

Okaloosa Historical Quarterly

***North Okaloosa Historical
Association, Inc.***

Baker Arts Festival

**Saturday, April 17, 2021
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Heritage Park,
see page 4**

**Vol. 1, Issue 2
Spring 2021**



Discover. Experience. Connect.

OKALOOSA COUNTY, FLORIDA

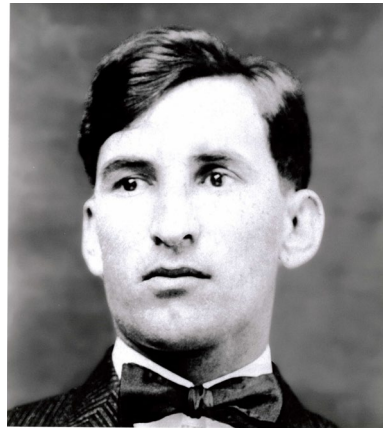
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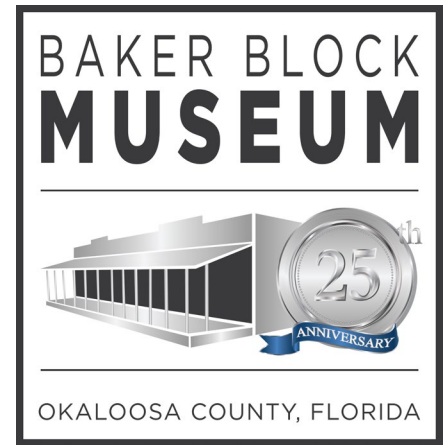
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CONTACT

Phone: 850-537-5714

Mail: P.O. Box 186
Baker, FL 32531

Email: bakermuseum@aol.com

Location:
1307 Georgia Ave.
Corner of State Road 4 and
Highway 189 in Baker

bakerbblockmuseum.org

The Baker Block Museum is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization of the North Okaloosa Historical Association, Inc., and is managed by its Board of Directors.

The *Okaloosa Historical Quarterly* is published by the North Okaloosa Historical Society, Inc., and is an authorized publication for distribution to Museum members and visitors. Contents of the *OHQ* is copyrighted, all rights reserved.

Items to be considered for the *OHQ* may be submitted to the Museum at P.O. Box 186, Baker, FL 32531 or emailed to bakermuseumnewsletter@gmail.com. Deadline for submission is March 15, June 15, Sept. 15, and Dec. 15 for consideration in the next quarterly issue. Articles received after the deadline will be considered for future use. All submissions will be edited for accuracy, clarity, brevity, and conformance with *OHQ* guidelines.

Director's Notes

We are happy to announce the recent launch of a new webpage for the Baker Block Museum. It's located at bakerblockmuseum.org.

The new site is packed with crisp, colorful museum photos and numerous links providing a variety of information featuring our research and genealogy library, membership to the North Okaloosa Historical Association, museum events, the Baker Mercantile Store, the North Okaloosa Historical Quarterly history magazine and much more.

The new and easy-to-navigate site is thanks to the dedication and many hours of hard work by North Okaloosa Historical Association Board of Directors' secretary, Stephanie Holcombe. We appreciate the many talents that Stephanie brings to the board and the many volunteer hours that she dedicates to the museum.

Check out our new webpage at bakerblockmuseum.org or visit the museum at 1307 B Georgia Avenue in Baker.

Ann Spann

President's Message

On the 25th anniversary of the Baker Block Museum, we are looking back at what an amazing collection we have amassed here during the past quarter century, including family genealogies, local newspapers, and oral histories. Now we are looking toward the future to figure out how the collections will be used and how the material will be accessed.

Research has changed quite a bit in 25 years. We no longer go to dusty courthouse archives or sit in front of microfilm readers. Today, census and military records, family trees, maps, and lots of other information, including some out-of-print books, are available at the click of a mouse. The pandemic and lockdown have also emphasized the need to make our collection available to a wider audience who may not be able to visit the museum in person.

We recently launched a major new project which we hope will make our collection more accessible and reach a wider audience. The first step in this process is digitizing a large collection of oral history interviews on cassette tapes, more than 100 of which are archived in the Museum. We also have on loan 60 additional cassettes from the Charlie Webb radio show, dating to the mid 1970s, that are being digitized. Digitizing and cataloging our entire collection, including microfilm, movies, family genealogies, and more, will allow us to make our collection available online in the coming years.

We have identified museum collection software that will enable us to move forward with this project. The software is available from Past Perfect for approximately \$2,500. This purchase is not an easy one on our Museum's small budget and are looking for a sponsor to help achieve this goal.

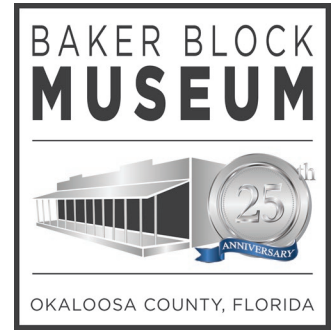
We cannot continue our mission to collect, preserve, and promote Okaloosa County history without everyone's help. Thank you for your continued support during the past 25 years.

Tracy Curenton

Baker Arts Festival

**Saturday, April 17, 2021
9 a.m. to 3 p.m.**

Vendor Application



\$40 per 10' x 10' space
\$50 per 10' x 10' space with electricity
Limit of 2 spaces per vendor

- Spaces are assigned by the date the application is received.
- Exhibitors must furnish tables, chairs, tents, covers and any other items required for their displays.
- Exhibitors must be set up and in place by 8:30 a.m. and stay until 3 p.m. the day of the event.

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Description of art or craft:

Do you require electricity? Y N

Children attending the event with parents must be under adult supervision at all times.

Complete the form and return it no later than Oct. 18 to:
Baker Block Museum
PO Box 186
Baker, FL 32531

For more information, please call the Baker Block Museum at 850-537-5714 or email at bakermuseum@aol.com.

Sponsored by the North Okaloosa Historical Association, Inc.
Baker Block Museum • 1307B Georgia Ave • Baker, Florida • 850-537-5715 • www.bakerblockmuseum.org

Baker Arts Festival

**Come join us as we kick off our inaugural
Baker Arts Festival
April 17 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.**

Some of the arts & crafts available include:

Soaps

Woodcraft

Rustic furniture

Bonsai trees

Jewelry

Doll clothes

Paintings

Coopersmithing

Cut flower arrangements

And much more!



**Vendor space still
available!**

**Call the Museum
at 850-537-5714
for more information.**

April is National Volunteer Month



The Baker Block Museum is looking for people who:

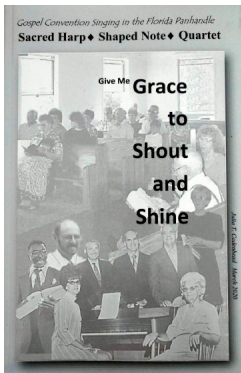
**Like history
Like interacting with Museum visitors
Can do light computer work
Can organize files**

Flexible hours

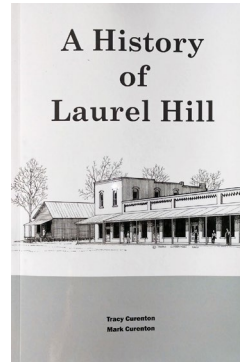
**See Museum Director Ann Spann
850-537-5714 or bakermuseum@aol.com**

Okaloosa County History Series

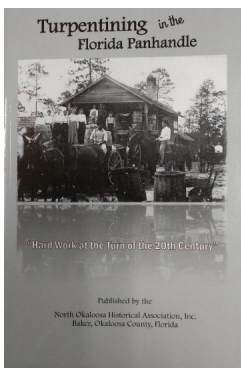
Available for sale in the Baker Mercantile, on eBay, by email at bakermuseum@aol.com, or by calling the Museum at 850-537-5714. **\$20 each.**



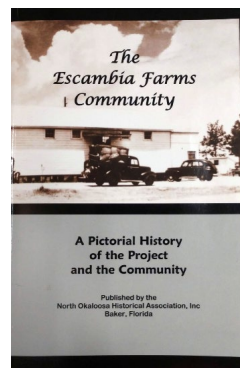
Give me the Grace to Shout and Shine, the newest book in the history series, focuses on the three most prominent gospel singing methods in the northwest Florida panhandle throughout the years: Sacred Harp, also known as fasola, five- or seven-shape note convention singing, and later, the gospel quartet.



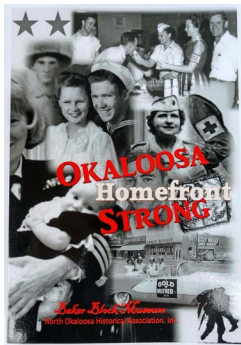
Drawing from interviews, newspapers, public records, and photographs, *A History of Laurel Hill* tells the story of this historic town. The book covers the early history of the area under Spanish rule through the Civil War, the coming of the railroad, the Great Depression, and into the modern era.



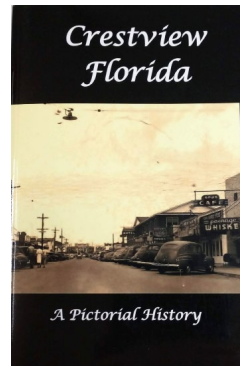
Turpentine in the Florida Panhandle casts turpentine as a significant element impacting the way of life in the Northwest Florida panhandle. It describes an integrated experience—culture, industry, and human condition—in the lives of those who lived it.



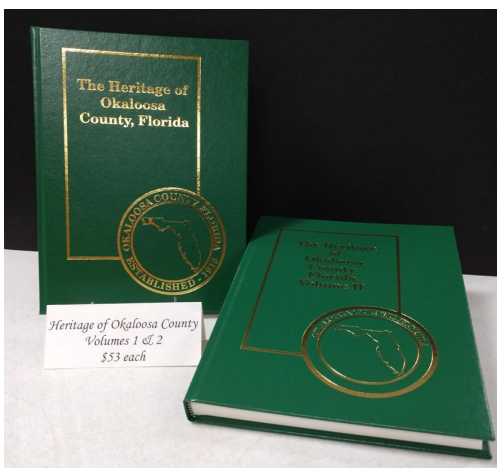
Present Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program included aid to American migrant workers and tenant farmers. The Resettlement Administration created a planned farming community in the northwest corner of Okaloosa County in 1936 known as Escambia Farms. By 1939, the community had grown to 72 families and included a school to educate the more than 220 children.



Okaloosa County has a rich military history. *Okaloosa Strong: The Homefront* is a sampling of the people, places, stories, and events during wartime in the county.



Officially founded in 1883, Crestview became a stop on the Pensacola & Atlantic Railroad. The geographic center of the county, the town became the seat of the newly established county in 1917. Crestview is situated on a rise between the Yellow River 4 miles to the west and the Shoal River 4 miles to the east. *A Pictorial History* shows in photos how Crestview changed into the largest city in the county.



Okaloosa County Heritage Books

Volume I & II

Limited quantity

Includes a history of Okaloosa County, pioneer families, industry, schools, churches, towns, family stories, and genealogies.

\$53 each

A century of service

Crestview Royal Arch Masonic Lodge celebrates centennial

by **Brian Hughes**

In February, the Crestview chapter of the Royal Arch Masons marked the end of the lodge's first 101 years serving the people of the area.

Past-masters of the organization were civic and business leaders, men whose names grace streets, highways, and buildings throughout the area.

While not all of today's members may share the fame of Mapoles, Ferdons, Brackins, Edneys, Whitehursts, and Sikes—yet—they do share those leaders' attributes: a steadfast love of the Lord, a devotion to their community, families, and fellow Masons.

Though Royal Arch Crestview Chapter No. 40, Council 33, is only 100 years old, Freemasonry dates back nearly two millennia. Beginning with George Washington, 14 United States presidents have worn the Mason's apron and ring.

Freemasonry arrived in Crestview in 1886, shortly after the Pensacola & Atlantic Railroad that started the town. Concord Lodge No. 50, a two-story building, was erected adjacent to today's Garden of Memories Cemetery between North Ferdon Boulevard and Industrial Drive.

With the brothers' typical spirit of community, they welcomed

the First Baptist Church and Crestview's first school to also meet in their lodge, said the late Royal Arch past master, retired attorney and regional historian James Moore during the centennial observance in 2020.

The lodge building burned in 1906, he said, and the brothers met in the courthouse grand jury room until funds were available to build a new lodge. But the masonic order's headquarters had rules that made raising the money difficult.

"Grand Lodge regulations discouraged lodges from borrowing money and mortgaging lodge property," Moore said. But where there's a will, there's a way. "Their research disclosed that if they could obtain a charter for a chapter of the Royal Arch Masons, they

could float a loan," he said. At last, a charter was issued for the new chapter under the York Rite Masons in September 1919. The brothers promptly issued a private bond issue.

"One hundred bonds in the amount of \$60 each, bearing 8 percent interest and redeemable in gold were quickly sold," Moore said.

In 1920, the Crestview Royal Arch Masons built and opened their new lodge in a building just northwest of the Okaloosa County Courthouse. Today the building—which bears a Crestview Historic Preservation Board marker—has been completely renovated, enlarged and houses the new Courthouse Suites.

The Royal Arch Masons joined eight other lodges in the newly formed Okaloosa County. Apart from a lodge each in Camp Walton (now known as Fort Walton Beach) and Boggy Bayou (now called Niceville), most lodges were in north Okaloosa communities including present-day Holt, Baker, Milligan, and Laurel Hill.

"In those days, there were so many Masons," Moore said. "People joked the county had two things: Masons and mosquitoes. They could control the mosquitoes, but they couldn't do nothin' about the Masons."

During the Great Depression in the 1930s, the DeFuniak Springs masonic chapter lost its charter. They moved their membership to the Crestview Royal Arch Masons, who heartily welcomed their brothers from the east.

In the late 1940s, the lodge



President George Washington, in this 1870 print, "Washington as Master Mason," by artist James Fuller Queen. (*Wikipedia*)

acquired 120 acres of rural land southeast of Crestview where outdoor ceremonies were held “as was the custom of early masonic bodies in rural areas,” Moore said. Progress in the 1970s, unfortunately, caught up with the practice. “The construction of Interstate 10 and its right-of-way split the property, and traffic noise prohibited the outdoor ceremonies,” he said.

The Royal Arch Masons remained in the 1920 building until the late 1980s, at which time they were forced out by technology again—or, rather, the lack thereof.

“At that time, when the lodge was built, we didn’t have things like air conditioning and an elevator so the older brethren could get upstairs,” Moore said. Selling the building, its property, and the acreage on either side of I-10, the Royal Arch brothers built—completely debt-free—a new lodge on Garden

Street in 1990. This current Royal Arch lodge continues the Masons’ tradition of hospitality. The building is shared with six other masonic bodies, including Crestview’s first masonic chapter, Concord Lodge Chapter 50, and the local Order of the Eastern Star, Chapter 303. Moore related the lodge’s rich history during the centenary celebration. “I found myself in a rut,” he said. “I was the historian for the 50th anniversary, and now I found myself being the historian for the 100th.” But, he said, the lodge had better find someone else to relate the Crestview Royal



Arch brethren’s rich history of service at the 150th anniversary in 2070, “because I’m not going to be available.”

Moore, a former Crestview City Councilman and city attorney, passed away Dec. 6, 2020, at age 86. He was joined in the afterlife by his beloved wife of 65 years, Barbara, who passed away Jan. 31.



At left, James Moore, former Royal Arch master, points out notable past Royal arch masters. Above, the Royal Arch Masons original meeting lodge is located on Main Street in Crestview. (Photos by Brian Hughes, except where noted)

Brian Hughes, a member of the North Okaloosa Historical Association, is the public information officer for the City of Crestview, a journalist, and historian.

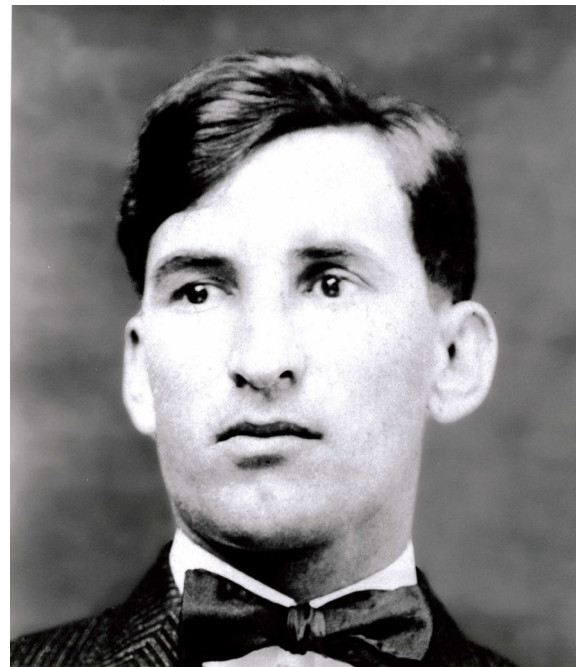


100 years ago

First law enforcement officer to die in Okaloosa County

Sheriff Summerlin was on the job for less than two weeks when he died in the line of duty

A crowd of seven-to-eight hundred mourners stood by on a Saturday afternoon January, 21, 1921, as Laurel Hill resident John Monroe "Bubba" Summerlin, 33, was laid to rest with masonic honors at the Sam Clary Cemetery 5 miles west of Laurel Hill. He left behind his wife, Mabel Elna Campbell Summerlin, whom he married just four years prior, his father and mother, a brother and a sister. Summerlin was sworn into office January 10 and had been sheriff for less than two weeks at the time of his death. He was the first Okaloosa County law enforcement officer killed in the line of duty.



It was a Friday morning, about 9 a.m. on January 21, 1921. Newly elected Okaloosa County Sheriff Summerlin had received a special delivery message from Dr. H.

Mason Smith, the superintendent of the Florida State Hospital for the Insane, also known as the Chattahoochee State Hospital for the criminally insane, in River Junction, Florida, a town more than 100 miles east of Crestview. The letter requested the sheriff to pick up and deliver Will Bishop to the Crestview depot for the eastbound train ride to the asylum. He was to be met by asylum attendant, N.B. Johnson, who was scheduled to arrive on the 9 a.m. Louisiana & Nashville Railroad train from Pensacola.

A local resident, Bishop had been judged insane a "few days ago," according to the *Okaloosa News=Journal*. He was allowed to stay at the home of Fern Barrow, a male relative, while awaiting transportation to the asylum in Chattahoochee.

Johnson, who traveled to Pensacola on business, wanted to return on the next

train back to River Junction. The L&N ran from Pensacola to River Junction, a community in the southern part of the city of Chattahoochee in Gadson County, along State Road One (now U.S. Highway 90) just south of the Florida/Georgia state line. The train ride from Pensacola to Crestview was a little more than an hour and a half.

Unfortunately, unbeknown to Summerlin, Johnson arrived at Pensacola too late to catch the morning train, so he wired the sheriff to meet the evening train instead. Sent after the train was scheduled to arrive in Crestview, Summerlin never received the message—he was already on his way to pick up Bishop. He asked Mills E. Savage, a turpentine still owner, to make the trip to the Barrow residence with him. Once there,

by Stephanie Holcombe

Bishop, Barrow, and Bishop's son, Frank, who was 23 at the time, climbed into the backseat of Summerlin's car. Savage sat in the front passenger seat for the trip back north to the Crestview train station.

Heading back to the Crestview depot, as they crossed the railroad tracks about a mile out of town, passenger train No. 3, the train they were supposed to meet, smashed into the sheriff's car, killing him instantly. Both Bishops and Barrow received mortal injuries. Both of Frank Bishop's legs and his right forearm were broken, and he suffered internal injuries, mainly to the right side of his body, according to the *Pensacola Journal*.

There was no warning whistle from the conductor as the engine approached the crossing. However, Savage reportedly saw the train about 25-to-30 feet from the railroad crossing as the sheriff's car was within 3 feet of the tracks. He yelled, then using the roof for leverage, swung himself out of the car. His left arm was clipped by the oncoming train, knocking him clear



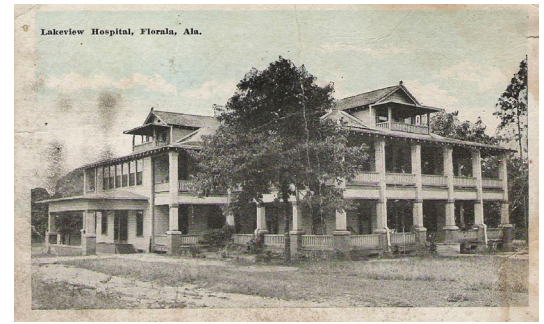
Sheriff Summerlin, right, with (left to right) Henry Clary, Hugh Harrison, and John Clary.

as he landed on the opposite side of the tracks.

The train continued another 200 yards or so after hitting the car before stopping, spreading wreckage and Summerlin along the tracks "for several yards." Train crew members picked up Summerlin's body and the other three injured men and backed the train to the Crestview depot where they were attended to by Dr. William F. McGriff. The westbound had already left for Pensacola, so the injured men were transferred to a train headed north in an effort to get them to a hospital as quickly as possible. Final destination was Lakeview Hospital in Florala, Alabama, a town north of Laurel Hill. Unfortunately, Barrow died en route to Florala before the train reached Laurel Hill. Will Bishop died shortly after he got to the hospital. Both men were about 70 years old, according to the *Okaloosa News=Journal*.

Frank Bishop succumbed to his wounds the next afternoon. Both Bishops were buried a day apart at Canoe Old Mill cemetery, now known as the Bishop Cemetery in Holt. Barrow was buried at Old Bethel Cemetery January 23. The Concord Lodge No. 50 later met February 20 at graveside to administer masonic rites. Summerlin was laid to rest January 21 at 2:30 p.m. at what is now the Magnolia Cemetery in Laurel Hill.

Following Summerlin's death, the governor of Florida appointed deputy sheriff Peter J. Steele, also of Laurel Hill, January 28 to succeed Summerlin as the third Okaloosa County sheriff.



Lakeview Hospital in Florala, Alabama (above), was built in 1919. It was destroyed by fire in 1975.

Endnotes

- 1 "Message would have saved lives." *Okaloosa News=Journal*, 28 January 1921, page 1.
- 2 "Sheriff J.M. Summerlin killed, three others mortally wounded." *Okaloosa News=Journal*, 21 January 1921, page 1.
- 3 "Three killed as train hits car." *Pensacola Journal*, 22 January 1921, page 1.
- 4 "Sheriff J.M. Summerlin."
- 5 "Four men killed in smash-up." *Florala News*, 27 January 1921, page 1.
- 6 "Fourth victim succumbs to accident." *Okaloosa News=Journal*, 28 January 1921, page 1, and "Three killed."
- 7 "Masonic funeral." *Okaloosa News=Journal*, 28 January 1921, page 3.
- 8 "Peter J. Steele the next sheriff." *Okaloosa News=Journal*, 28 January 1921, page 1.



Here we go again

The 2021 hurricane season begins June 1

National Hurricane Preparedness Week: May 9-15





A satellite image shows Hurricane Sally on September 14, 2020, in the Gulf of Mexico, two days before landfall near Gulf Shores, Alabama.

By Stephanie Holcombe

The start of the 2021 Atlantic hurricane season begins June 1.

Or does it?

On May 15, the National Hurricane Center, located at Florida International University in Miami, will issue the first 2021 tropical weather outlook, kicking off the season 15 days earlier.¹

Named storms have formed prior to the official start of the hurricane season in about half of the past 10-to-15 years, including each of the past six years. Many of the May systems, while short-lived, hybrid (subtropical) systems, are now being identified because of better monitoring and policy changes that now name subtropical storms.²

In 2020, the NHC issued 36 “special” tropical weather outlooks before June 1. To provide more consistent information on the potential for late May and early June

systems, the NHC will now begin the routine issuance of Atlantic outlooks May 15, which is when routine outlooks also begin for the eastern Pacific basin.³ It is also considering the need for, and ramifications of, potentially moving the beginning of the hurricane season to May 15. That decision falls to the World Meteorological Organization, a specialized agency of the United Nations made up of 193 member countries and territories. While no changes were made for the 2021 season, the recommendation is still under consideration.⁴

The 2020 hurricane season got off to an early and rapid start with a record nine named storms from May through July. It ended late, with two major hurricanes in November for the first time on record and at a time when the season is normally winding down. September was the most active month on record in the Atlantic,

with 10 named storms.

A record-breaking season, there were 30 named tropical storms, including 13 hurricanes and six major hurricanes, with direct impacts in many countries in the Atlantic basin, Caribbean Sea, and Gulf of Mexico. It was the fifth straight season with above-average activity, and caused hundreds of casualties and billions of dollars' worth of damage. There were 12 landfalling storms in the continental United States, five in the Caribbean, including two at category 4 strength that occurred in Nicaragua about two weeks apart.⁵

During 2020, the NHC issued 639 advisory packages, nearly twice as many as during an average season. U.S. Air Force and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Reconnaissance hurricane aircraft flew 223 missions to monitor the track and intensity of tropical storms.⁶

Memorable storms

Of the 30 named storms last season, Hurricane Sally came closest to Okaloosa County. Sally made landfall near Gulf Shores in Alabama September 16 with maximum winds of 105 mph, a category 2 storm. This was the first Alabama landfall since Hurricane Ivan in 2004, also along Gulf Shores.⁷ Both Sally, and Ivan 16 years before it, impacted the northwest Florida panhandle. On the eastern, typically "dirty" side of the storm, Pensacola in particular felt the brunt of Sally's force.

The storm tore 22 construction barges loose from their moorings in Escambia Bay. Five washed up on shore near the downtown area, one was lodged under the Garçon Point Bridge, and one lodged under the Three-Mile Bridge. A construction crane fell on the bridge causing a section to collapse into the bay. Six months later, the bridge is still closed, impacting Gulf Breeze and

2020 Atlantic Hurricane Season by the numbers



13
Hurricanes
Average season
has six

6
Major
hurricanes
Average season
has three

12
Storms hit the
U.S. coastline,
(5 of which came
ashore in Louisiana)
Previous record: 9 in 1916

10
Named storms
that formed in
September
Most for any month on record

10
Rapidly intensifying
storms sampled
by NOAA and the
U.S. Air Force

30
Named storms

Arthur	Paulette
Bartha	Rene
Cristobal	Sally
Dolly	Teddy
Edouard	Vicky
Fay	Wilfred
Gonzalo	Alpha
Hanna	Beta
Isaias	Gamma
Josephine	Delta
Kyle	Epsilon
Laura	Zeta
Marco	Eta
Nana	Theta
Omar	Iota



NOAA Hurricane Hunters

86
Missions conducted

102
Hurricane eyewall passages

678
Flight hours

1,772
Drosondes deployed
to gather vital atmospheric data



NOAA underwater
hurricane gliders

47
Glider deployments

13,272
Gathered observations

179,401
Temperature and
salinity profiles
These help improve forecasts for
current storms



16
NOAA weather
satellites in operation

5th
consecutive
above-normal season
Previous record: 4 from 1998 to 2001

86
Facebook Live
broadcasts
from the National Hurricane Center

Pensacola traffic, commuters, and commerce. More than 24 inches of rain fell, flooding Pensacola streets.⁸

In north Okaloosa County, the Shoal River saw its highest level in 20 years as a result of rainfall. On U.S. Highway 90, west of Crestview, the river rose so high that it reached the bottom of the bridge, causing the road to be closed. Shoal River flooding also



Rising waters from Hurricane Sally washed out the roadbed under Clear Creek Road in Crestview September 18, 2020. (Photo by Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office)

covered Interstate 10, causing a section of the highway to be closed between exits 56 and 70. Throughout the area, residents felt the impacts of flooding, downed trees and power lines, and power outages. In Florida, three storm-related deaths have been attributed to Hurricane Sally.

In 2004, Hurricane Ivan landed along Gulf Shores September 16 as a category 3 storm with 120 mph winds, causing heavy storm damage in Pensacola and Gulf Breeze. Roads in Pensacola Beach were closed well into December because of storm damage. A section of

the pier at Navarre Beach were washed away. Much of the east-west road on Santa Rosa Island through the Gulf Islands National Seashore from Pensacola Beach to Fort Pickens was covered with sand or washed out. U.S. 98 between Fort Walton Beach and Destin was washed out, and the sand spit at Norriego Point in Destin was breached. The biggest headlines were reserved for the quarter-mile section of the Interstate 10 bridge that collapsed into Escambia Bay. The bridge reopened with temporary repairs in November. In Florida, Ivan is credited with 14 deaths.⁹

On the rise

The number of named storms, hurricanes, and major hurricanes has steadily risen since 1960, according to data by the Rosenstiel School of Marine & Atmospheric Science at the University of Miami. From 1961 to 1990, there were 10 named storms, 5.7 hurricanes, and 1.9 major hurricanes per year. From 1991 to 2020, those number rose to 14.4 named storms, 7.2 hurricanes, and 3.2 major hurricanes per year.

Endnotes

1 National Weather Service. "Routine issuance of the Atlantic basin Tropical Weather Outlook beginning, May 15, 2021. <https://forecast.weather.gov/product.php?site=NWS&product=PNS&issuedby=NHC>, accessed March 20, 2021.

2 National Weather Service. Facebook post dated March 2, 2021, @NWSNHC.

3 Ibid.

4 "Hurricane Committee discusses record-breaking 2020 season, plans for 2021." World Meteorological Organization. March 15, 2021. <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/hurricane-committee-discusses-record-breaking-2020-season-plans-2021>, accessed March 20, 2021.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 "Hurricane Ivan." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurricane_Ivan, accessed March 20, 2021.

8 "Hurricane Sally." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurricane_Sally, accessed March 2021.

9 Ibid.

What's in a name?

The United Nations' World Meteorological Organization facilitates and collaborates research, data, and information among its 193-member countries and territories. The WMO also establishes the naming system of tropical cyclones around the world, including those used during the Atlantic hurricane season each year.

Atlantic tropical system names repeat every six years unless a storm is so deadly or costly that its name is retired from future lists. The WMO issued a news release March 17 that retired the names Dorian from the 2019 season, and Laura, Eta, and Iota from 2020 from the rotating list of hurricane names because of the death and destruction caused by these storms. In total, 93 names have been retired from the Atlantic list since 1953 when storms began to be named under the current system.

The WMO also decided to end the use of the Greek alphabet as hurricane names after last year's record-breaking season. The 2020 season was so active that WMO's 21-name rotating list was exhausted and the Greek alphabet was used for only the second time since it was first used in 2005. Instead, the WMO created a supplemental list of A-to-Z names to be used in lieu of the Greek alphabet.

May 31



Memorial Day

*Remembering
those who
went
before*

May is National Military Appreciation Month

A salute to

Colonel Mills Spencer Savage

U.S. Army, U.S. Army Air Corps, U.S. Air Force

Colonel Mills Spencer Savage was born June 1, 1902, in Crestview, to Mills Eure and Elizabeth Dean Savage. He grew up in Crestview and DeFuniak Springs, the second-oldest of six children. His *father owned and operated the Savage turpentine still near Crestview, which was then in Walton County.

Sometime after Savage finished high school, he attended the Georgia School of Technology (now Georgia Tech), earning a commerce degree in 1928. While there, he played freshman football and was a member of the student council.

He enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps 1928, and earned his pilot wings at Brooks and Kelly Fields in Texas.



Helen Benz Savage

Spencer, Jr., who went by his middle name, Spencer.

By the end of 1944, Savage had accumulated more than 3,500 flying hours in 30 different aircraft including training, attack, pursuit, bomber, cargo, and observation.

Savage served in the Army until 1947 when the Air Force was created as a single military branch on September 18. He retired as a colonel November 30, 1959, after 30 years of service, having served his final assignment as commander of the 3800th Air

In 1936, while assigned to Wheeler Field in Hawaii, Savage married local Honolulu girl Helen Benz. They had four children: three girls, Deborah L. and twins Shirley Daryl and Sandra Dean, known as Daryl and Dean, and a son, Mills



Second Lieutenant Mills S. Savage in front of one of the many biplane training aircraft at either Brooks or Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas, in 1928.

Base wing at Maxwell Air Force base in Montgomery, Alabama.

After retiring, Savage moved to Fort Walton Beach and lived there with his wife until she passed away in 1991. Savage died February 18, 1997, at age 95. He is buried in Magnolia Cemetery in DeFuniak Springs.

**See page 10: Colonel Savage's father escaped fatal injury by the train that killed Sheriff Summerlin in 1921.*

Laurel Hill Square taking shape



The new Laurel Hill Square is located where Okaloosa County's oldest incorporated municipality's first water well and popular public gathering spot stood.

An all-volunteer effort created a green space in the city's historic heart

by **Brian Hughes**
photos by **Mark Broadhead**

Okaloosa County's first and smallest municipality still retains much of its original street layout, with several brick commercial buildings, originally built in the early 1900s, overlooking the area where the city's first water well was located. The Yellow River Railroad, which founded the town, is long gone, along with its depot, Laurel Hill's bank, movie theatre, and Campbell Company stores. But the city's commercial heart still contains a thriving restaurant—the Laurel Hill Grill, home to the county's best chicken-fried

steak, most agree—and a Tom Thumb gas station and convenience store.

Lately, another project has risen in downtown Laurel Hill: a verdant garden spot across from the now empty 1908 Gallery and a former beauty parlor: Laurel Hill Square.

Standing on State Road 85 between the Gallery and where the depot once stood, the square's construction has been a volunteer effort led by the Rev. Mark Broadhead of Laurel Hill Presbyterian Church working with the project's city council liaison, Councilman Scott Money Penny and his wife, Kathleen. "It was a perfect project to get us out of the house and socially distanced over the last year," said



The Campbell Company store, shown here in 1900, was located across from the city's first water well where the new Laure Hill Square, complete with fountain, now resides.

were received, including from Broadhead's church, the family of former Mayor Smith, Teachers Federal Credit Union, and interested residents. "Even while we were working the other afternoon, we had several people stop and hand us money from their pockets," Broadhead said. "Contributions from that Saturday now total \$1,450 toward

Broadhead, an accomplished home handyman and tinkerer. "We can work in the fresh country air yet keep safely apart from each other."

The project brings yet another use to the old water well site, which has been traditionally where Laurel Hill residents congregated. "In the very early days, it served as a spot for community gatherings, political rallies, etc.," said Laurel Hill historian Tracy Curenton. "Later the city leased the square to Joel Adams and he built a café there. The café building was later used for the Ruritan Club."

A recent Saturday afternoon found Broadhead, the Moneypenneys, and volunteers Tim Crawford, Bo and Jessica Stokes, and Andy Baber laying turf and putting in place a fountain donated to the project by late Laurel Hill Mayor Joan Smith. The site held a garden and gazebo for many years, but was cleared in the late 2010s when the volunteers who tended it became elderly and either moved away or passed away.

After more than a year of work, sod and walkways have been laid, a trench for coping around the square's perimeter has been dug, water and electricity have been provided, benches anchored in place, and some of the shrubbery planted.

Slowly donations toward the purchase of materials for the square

a goal of \$3,450."

The volunteers hope to have the square construction completed by the summer so residents and visitors alike can enjoy reflecting on Laurel Hill's history there in its traditional public gathering spot, looking toward the future of Okaloosa County's oldest city.

"Our hope is that Laurel Hill Square will present a pleasant welcome to visitors passing through town on their ways to and from the beach, and locals will find it a nice spot to sit in and read or eat an ice cream cone from the Grill," Broadhead said.



Volunteers from the community, Laurel Hill Presbyterian Church, and City Councilman Scott Moneypenney and his wife, Kathleen, work on Laurel Hill Square on a recent Saturday.



Celebrating the Gopher Tortoise

The gopher tortoise played an important role in the lives of early northwest Florida pioneers. Holt historian Max Cooper explains how.

The gopher tortoise was a staple in the diet of early Holt pioneers. Used in many food dishes of the pioneer meals, it was primarily used in a stew known as “gopher gumbo.” Families depended on gophers to sustain them and viewed the gopher as a free food source.

Holt’s early history mentions gophers. In 1902 the Holt-Seigler Mercantile Company, one of the first stores in the area, moved into a new building located south of

the Seigler house located near the northeast corner of what now is Main Street and Johns Road. The new building had a “gopher box” outside.

The gopher market was good. People pulled gophers from their burrows using a long vine with a metal hook attached to the end of it. They brought gophers to the station and either sold or exchanged them for goods. Gophers were collected in the “gopher box” until enough of them were accumulated to send to market.

An early resident, A.D. Armstead, told a story about how “one could bring a big gopher in, exchange it for a pair of overalls, a sack of flour and get two small gophers in change.”

Another local pioneer, John S. Kelly, would take his team of oxen and wagon in the local forest looking for gopher holes where he would “pull a gopher” and throw it into the wagon. When the oxen heard the gopher hit the wagon bed they would move on and follow Kelly. If he didn’t get a gopher,



Holt School mascot



Holt Academy gopher

he would have to throw a chunk of wood in the wagon so the oxen would move on.

The gopher was also known as the “Hoover chicken” during the Great Depression because people out of work saw the gopher as their only meat source. The gopher later became a delicacy to many of the local population.

Protected under Florida law, it is now illegal to hunt gophers or have gopher meat or shells because some of the gopher colonies have almost been driven to extinction.

All of these things endeared the gopher to the people of Holt and

it was selected as the mascot of the local school, other businesses, and even a local band’s home base.

In the early 1960s, Holt Elementary/ Junior High School

Principal Doug Griffith told his students the school needed a mascot. In 1962, the students submitted names for the mascot. Several suggested “Gopher” because of its importance to the livelihood of Holt residents thorough the years. The Gopher became the mascot by an overwhelming vote.

Gopher dishes, as a food delicacy, were very popular even up through the latter part of the 1900s. In the 1980s, the local Assembly of God church hosted a church-wide men’s fellowship and “dinner on the

grounds” several times a year called “Gopher on the Grounds.” Some of the favorite dishes were gopher and dumplings, gopher and rice, gopher gumbo, and gopher gravy and biscuits.

A local band, popular in the mid-1990s, named “Black Tooth Grin,” named its home base and practice area “The Gopher Hole.”

Other local schools and organizations took on the identity of the Holt gopher. Holt Academy, the local child care center, called itself the “Home of the Gophers” when it opened in 2008.

The Holt Fire District adopted



Holt Fire District gopher

the Holt gopher and placed an image of it in the center of their patch in 2019.

Keystone species supports other Florida wildlife

by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

The gopher tortoise occupies upland habitat throughout Florida, including forests, fields, roadsides, and residential yards. Gopher tortoises dig deep burrows for shelter and forage on low-growing plants.

In Florida, gopher tortoises are a threatened species protected by state law.

The gopher tortoise is considered a keystone species because its burrows are used by more than 350 other species of insects, mammals, birds, amphibians, and other reptiles. These important shelters are also protected by Florida law.

Although it is against Florida law to harass or kill a gopher tortoise, the primary threat for adult tortoises comes from humans and land modification activities. Adult tortoises may also occasionally be killed by domestic dogs, coyotes, or bears. Other threats to gopher tortoises include diseases, illegal harvest for food, and habitat degradation from a lack of fire.

Gopher tortoises must be relocated before any land clearing or development, and property owners or their representatives must obtain permits

from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission before tortoises can be moved.

Gopher tortoises can live 40-60 years in the wild. They also have an ancient history, dating back to an ancestral species of land tortoise that originated in western North America approximately 60 million years ago.

Gopher tortoises reach reproductive maturity between 9 and 21 years of age, depending on latitude and local resource abundance. The breeding season generally lasts from March to October. Nests are excavated (often in burrow mounds) from mid-May to mid-June, and females produce one clutch of five-to-nine eggs annually. The incubation period lasts approximately 80-100 days, with hatching generally occurring in late summer or early fall.

A gopher tortoise burrow is typically a single-channeled tunnel that gradually slopes downward from the soil surface and levels off under ground. The deepest part of the burrow is usually enlarged into a chamber. The record length for a Florida gopher tortoise burrow is more than 67 feet long.

Wall of Honor nominations now being accepted



The North Okaloosa Heritage Association is accepting nominations for the Family Heritage Wall of Honor program.

Established in 2012, the program is designed to honor area unsung heroes for their positive effect on their family and community, and their contribution to the history, formation, and continued well-being of Okaloosa County.

Since its inception, 44 names have been added to the honoree board hanging in the Museum's research library.

It's easy to nominate someone. A nomination form and sample biography are included in this newsletter (see pages 23 and 24). Those wishing to nominate someone can also download a .pdf of the form and bio from the Museum's website.

Individuals may be nominated while still living or posthumously.

Nominations are due to the Baker Block Museum no later than April 30.

Single nominations are \$30; dual or family nominations are \$50. Fees are used to fund the program and recognize those honored.

The induction ceremony is scheduled for May 15 at 11 a.m. under the pavilion.

2020 Inductees



Caroline Baker Allen



Roger Robinson



Dr. George W. Barrow, Jr.

Family Heritage Wall of Honor

Sample Biography



Full Name of Nominee(s): Mayme Tyner, 3/15/1906 - 11/05/ 2002, Laurel Hill, Florida

Mayme Tyner was one of four children born to Mack and Effie Campbell Tyner, Laurel Hill, Florida. She was a life-long resident of Okaloosa County, living on the land of her forefather, Daniel Campbell. After passing the Florida Education written exam, Mayme began teaching school at age 14. Later she returned to school herself, finishing high school and college at Florida State University (then Florida State College for Women), finally receiving a master's degree in education.

Recalling her early childhood, Mayme talked about attending the annual four-month school which usually began the first Monday following the 4th of July. Prior to 1900, the school in the Laurel Hill area was a two-room shack with an enrollment of 70 students and two teachers. The teacher usually lived with local families who had a spare room.

Of her years teaching in the Okaloosa County school system she said, "It has been the rewarding experience of my life to attend the class reunions of my former students and to have them tell me of the effect I have had on their lives." She added that all she ever wanted to do was to help build a better community. Mayme was also a rancher and was a registered real estate broker for some 20 years.

The epitaph on her grave stone reads as follows: "I wait for green mornings to come again, my heart warm with friends I have made, students I have taught, and a daughter I have loved."

Written by _____

mailing address _____

phone _____

() I plan to be present at the induction ceremony; email _____

Family Heritage Wall of Honor Nomination Form



Eligibility:

- ◆ Individual(s) who lived or worked in Okaloosa County
- ◆ Living or nominated posthumously
- ◆ Signature endorsement of at least one family member and one friend/acquaintance

Full Name of Nominee(s): _____

Town/Location: _____

Nominator Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Requirements:

- ◆ Brief one-page maximum biography or story highlighting the positive contribution to, or enhancements of, the community, family life or traditions in Okaloosa County.
- ◆ 5x7 photo of nominee, black and white or color
- ◆ Donation of \$30 per individual or \$50 for a couple (e.g., Mr. & Mrs.)
Check or money order payable to "Baker Block Museum"
Donations are used to recognize nominees and to fund the program.
- ◆ Nominator or inductee to attend induction ceremony

Submit in person or via email no later than April 30 at 3 p.m.

Email: bakermuseum@aol.com

Mail: Baker Block Museum
Family Heritage Wall of Honor
P.O. Box 186
Baker, FL 32531

LAUREL HILL ARTS & HERITAGE *Festival*



ARTS • CRAFTS • MUSIC • FOOD

SAT., APRIL 24, 11am-3pm • FREE!

LAUREL HILL PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH YARD • 8115 FOURTH STREET
LIVE LOCAL MUSIC • COTTAGE FOODS • CRAFTERS
ARTISTS • HISTORIC AND CULTURAL DISPLAYS

PRESENTED BY
THE LAUREL HILL AND CRESTVIEW
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES AND
THE FRIENDS OF THE ARTS



North Okaloosa Historical Association

Membership News

NOHA Board Members

- **President - Tracy Curenton**
- **Vice President - Phyllis Enzor**
- **Treasurer - Sharry Rustin**
- **Secretary - Stephanie Holcombe**

Members:

Joyce Arnett	Allison Broxson
Mike Bush	Judy Cadenhead
Doug Hibbing	

2021 Goals

- **Increase membership by 30% percent**
- **Apply for an historical marker for the museum building**
- **Redesign Baker Block Museum website — **completed in March****
- **Accrue \$5,000 in sponsorships**
- **Begin to digitize the oral histories — **began in January****
- **Find a sponsor to purchase museum inventory software**

New members

- **Randall Broxton — annual**
- **Donald Martin Smith, II — family**

Why become a member of the North Okaloosa Historical Association?

Besides supporting the preservation of the history of Okaloosa County, membership in the NOHA has its benefits:

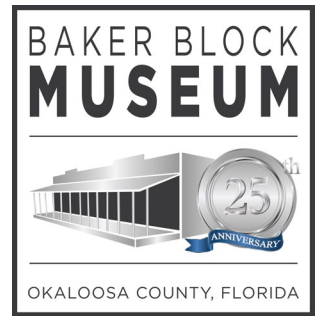
- » Membership card
- » *Okaloosa Historical Quarterly* magazine
- » 10% discount off books and calendars published by the NOHA
- » Email notification of special events
- » Invitation to the annual meeting in January

Lifetime members receive all of the above, PLUS:

- » 20% discount off books and calendars published by the NOHA
- » Recognition in the annual report
- » 10% off nominations for any Family Heritage Wall of Honor submission

North Okaloosa Historical Association

Membership Form



Membership in the North Okaloosa Historical Association, Inc., is open to anyone interested in preserving and documenting the history of Okaloosa County and its pioneering families. NOHA serves as the governing body for the Baker Block Museum. Member benefits include the *Okaloosa Historical Quarterly*, e-mail notification of special events, discounts in the Baker Mercantile store, and an invitation to the annual meeting in January.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State and Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Type of membership (check one)

- Individual \$25 per year
- Family \$50 per year
- Student \$15 per year
- Lifetime \$250

_____ I would like to volunteer at the Baker Block Museum

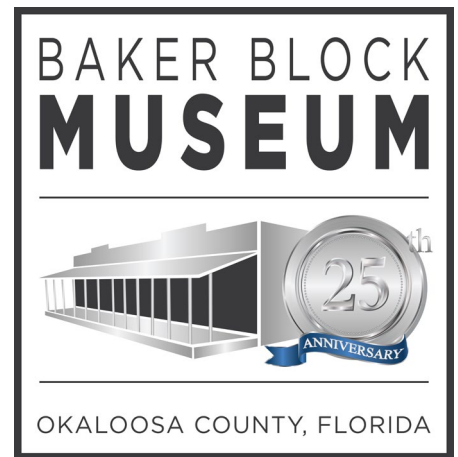
_____ I have items I would like to donate to the Baker Block Museum

_____ I have photographs that I will allow to be scanned for the Museum's collection

Return this form with your contribution made payable to:

North Okaloosa Historical Association
Membership
P.O. Box 186
Baker, FL 32531

Create a Legacy



Make a legacy gift to the Baker Block Museum



How would you like to be remembered?

Legacy gifts are one of the most significant demonstrations of commitment to the community an individual can make. A legacy gift, deferred gift, or planned gift is one you decide upon now and that provides for your favorite nonprofit program later.

You can leave a wonderful legacy to the Baker Block Museum by including the North Okaloosa Historical Association, Inc., in your estate planning. There are many tax advantages when you make a planned gift. We encourage you to consult with your attorney or financial planner for your specific circumstance.

Bequests

While there are a number of ways to build a legacy contribution, a charitable bequest is one of the easiest and most popular ways to leave a lasting impact on the Museum.

You may designate our organization as the beneficiary of your assets by will, trust, or other instrument. Simply specify an amount, a percentage of your estate, or what remains of your estate to the North Okaloosa Historical Association, Inc., after you have provided for your children or other beneficiaries.

For more information on legacy gifts, contact the Baker Block Museum at 850-537-5714.

The North Okaloosa Historical Association, Inc., is a non-profit 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Donations are tax deductible.

Calendar of Events

April							May							June						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3							1			1	2	3	4	5
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
25	26	27	28	29	30		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	27	28	29	30			
							30	31												

1	April Fool's Day	9	Mother's Day	6	D-Day
2	Good Friday	15	Wall of Honor Ceremony, 11 a.m. 3rd Saturday: Museum open from 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m.	14	Flag Day
4	Easter	17	Tax Day extension	17	North Okaloosa Historical Association Board meeting, 6 p.m.
15	North Okaloosa Historical Association Board meeting, 6 p.m.	20	North Okaloosa Historical Association Board meeting, 6 p.m.	19	Spring Market Day 3rd Saturday: Museum open from 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
17	Baker Arts Festival 3rd Saturday: Museum open from 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m.	31	Memorial Day	20	Father's Day First day of Summer

Thank You!

The North Okaloosa Historical Association would like to thank the following sponsors for their support to the Baker Block Museum.



Enzor Management

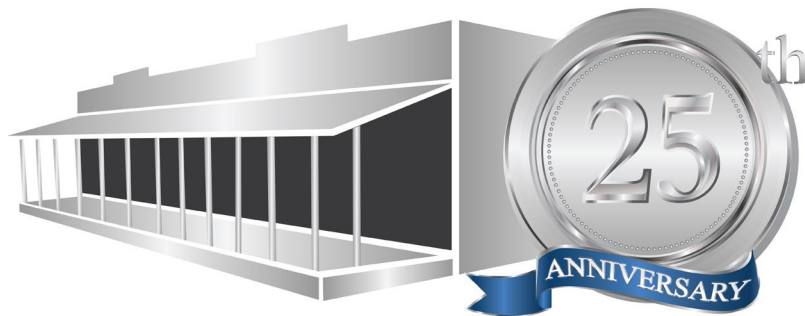
BAKER AUTO PARTS

The Restroom

Okaloosa County Charities-Racetrack Bingo

Celebrating 25 years

BAKER BLOCK
MUSEUM



OKALOOSA COUNTY, FLORIDA

1996-2021