum and Archives at <https://www.facebook.com/veniceflarchives>

**Did you know we've started a collection of history articles?** [Check them out](#) and watch as we add to it ... and if you have suggestions for more, let us know!

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## Slowly, slowly, we have a chance to save history!

The Crocker Church has spent nearly 120 years subjected to our brutal Florida climate. Every year the damage done by heat, water, and tropical storms becomes more severe. In 2018/9 HSOSC worked tirelessly to identify the priority for repairs: the windows on the west side of the church. We raised the necessary funds in December 2018 and selected a contractor who specialized in historic window repair.

However, as the repair work started in summer 2019 additional problems were uncovered. The foundation beam under those windows was rotten, so work was paused, engineers and the City were involved to help make the right repair decisions. We got a new estimate for a complete repair of the west wall including the windows – **close to \$100,000.**



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In December 2019 the HSOSC members and the community at large contributed over \$24,000 to fund this work. Then national crises took over. The coronavirus pandemic has halted public programs, construction projects, fundraising, just about everything in our lives.

As we begin to resume life as safely and carefully as we can, HSOSC is turning to The Crocker Church repairs again. We have \$50,000 raised in 2018 and 2019 toward this project. **That's about 50% of the total cost.**

The Campaign to Rescue The Crocker will continue through 2020 and into 2021, but we know that the final result will be sparkling windows and sturdy foundations for this little white church.

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## County Centennial Celebration Opportunity to Participate:

On Saturday, January 9, 2021 the Sarasota County Centennial Committee will hold a celebration acknowledging the year that Sarasota became a county (1921). The open-air party will run from 11-4 at the Phillippi Estate Park in Sarasota. Historical societies (including HSOSC) and many other community organizations will participate in the festivities. Volunteers are needed to help set up the event and then to take it down. If you can volunteer, please contact committee member Marilyn Gerkin. Be sure to provide her with your email and a phone contact. Reach Marilyn at [mgerkin91@gmail.com](mailto:mgerkin91@gmail.com) If you want to read more about this celebration go to [sarasotacountycentennial.com](http://sarasotacountycentennial.com)

[Ed. Note: *As of early September, plans are still up in the air as to whether this will be a actual gathering, or some sort of virtual event. Email Marilyn and she can tell you more.*]

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## In the Spotlight



**Any nonprofit is composed of many moving parts, and most of those parts are people. We'd like to shine the spotlight on William Watrous, the "Unsung Champion of the Rosemary Cemetery."**

**Here's what Marsha Fottler, our President, had to say about Bill:**

*William "Bill" Watrous has deep roots in Sarasota. His grandfather Thomas Theodore Watrous developed the Watrous Hotel on Main Street in 1912, one of the first brick buildings in Sarasota. Bill's other grandfather William L. VanDame developed DeSoto Acres and part of Newtown. Bill and his wife Helen have two sons Robert and Frank, the fourth generation raised in the family home on Bungalow Hill.*

*Bill graduated from Sarasota High School in 1957 and the University of Florida in 1961. He worked primarily in radio as a DJ, news director, an account sales executive, and in the production department of various radio stations. From there, Bill launched his own business, Watrous Video Productions, documenting events in the lives of people and businesses all over Florida for decades. He was a historian in the best sense. He closed the office at the end of 2016 but continues migrating old videotapes to DVD, audiotapes to CD, duplicating DVDs and CDs.*

*A Scoutmaster for 20 years, Bill also served on the Board of Directors for the High Noon Lions, and as an instructor and on the Board of Directors for the American Red Cross. He's taught Sunday School at the Presbyterian Church of the Palms, where he's been an Elder, Deacon, and chairman of the Mission Committee.*

*After Bill joined HSoSC as a member, he was elected to serve two terms as a Director and one as Vice President. Today he is an active member of the Advisory Board.*

*Some years ago, Bill was also appointed to serve along with Pete Esthus on the Rosemary Cemetery Committee and he's been doing it ever since. With annual financial support from the Doyle Trust, Bill has methodically overseen the sensitive and difficult restoration of many of the grave sites as well as the cemetery's focal pergola.*

*What Bill Watrous does is ongoing but often un-noticed by the community at large. We at the Historical Society are well aware of the time, patience and diligence that Bill devotes to preserving one of the city's most important historical sites, the Rosemary Cemetery. In 2018, Bill was presented with a Distinguished Service Award from HSOSC members. He serves this community and the mission of HSOSC every single day. We appreciate Bill Watrous, we admire him and we thank him.*

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**ICYMI *That acronym stands for In Case You Missed It... and we wouldn't want you to miss a thing. So here's some highlights from recent activity:***

Were you distracted back in July, missed our last newsletter? No worries, it's in our archives (after all, we ARE the Historical Society which means we never throw anything away.) [Read it here.](#)

We had a ball making [virtual jigsaw puzzles](#). Go solve a couple and validate our existence.

Do you get emails when we have new blog posts? Sign up on our website and don't miss posts like [Resources for Researching Your Home's History](#), donated to us by Facebook fan librarian Carol Briggs.



## Welcome New Members!



*We'd had so many new members join us in 2020.  
Here's to seeing you in person as soon as we can!*

**Laura Dein**

**Susan & Warren Seay**

**June Derr**

**Barry Weisblatt & Caroline Villela**

**Janice Galanter**

**Dr. Michael Wolfe**

**Robert Martschinske**

**Margaret Bailey & Tom Barwin**

**Kath Rooney**

**Rick Monk**

**Vivian Silverman**

**Deborah Purdum**

**Caroline Zimmer-Stone**

**Cheryl & Jeffrey Burnstein**

**Jane Kent Rockwell**

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### Going Forward:

What does the future hold? Watch for more online information as we all make history in our brave new world. Follow us on [Facebook](#), our [website](#) and our [blog](#) and even [Pinterest](#). We're always

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