

# Okaloosa Historical Quarterly

North Okaloosa Historical  
Association, Inc.

75<sup>th</sup>  
*Anniversary*

THEIR  
WOMEN  
NEVER  
KNEW  
THEM...

DARRYL F.  
ZANUCK  
*presents*

# TWELVE O'CLOCK HISTORY

Vol. 4, Issue 4  
Fall 2024



Discover. Experience. Connect.



A B-17G model, built by Boeing Aircraft, is on display at Eglin Air Force Base's Air Armament Museum in Fort Walton Beach. This aircraft, serial number 44-83863, was built in 1945 for the U.S. Army Air Forces, transferred to the U.S. Navy, then sold in 1957 for use as a forest fire tanker. It was traded to the museum in 1976. The aircraft depicts the emblem of the 96th Bombardment Group, a precursor to the 96th Test Wing at Eglin Air Force Base.

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Fall 2024, Vol. 4, Issue 4

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

The mission of the North Okaloosa Historical Association, Inc., is to collect, preserve, and promote the history of Okaloosa County, the northwest Florida Panhandle, and the surrounding communities.

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bakerblockmuseum.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.

**On the cover:** The official movie poster for *Twelve O'Clock High*. The tag line said, "A story of twelve men as their women never knew them..."

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**FOLLOW ON**  
bakerblockmuseum.org



**3RD**   
**SATURDAY**

# CREEPLY CABINS

AT THE BAKER BLOCK MUSEUM

**Friday, Oct. 18**

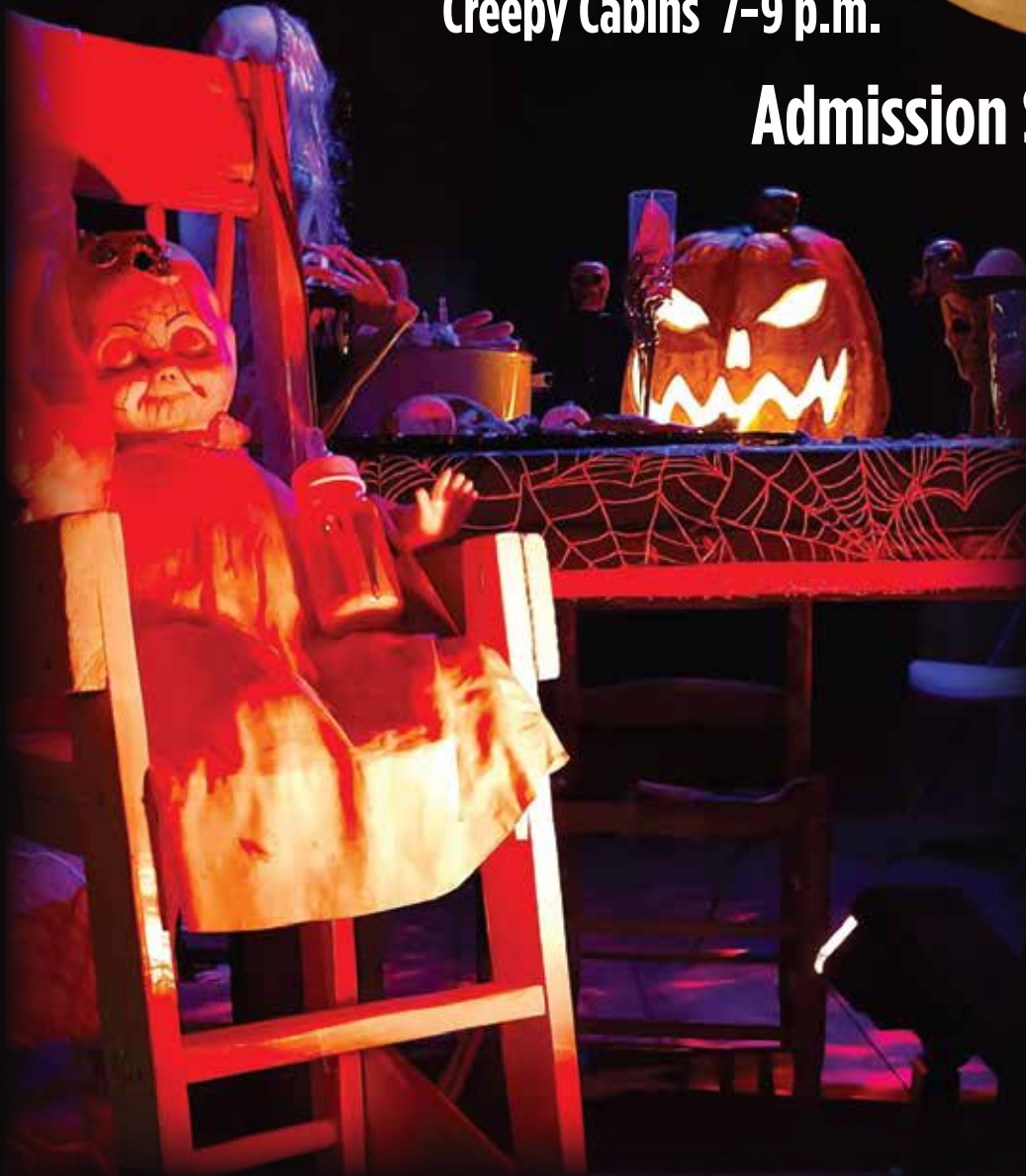
7-9 p.m.

**Saturday, Oct. 19**

Movie, 7 p.m.

Creepy Cabins 7-9 p.m.

**Admission \$4 per person**



# Director's Notes



**W**e have exciting news: Our Pavilion in the Heritage Park has been finished. Thanks to Okaloosa County, we have a concrete floor, lights, and fans. The Museum bought the materials and equipment and Okaloosa County provided the manpower to make it happen. We can't thank the county enough for supporting our organization.

We started this project with a fundraising event in March 2018 organized by Heather McCullough. With assistance from the Rotary Club of Crestview and other generous donations, we reached our monetary goal and began construction. The Pavilion was completed in October 2020 with Okaloosa County Jail inmate manpower, just in time for Heritage Day bands to perform under the new roof.

Then, in September 2022, Florida Power & Light gave the Museum a generous \$5,000 donation to help complete the project. With the money, we purchased lights, fans, and concrete material. Future plans include building a raised stage under the Pavilion at the north end.

Now that the Pavilion is complete, the North Okaloosa Historical Association, Inc., has updated the park policy to include opportunities to rent the Pavilion for large events. While there's no charge for general everyday use, there is a fee to reserve the Pavilion for either half-day or whole-day events. Our policy and reservation application are on our website at [bakerblockmuseum.org/park](http://bakerblockmuseum.org/park).

We hope to see everyone in October for our third annual Creepy Cabins. The cabins will be creepy Friday and Saturday, October 18 and 19, and we'll be showing a family movie favorite Saturday, October 19 under the Pavilion. Both events run from 7-9 p.m.

Please return November 16 for our annual Baker Heritage Day in the Park from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. We have a number of arts and craft vendors and demonstrators lined up. There will also be music and food. The Museum will be open as well.

Hope to see you there!

*Ann Spann*

# MUSEUM NEWS



The Pavilion in the Jeanette and Charles Henderson Heritage Park is getting a concrete floor, lights and fans. Work is being done by Okaloosa County's Parks Division with material supplied by the Museum, thanks to a generous donation by Florida Power & Light. Work is expected to be completed in time for October's Creepy Cabin movie night.

## New policy established for Park and Pavilion use

With the completion of the Pavilion, the Board of Directors of the North Okaloosa Historical Association, Inc., which oversees the operation of the Baker Block Museum and the Jeanette and Charles Henderson Heritage Park, has established a new park use policy.

Some basic rules are now in place to make the park enjoyable for everyone.

Animals are not allowed in the Park with the exception of service animals and all waste must be removed by the owner.

Alcohol, fireworks, open fire or flames, and vehicles are not allowed except during scheduled events. Overnight camping is prohibited. Disorderly conduct will not be permitted at any time.

Commercial activity in the Park is not permitted except during scheduled events.

The public is free to enjoy the Park grounds during the day. Park hours are from one hour

before sunrise to one hour after sunset. The Park is closed during nighttime hours.

For planned events, the Park and Pavilion facilities may be rented.

A park rental agreement is required for all commercial activity and special events. The reservation gives the reserver the right to use the park and pavilion for a specific time. Fees for park use include a reservation fee, a refundable clean-up deposit, and the cost for the rental for either a half day or for the full day. In addition to signing a park rental agreement, a hold harmless agreement is also required.

Non-professional, casual, or personal photography on the ground and the cabins is always allowed.

For more information about park use and rental, visit the Museum's website at [bakerblockmuseum.org/park](http://bakerblockmuseum.org/park).

# Archaeology of Northwest Florida

**3rd**  
**Saturday**



July 20

The July 3rd Saturday event was a presentation by Florida's Public Archaeology Network's Della Scott-Ireton who spoke about the archaeology of northwest Florida. It featured a virtual tour of the major archaeological discoveries of the Florida panhandle. Within FPAN's northwest region, there are more than 16,000 cultural sites, from shipwrecks to cemeteries to Native American sites.

According to Scott-Ireton, heritage tours are one of the fastest-growing industries.

"So many people are calling Florida home and want to know more about the area," she said.

Two of the sites she talked about reside in Okaloosa County: the Indian Temple Mound in Fort Walton Beach and the Old Bethel Cemetery in Crestview.

The Indian Temple Mound dates back to around 850 BC. It was believed to have been abandoned in late 1600. Confederate soldiers established "Camp Walton" at the base of the mound in 1861. The Walton Guard used the earthworks as a gun platform to guard the Santa Rosa Sound and Choctawhatchee Bay.

The Old Bethel Cemetery, located on Old Bethel Road, was established in the 1830s. Like most early cemeteries, it was likely associated with a church at the site. A legend associated with the cemetery centers around the supposed burial of several Civil War soldiers whose mass grave is marked by a circle of coarse sandstone field stones.

Several sites in the presentation are located in Walton, Santa Rosa, and in Pensacola in Escambia County and Scott-Ireton encouraged audience members to explore the archaeology of northwest Florida.



# Baker Heritage Day



**Saturday, November 16  
9 a.m.-3 p.m.  
Heritage Park**



- **Arts & Crafts**
- **Music**
- **Food**
- **Demonstrations**



**Baker Block Museum Heritage Park  
At the corner of Hwy 4 and 189 in Baker  
850-537-5714**



# Old Okaloosa County Police Stories

**3rd  
Saturday**



September 21



Above left: Mike Simmons, retired Pensacola police officer and Escambia County Sheriff's Office correctional officer and historian is director of the George Stone Justice Training Center in Pensacola. He shared stories about past Okaloosa County lawmen throughout history during September's *3rd Saturday* event.

Above: Simmons visits with attendees after his presentation.

Left: Barrett, 6, who has "wanted to be a police officer since he was 4," asks Simmons to autograph Simmons's book, *Pensacola's Finest*, for him.

# SPONSORS

The North Okaloosa Historical Association, Inc., would like to thank our sponsors for their continued support of the Baker Block Museum.



**Trevia Buckner, CPA**



**TheRestroom**



**BAKER AUTO PARTS**



**Enzor Management**

# Be a volunteer!



**The Baker Block Museum is looking for people who:**

- Like history**
- Like interacting with Museum visitors**
- Can do light computer work**
- Can organize files**
- Is handy with a hammer and nail**

**Flexible hours**

**See Museum Director Ann Spann  
850-537-5714 or [bakermuseum@aol.org](mailto:bakermuseum@aol.org)**

# When Hollywood came to Okaloosa County

TWELVE  
O'CLOCK HIGH

Celebrating  
75  
years

*The year was 1949. The first Volkswagen Beetle arrived in the United States. Only two were sold. It would later become an automotive phenomenon with production lasting 65 years. The Soviet Union lifted the Berlin Blockade, which lasted for nearly a year following World War II. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, established in the aftermath of World War II, stood up as a collective security system with the promise of its nation members to come to the aid of any other member against third-party attacks (specifically, the Soviet Union). And the Soviet Union tested its first atomic bomb. John Belushi; George Foreman; Hank Williams, Jr.; Meryl Streep; and Gene Simmons were all born in 1949.*

*The year 1949 also brought Hollywood to Okaloosa County.*

**I**n 1948, two former Army Air Forces officers and Hollywood screenwriters, Beirne Lay, Jr., and Sy Bartlett, wrote a novel about their experiences during the war they titled “Twelve O’Clock High.” The term “twelve o’clock high” refers to enemy fighters flying directly head-on and above the aircraft, where the bombers were most vulnerable. Using a clock face, twelve o’clock refers to straight ahead. High or low refers to the altitude of the attack. Thus, “twelve

o’clock high” means the enemy is diving down from above directly in front of the aircraft, usually out of the sun making it hard for the bomber crews to see the enemy coming.

After finishing their book, Lay and Bartlett wrote and submitted a story treatment, a narrative describing a movie based on their novel. Darryl F. Zanuck, president of Twentieth Century-Fox Film Studios, purchased the story rights to “Twelve O’Clock High” for \$100,000, a lot of money at the time.

# TWELVE O'CLOCK HIGH

PREMIERED: DECEMBER 21, 1949 (LOS ANGELES)

OPENED: JANUARY 26, 1950 (NEW YORK CITY)

GENERAL RELEASE: FEBRUARY 1950

STARRING: GREGORY PECK, DEAN JAGGER

DIRECTED BY: HENRY KING

PRODUCED BY: DARRYL F. ZANUCK

STUDIO: TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX

RUNNING TIME: 132 MINUTES

BOX OFFICE: \$3,225,000 (U.S. ONLY)

## The story

The movie “Twelve O’Clock High,” adapted from Lay and Bartlett’s novel, was based on real-life events and people. Lay was a member of the VIII Bomber Command—the precursor to the Eighth Air Force—and as a pilot in the 100th Bomb Group, flew a low-level precision daylight bombing mission over Germany on one of only 12 out of 21 B-17s that made it back to base. He was also shot down behind enemy lines, making it back to England with the help of the French Resistance fighters. Bartlett also worked in the VIII Bomber Command headquarters as an aide to Lieutenant General Carl Spaatz.

The story they wrote looks at the toll difficult command decisions take on leadership, in this case, sending men to their possible (and probable) deaths.

The narrative account takes place during the early days of World War II. It focuses on on the 918th Bomb Group, a “hard luck” B-17 Flying Fortress bomber unit suffering from low morale due to the heavy operational tempo to conduct low-altitude daylight precision bombing missions over Europe. In addition to the never-ending missions, the group has suffered heavy losses in men and aircraft. The group’s low morale is blamed on the leadership of its commander, Colonel Keith Davenport,

Most outdoor non-flying scenes of “Twelve O’Clock High” were filmed at the D.J. Sullivan farm in Crestview (top right) and Eglin Air Force Base (middle and bottom right).

The air battle scenes in this Motion Picture were photographed in *actual combat* by members of the United States Air Force and the German Luftwaffe.



who is replaced by Brigadier General Frank Savage, a hard-charging, no-nonsense commander, early in the story.

Savage’s hard-nosed leadership and discipline begins to turn the group around until the aircrews start to recover their focus, experience mission success, and begin to take pride in their unit again. However, the crushing mission tempo begins to affect Savage, much like it did Davenport, and he suffers a mental breakdown.

## The 306th

The fictitious 918th Bomb Group was based on the 306th Bombardment Group (306 times 3 equals 918). The 306th Bomb Group was activated March 1, 1942, and stationed at Royal Air Force Thurleigh, in Bedfordshire, England, where it began bombing missions in October 1942. Success was measured by the number of bombs on target and the number of B-17s lost.

Low-altitude daylight precision bombing was brutal. There were no fighter escorts during the early days of the war. The groups, which flew together in high, medium, and low altitudes, had to rely on the integrity of the formation to ensure mission success.

Colonel Charles B. “Chip” Overacker was commander of the 306th. As battle losses began to stack up, morale started to tank, and

sloppiness and lack of discipline began to set in. The 306th became the worst unit in the VIII Bomber Command. Overacker was relieved of command and replaced by Colonel Frank A. Armstrong, Jr. In short order, under his strong leadership, the 306th went from worst to best in the command. Like the fictitious 918th Bomb Group, the 306th led the first heavy bomber mission into Germany. The legacy of the 306th continues on as the 306th Flying Training Group based at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

## Finding a location

The first announcement that a Hollywood movie would be filmed in the local area came from a March 3, 1949, article in the *Okaloosa News=Journal* buried on page 5B: “Eglin Air Base may be used for filming new motion picture by Hollywood Fox.” Director Henry King was looking for outdoor locations to film the movie and flew his private Beechcraft airplane to several military bases. Two locations he scouted were Eglin Air Force Base and inactive and overgrown Ozark Army Airfield in Alabama, now a part of then-Fort Rucker (renamed Fort Novosel in 2023). The director met with Major General William Kepner, commander of the Proving Ground Command, and other officials in early March.

King received permission from the Pentagon

Although fiction, *Twelve O’Clock High* was based on actual events. The fictional 918th Bomb Group represented the actual 306th Bombardment Group. Here’s how the fictional characters equated to the real people.

Character	Actual Person	Actor
Brigadier General Frank Savage	Colonel Frank A. Armstrong, Jr.	Gregory Peck
Colonel Keith Davenport	Colonel Charles Overaker	Gary Merrill
Major General Pritchard	Lieutenant General Ira Eaker	Millard Mitchell
Lieutenant Colonel Ben Gately	Fictitious	Hugh Marlowe
Major Harvey Stovall	Fictitious or Colonel William Howard Stovall	Dean Jagger
Major Kaiser	Fictitious	Paul Stewart
Major Joe Cobb	Lieutenant Colonel Paul Tibbets, Jr.	John Kellogg
Sergeant McIlenny	Sergeant Donald Bevan	Robert Arthur
Second Lieutenant Jesse Bishop	Flight Officer John C. Morgan, Royal Air Force	Robert Patten



U.S. and British officers look for the return of B-17 Flying Fortresses from the top of the control tower at Grafton Underwood in Northamptonshire, England, after the Eighth Air Force's first heavy bomber raid on August 17, 1942, over the Marshalling Yards at Rouen. General Carl A Spatz stands to the left of the ladder, Beirne Lay behind the guide rope. (*U.S. Army Air Force photo*)

to film at both locations with Eglin being the primary outdoor location. He used Ozark for the opening and closing post-war scenes of the movie and filmed takeoffs and landings there because Ozark's dark runways better matched the dark World War II runways in England more so than Eglin's brighter concrete runways did.

Once the opening and closing scenes were shot, the grass was mowed and takeoff and landing scenes were filmed, including the tense B-17 belly landing sequence eight minutes into the movie. All other outdoor scenes were filmed at Eglin.

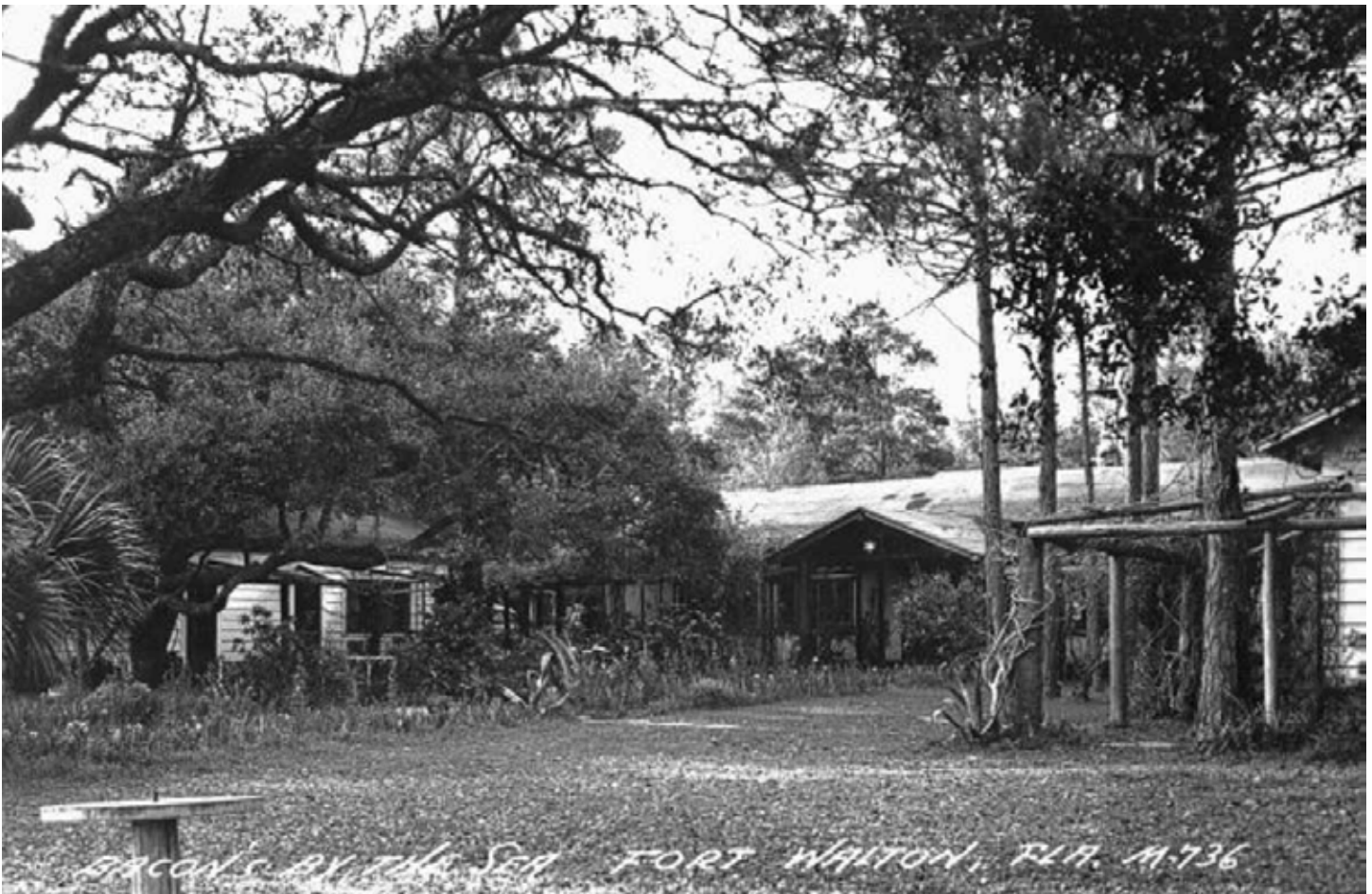
## Filming in Florida

King had arrived to Florida a month early

and he and Bartlett spent early April in Fort Walton completing the final script in a week's time, writing from 8 a.m. to noon, then taking lunch at the Bacon's by the Sea restaurant where they were staying. By 1:30 p.m., they were back writing for the next four-and-a-half hours.

Production in Florida officially began April 18, 1949. The film company spent four-to-six weeks in Okaloosa County filming the outdoor scenes at a farm in Crestview and at a remote airfield on Eglin Air Force Base. Filming began every day at 8 a.m. and lasted into the evening hours.

The 840-acre Crestview farm was owned by D.J. Sullivan and was located at Blueberry Curve (west side of State Road 85 and Lake



Bacon's by the Sea inn was located in Mary Esther on the Sound. Gregory Peck stayed here during filming of "Twelve O'Clock High" in 1949.

Silver Road). Scenes filmed at the farm stood in for outdoor shots of a rundown English country estate that had been converted to a girls' school where the headquarters of the VIII Bomber Command, known by its codename "Pinetree," was located. Shots were filmed around the lake and the countryside dotted with pecan trees and overgrown grass.

Outdoor military ground operations were filmed at Eglin Field 3—now known as Duke Field—in late March. In 1949, a single road led to the remote field and was posted with a guard to keep the curious away during filming. The sets consisted of 14 to 15 block and Quonset-style buildings and an English control tower that turned the Air Force airfield into England's fictitious Archbury Air Base. The U.S. Navy furnished 12 Quonset huts to the Air Force for the project. Existing buildings on the field were given new fronts to blend in with the set pieces. An April 1, 1949, article in the

*Okaloosa News=Journal* said representatives from the film studio had been in Crestview the week of March 28 to buy lumber, hardware, and other materials needed to build sets at Eglin. Amusingly, the article also said merchants reported the crew also bought all the snake bite kits available.

The Air Force loaned twelve B-17s to the studio; six of them came from Eglin's drone group being used for ditching tests and targets. Others came from depots at Brookely Field in Mobile, Alabama, and other sources. Some were used in the atomic bomb tests at Bikini Atoll and were still somewhat radioactive, but could be used for short periods of time.

Other military equipment included staff cars, ambulances, bomb carts, gas trucks, and aircraft tugs for moving the B-17s around on the ground. The Air Force provided all types of uniforms, flying gear, and equipment as well.

Air battle flying scenes in the movie was



actual World War II combat footage shot by the U.S. Army Air Forces. It also included captured German Luftwaffe footage of B-17s being shot down.

Location shooting in Okaloosa County wrapped up in June 1949.

## Cast

The stars of the film showed up after the sets were built, arriving in Fort Walton April 19, 1949. Leading the cast was film legend Gregory Peck. He played Brigadier General Frank Savage who was assigned to replace Colonel Keith Davenport as commander and get the 918th Bomb Group back in fighting form.

When offered the role as General Savage, Peck initially turned it down. To him, and others, the story was too similar to the stage play, "Command Decision," which Metro Golden Mayer studios turned into a successful war film in 1948 starring Clark Gable, Walter Pidgeon, and Van Johnson. The major theme of both movies was the mental toll of sending men into battle that resulted in high casualties. Peck also hesitated because he had no military experience; he was classified as 4F—not fit for duty—during World War II due to an injury. King convinced Peck he could handle the role.

In addition to military members cast as extras in the movie, local residents also found jobs as extras, including Milligan resident J.T. Garrett and Niceville resident Clint Wright, according to an *Okaloosa News=Journal* article.

## Local area

While in town for the filming, Peck stayed at Bacon's by the Sea, a "resort hotel" located at 757 E Miracle Strip Parkway, east of Mary Esther Boulevard, where Cash's liquor store now sits, across from the United Methodist Church. King and Bartlett holed up there while rewriting the final script.

Other cast members and film crew stayed

Complete Cast Of Characters Of Famed War Film Listed For Theater Goers	
Southern preview fans of "12 O'Clock High" who would like to study over the cast of characters prior to the start of the picture are given the opportunity with the complete cast being listed below.	
General Savage	Gregory Peck
Lt. Col. Ben Gately	Hugh Marlowe
Col. Davenport	Gary Merrill
General Pritchard	Millard Mitchell
Major Stovall	Dean Jagger
Sgt. McIlhenny	Robert Arthur
Capt. "Doc" Kaiser	Paul Stewart
Major Cobb	John Kellogg
Lt. Bishop	Bob Pattern
Nurse	Joyce MacKenzie
Lt. Wilson	Don Hicks
Lt. Zimmerman	Lee MacGregor
Birdwell	Sam Edwards
Interrogation Officer	Roger Anderson
Sgt. Ernie	John Zilly
Lt. Pettinghill	William Short
Lt. McKessen	Richard Anderson
Capt. Twombly	Lawrence Dobkin
Sentry	Kenneth Tobey
Operations Officer	John McKee
Mr. Britton	Campbell Copelin
Dwight	Don Guadagno
Weather Observer	Peter Ortiz
Clerk in Antique Shop	Steve Clark
Clerk	Pat Whyte
<b>STAFF</b>	
Produced by	Darryl F. Zanuck
Directed by	Henry King
Screen Play by	Sy Bartlett, Beirne Lay, Jr.
Based on the Novel by	Beirne Lay, Jr., Sy Bartlett
Director of Photography	Leon Shamroy, ASC
Art Direction	Lyle Wheeler, Maurice Ransford
Set Decorations	Thomas Little, Bruce Macdonald
Film Editor	Barbara McLean
Music	Alfred Newman
Air Force Technical Adviser	John H. deRussy,
Col. U. S. A. F. Group Operations Officer, 303th Bombing Group, Chelveston, England, 1942.	

The cast of the movie "Twelve O'Clock High" is listed in the February 14, 1950, issue of the *Okaloosa News=Journal*.

at the Valparaiso Inn, built on the shores of Boggy Bayou. The three-story, 56-room inn was patterned after Chicago's Edgewater Beach Hotel. It had four wings set at angles to catch the breeze from the water with views of the bayou and the Choctawhatchee Bay. It was built in the 1920s, and by 1949, was nearing the end of its existence as an inn. In 1957, it was converted to an apartment building. One cast member described the inn as an "old frame building sinking into a swamp," according to an account in Allan Duffin and Paul Matheis's book, *The Twelve O'Clock High Logbook*.

While the movie's stars were in town, General Kepner invited them to a party at the Eglin Officer's Club April 21. Peck, King,



A British World War II control tower was built at Eglin's Field 3 for the movie "Twelve O'Clock High," in 1949.

and Air Force film consultant Colonel John DeRussy were invited. They were joined by 70 "officers and ladies," according to an *Okaloosa News=Journal* article.

### Baseball game

While the film crew was in town, they challenged the Crestview Indians, a minor league baseball team, to a softball game May 12, played before a regularly scheduled game between Crestview and Niceville at Richbourg Field located at 275 North Avenue E. The Crestview Indians lost the softball game to the film crew, 13 to 15, but the "special attraction" of Peck, King, Jagger, and "several other well-known personalities" who attended the game but did not play, attracted a huge crowd to the ballpark, according to a May 12, 1949, *Okaloosa News=Journal* article.

Before the game, Peck was presented the key to the city of Crestview by Mayor J. Franklin Cook and was made an honorary citizen. Local radio host Willie D. "Cooter" Douglas of Laurel Hill was master of ceremonies for the event. Publicity photos of Peck were sold during the game and he graciously signed them until they sold out. He then signed whatever was thrust

at him, from dollar bills to paper bags.

Peck was afforded the honor of buying the first poppy from the American Legion's annual poppy sale, an honor usually reserved for the mayor. Peck donated \$10 toward the poppy drive which boosted sales. Pinned on his lapel by Louise Coates, wife of Arthur D. Coates, she visited with Peck for a bit and described him as an ordinary person, down-to-earth, very nice, and not conceited. "Talking

to Gregory Peck was like talking to someone you've known a long time," she said in an interview with the *Okaloosa News=Journal*.

### Side Stories

In a twist of fate, the commander who Colonel Keith Davenport was modeled after, Colonel Charles "Chip" Overacker, was relieved of command of the 306th Bomb Group and left Thurleigh, England, in January 1943. Ironically, he was reassigned to the Proving Ground Command at Eglin Field as commander of Field 9 (now Hurlburt Field), then later became deputy commander of the Proving Ground Command. He left Eglin for Langley Field in Virginia in 1945, four years before filming of the movie began.

As the movie begins and then transitions from "present time" to 1942, the scene opens with a dramatic belly landing of a B-17 returning from a mission. With the exception of the belly landing, the events depicted in the movie followed what happened during the actual mission to Hanover, Germany. The pilot was hit in the head by enemy fire. The top turret gunner had his left arm torn off by

enemy fire and was bleeding to death. The navigator parachuted the gunner out of the plane over enemy territory where he could hopefully receive medical attention (he survived).

Meanwhile, the co-pilot, Royal Air Force Flight Officer John Morgan, took over command of the mission. For two hours, Morgan flew the mission with one hand while he kept the injured pilot, who was fighting him for the controls, at bay with his other hand, until the navigator came up to the cockpit to help take care of the pilot. After the bombs were dropped on target, Morgan landed the plane, wheels down, at RAF Foulsham with his gas gauges reading empty. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroism. Lieutenant Jesse Bishop who belly landed the B-17 at beginning of the movie was modeled after Morgan.

### **World premiere**

The world premiere of "Twelve O'Clock High" was held in typical grand Tinseltown style at the famed Grauman's Chinese Theater on Hollywood Boulevard December 21, 1949. Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, provided a 60-piece marching band and uniformed military participants from March Air Force Base in Riverside, California, filled out a parade that marched from Hollywood and Vine to the theater. Parade participants received a

# Special Attraction

**RICHBOURG FIELD — CRESTVIEW**

**Gregory Peck, star of "Twelve O'clock High," and other 20th Century-Fox actors will be guests of the Crestview Indians.**

**The movie actors will oppose a local team in a game of softball before the regular game with Niceville.**



**GREGORY PECK, AS AN OFFICER IN THE AIR FORCE, PHOTOGRAPHED AT EGLIN AFB**

**DON'T MISS THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SEE PECK AND THE OTHER STARS AT RICHBOURG FIELD**

**Thursday Night, May 12th**

special showing of the film prior to the parade.

The studio invited a number of military distinguished guests to the premiere, including Lieutenant General Frank Armstrong, General Ira Eaker, General Curtis LeMay, and three flying ace pilots Lieutenant John Meyer, Lieutenant Colonel Francis Gabreski, and Captain Dominic Gentile. (A flying ace is a pilot who shoots down five or more enemy aircraft during combat.)

A short introduction to the movie by Gregory Peck opened the film. In it, Peck said his role playing Savage was “the most satisfying” he’d ever played. (This was fourteen years before his iconic Oscar-winning role of Atticus Finch in “To Kill a Mockingbird.”)

The movie also had a dedication to the men whose mission was to conduct daylight precision bombing during the fall of 1942. “They stood alone, against the enemy...” and were the only Americans fighting in the war in Europe at that time.

In January, the movie had its east coast premiere in New York City at the Roxy Theater. It was held January 28, 1950, the eighth birthday of the Eighth Air Force. Sponsored by the Air Force Association, it was attended by 1,500 current and former members of the Eighth Air Force. Tickets were distributed on a first-come, first-served basis, according to a January 15, New York *Daily News* article. Also attending the event was former Air Force Chief of Staff General Carl Spaatz and six Congressional Medal of Honor awardees, according to a *New York Times* January 27 article. Oscar winner Dean Jagger who played Major Harvey Stovall; Gary Merrill, who played Colonel Keith Davenport; and Millard Mitchell; who played Major General Pritchard, flew in from Hollywood to attend the New York premiere.

Another special screening occurred January 16 at Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha, Nebraska, home of Strategic Air Command, the organization responsible for the United States bomber fleet. Lieutenant General Curtis LeMay and his wife hosted around 100 distinguished visitors for a meal at the officers club and showing of the movie.

### **Southern premiere**

Finally, it was Florida’s turn to premiere the movie.

Notification came in late December 1949



An ad announcing the the movie appeared in the *Okaloosa News=Journal* in February 3, 1950.

that “Twelve O’Clock High” would premiere in Crestview before it would be released statewide in Florida, Alabama, and Georgia, according to a February 14, story in the *Okaloosa News=Journal*. Although not known at the time of the December notification, the date finally settled upon was February 14, 1950.

Formal invitations were mailed to members of the state legislature and other state officials and Eglin was given permission to provide an

airplane to go to Tallahassee to pick up these dignitaries for the Crestview movie premiere. Governor Fuller Warren did not attend due to health reasons, but his wife Barbara, was part of the Tallahassee party. Once at Eglin, the dignitaries were wined and dined at a supper at the officers club before being transported to Crestview for the premiere.

Senator Newman C. Bracken was master of ceremonies for the night. He did brief introductions at 7 p.m. and the movie started at 7:30 p.m.

Following the movie, an invitation-only reception was held at the Hilton Hotel organized by chamber of commerce officers' wives. Guests were restricted to members of the chamber and their families. There was no receiving line and light refreshments were served, according to an *Okaloosa News=Journal* article.

During its three-day general audience showings, the movie was shown at both Crestview theaters, the Fox, owned and operated by Neal and Estelle Robinson, and the Eglin, owned and operated by Tom Barrow, both on Main Street just a block away from each other on opposite sides of the street. But there was only one print of the film, so once the first reel was completed and changed at the Fox, a theater assistant ran the reel down to the Eglin to begin the show, according to the

late Neal Robinson. Since this was a three-day run for the movie, this reel swap happened multiple times, each time the movie played.

## **Academy Awards**

When the 22nd Academy Awards rolled around in March 1950, "Twelve O'Clock High" was nominated in four categories: Best Picture, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actor, and Best Sound Recording. The movie lost to "All the King's Men" and Peck lost to Broderick Crawford for "All the King's Men," but Dean Jagger who played Major Harvey Stovall won for best supporting actor and "Twelve O'Clock High" took home the Oscar for best sound recording.

The movie was so popular, a radio program was produced from the script in September 1950 with Peck reprising his role as General Savage. Then, in 1964, ABC produced a one-hour television show starring Robert Lansing as Savage. The lead was changed to Colonel Joe Gallagher, played by Paul Burke, after the first season. The show ran for three years.

"Twelve O'Clock High," considered a lesson in leadership, was required viewing at all military service academies and as a training aid in Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps and Officer Candidate School classes. It remains as one of the best movies the Pentagon has ever supported.

# Crestview resident reminisces about being a part of Twelve O'Clock High

By Ann Spann

**B**efore he was Barney Fife, Crestview resident J.T. Garrett was picked to be Gregory Peck's stand-in during the filming of the movie "Twelve O'Clock High" in 1949.

Recently discharged from the U.S. Navy, the 22-year-old Garrett had gone to Duke Field to apply for a job, unaware of the movie production taking place there.

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience to meet Gregory Peck and work in the movie," said Garrett about being picked to participate in the production.

Garrett, who was also Peck's driver and a movie extra, never knew why he was chosen. "I was in the right place at the right time," he said during a 2007 interview.

In addition to the local scenes, he traveled with the production crew to Ozark Army Airfield belonging to then-Fort Rucker (now Fort Novosel) in Dale County, Alabama, where B-17 aerial shots, as well as the opening and closing shots of the movie were filmed.

Garrett remembered standing in a scene for up to an hour while lights and other details were set. "I would get out and Peck would be in



A 22-year-old J.T. Garrett was a stand-in and driver for film legend Gregory Peck, as well as an extra, during the filming of the Hollywood movie, "Twelve O'Clock High." This photo also appeared in the *Okaloosa News-Journal* February 14, 1949. (photos courtesy J.T. Garrett)

for just a few minutes for the shot," he said.

He recalled a conversation between director Henry King and well-known stunt pilot Paul Mantz about crashing a B-17 for the camera. Mantz wanted \$5,000 to crash the plane. King, who was also a pioneer in aviation and pilot since 1918, replied that he could crash it himself for less than that. The two settled on \$2,500 according to Garrett.

Garrett remembered Peck as being very cordial and friendly. "He was such a nice fellow and took time for anyone who wanted his autograph," he said.

J.T. Garrett was a life-long Okaloosa County resident. He was born in Holt in 1927, graduated from Baker High School in 1944, and served in the U.S. Navy during World War II. He married his high school sweetheart,



Elsie Boyette in 1951 at the First Baptist Church of Milligan, where he was a longtime member and served as a deacon. He worked as a local barber and later as an employee of the State of Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

In 1991 Garrett won a Mayberry look-alike contest because of his resemblance to Don Knotts, the actor who played Barney Fife in the CBS television series “Mayberry RFD” that ran from 1968 to 1971. That victory meant national appearances at the Mount Airy, North Carolina, annual Mayberry events as well as events in Nashville and Branson Missouri. Garrett portrayed Barney Fife at countless parades and festivals across the south, including events in Baker and Crestview, until his death on March 3, 2024.

Top: J.T. Garrett stands next to a B-17 at Duke Field in 1949.

Left: Gregory Peck’s stand-in and driver, J.T. Garrett during the filming of “Twelve O’Clock High.”

# The B-17 Flying Fortress



B-17E Flying Fortress, circa 1941 (*U.S. Air Force*)

The B-17 aircraft, designed by Boeing Aircraft in 1934, is one of the most famous aircraft ever built. The prototype first flew July 28, 1935, and first went into combat in the Philippines and Hawaii December 7, 1941, in strikes against the Japanese fleet.

Eventually B-17s were used in every theater of operation during World War II, but were best known for strategic daylight precision bombing of German industrial targets, like those portrayed in the movie, “Twelve O’Clock High.”

When production of the B-17 was halted in May 1945, a total of 12,731 aircraft had been produced. In Europe alone, B-17s dropped more than 640,000 tons of bombs—which was almost 200,000 tons more than were released by all other Allied bombers and fighters combined.

The “Flying Fortress” earned its name in aerial combat over Europe with an average of 25 enemy planes shot down per 1,000 sorties. It became legendary for sustaining heavy battle damage and still being able to return to base.

The aircraft at the U.S. Air Force Armament Museum at Eglin Air Force Base is a B-17G,

serial number 44-83863. It was built July 5, 1945, for the U.S. Army Air Forces, was transferred to the U.S. Navy July 14, 1945, sold December 2, 1957, for use as a forest fire tanker, and traded back to the National Museum of the USAF in 1976. It is depicted with the 96th Bombardment Group emblem. The 96th Bomb Group would later become Eglin’s 96th Test Wing July 18, 2012.

## Specifications

Manufacturer: Boeing Aircraft  
Number Built: 6,430 – B-17G Models  
Crew Size: 10 crewmembers  
Thrust: 4 Wright R-1820-97 cyclone turbosupercharged radial engines rated at 1,200 hp each  
Length: 74 feet, 4 inches  
Height: 19 feet, 1 inch  
Wingspan: 103 feet, 9 inches  
Weight: 36,135 pounds empty, 72,100 pounds maximum  
Speed: 287 mph maximum, 182 mph at cruise speed  
Range: 3,400 Miles  
Ceiling: 35,600 feet  
Armament: 13 .50 caliber M2 Browning machine guns and up to 8,000 pounds of bombs depending on range of mission



# The mystery of the missing Toby jug



Dean Jagger as Maj. Harvey Stovall in *Twelve O'Clock High*, turns the Toby jug toward the front of the room to clandestinely signal that the 918th Bomb Group has a mission scheduled the next day. Jagger won an best-supporting Oscar for his performance.

One famous character who did not receive screen credit in the movie “*Twelve O’Clock High*” played itself: the Robin Hood Toby jug, probably one of the most iconic movie props of all times next to Rosebud (the sled) in “*Citizen Kane*.” The movie actually opens with discovery of the jug in an English curio shop after the war. It’s the discovery of the jug that sends the movie back to 1942.

In the movie, the 918th Bomb Group has a unique way of discretely letting its members know when they’ve been assigned a bombing mission the next day: by turning the Robin Hood Toby jug sitting on the mantle around to face the room.

What happened to the original movie prop after filming is one of Hollywood’s mysteries. The long-lost movie memorabilia has never been found.

After movie production

ended, the jug disappeared. It wasn’t until 1998 that a descendant of General Frank Armstrong revealed that the jug resided as an Armstrong family heirloom from 1949 through the 1950s. Director Henry King had presented the jug to Armstrong when production of “*Twelve O’Clock High*” wrapped. The jug went to Armstrong’s sister upon his death in 1969.

Unfortunately, the jug went missing again in the 1990s and hasn’t been seen since.

# SHOP

All items are available in the **Baker Mercantile Gift Store.**



**Pyrex Town & Country Snowflake loaf dish: \$12.95**

This is a medium-sized vintage Pyrex loaf dish in the Town & Country pattern. The snowflake design was introduced in 1963.



**St. Michael porcelain dish: \$7.95**

This porcelain St. Michael fan-shaped dish, made in the late 1980s-early 1990s, is painted in an "oriental blossom" design. Made in Japan. Side: 11"x8.5"



**Coonskin cap: \$4.95**

Made by American Souvenirs and Gifts, this coonskin cap is made out of 100 percent polyester (not raccoon—sorry). While it is tagged as an adult size, it seems more of a child size.



**13"x16" Barney Fife retro metal poster: \$13.95**

This sign would look great on any wall. Many other themes are available. Size: 13"x16"



**Star child's toy harmonica: \$3.50**

Future musicians can begin learning how to play with this beginner Star K520 harmonica. Made in China. Plastic and tin. Size: 4"x1"



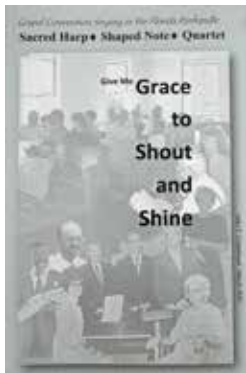
**Set of 6 plastic turtles: \$1**

Get a set of six plastic turtles of various colors and designs. Size: 1"x1/2"

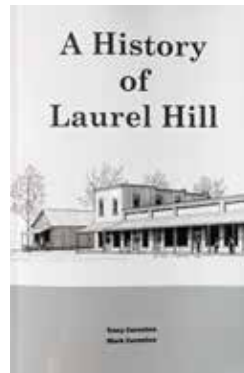
All this and much, much more is available in the **Baker Mercantile Gift Store.**

# Okaloosa County History Series

Available for sale in the **Baker Mercantile Gift Store**, on eBay, by email at [bakermuseum@aol.com](mailto:bakermuseum@aol.com) or by calling the Museum at 850-537-5714. **\$20 each.**



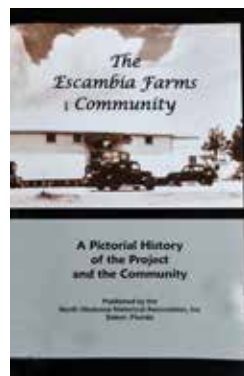
*Give me the Grace to Shout and Shine*, the newest book in the history series, focuses on the three most prominent gospel singing methods in the northwest Florida panhandle throughout the years: Sacred Harp, also known as fasola, five- or seven-shape note convention singing, and later, the gospel quartet.



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.



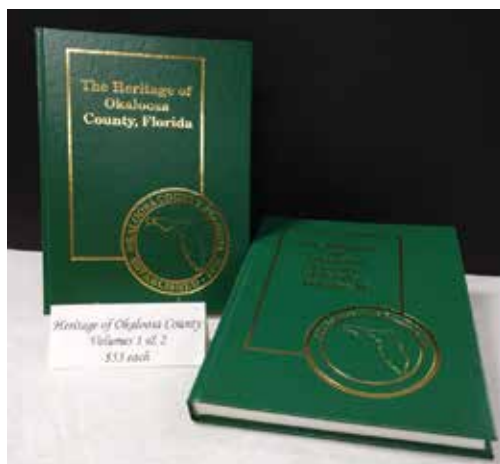
President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program included aid to American migrant workers and tenant farmers. The Resettlement Administration created a planned farming community in the northwest corner of Okaloosa County in 1936 known as Escambia Farms. By 1939, the community had grown to 72 families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





## **Jeanette & Charles Henderson Heritage Park Policy**

- Per Okaloosa County Ordinance:
- The Park is open one hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset.
- All animals are prohibited in the Park with the exception of service animals.
  - All service animal waste must be removed by the owner.
- Overnight camping is not allowed.
- Commercial activity in the Park is not permitted except during scheduled events.
- Alcohol, fireworks, open fires/flames are not allowed, except during scheduled events.
- Illegal drugs are prohibited.
- Loud music, either live or amplified, that can be heard at a distance of 100 feet or more from the source, is not permitted except during scheduled events.
- Disorderly conduct will not be permitted at any time and will be subject to notification of law enforcement.
- Vehicles are not allowed in the park except during scheduled events.

Okaloosa County Ord., Chap. 16, Sec. 43

### **Park, Pavilion, and Cabins**

- Those wanting to use the Park, Pavilion and/or Cabins must schedule their event with the Baker Block Museum.
- A daily use fee and refundable clean-up deposit are required. Contact the Museum for more information.
- The reservation form is available at [bakerblockmuseum.org/park](http://bakerblockmuseum.org/park).
- A hold harmless agreement is also required to reserve the Park/Pavilion.

### **Photography**

- Professional/commercial photographers are required to schedule and pay the Park usage fee. Professional/commercial photography for the purpose of this policy is defined as accepting monetary payment in exchange for photography services.
- Non-professional, casual or personal photography on the grounds and the cabins is always allowed.

Contact the Museum at 850-537-5714 or visit the website for more information.

# SUPPORT

North Okaloosa Historical Association, Inc.

## Membership News

### NOHA Board Members

- **President – Brenda Russell**
- **Vice President – Vacant**
- **Treasurer – Sharry Rustin**
- **Secretary – Stephanie Holcombe**

### Members:

**Nina Adams  
Melissa Barrett  
Randy Batson  
Tracy Curenton  
Doug Hibbing  
Eva Joiner**

### Emeritus Members:

**Judy Cadenhead  
Phyllis Enzor  
Jeanette Henderson**

**New memberships: Annette Henderson Brown, individual  
John & Kaye Gustafson, family  
Barbara Henderson Slocomb, lifetime  
Kristen Sallberg, family**

### 2024 Goals

- **Increase new membership by 30% – goal met**
- **Complete the historical marker application**
- **Transcribe digitized oral histories**
- **Stripe front parking spaces and place parking and park signage**

## 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 nomination 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

The North Okaloosa Historical Association is a 501(c)(3) organization. Membership and any donations are tax deductible.



# 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.*



# EVENTS

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

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <p>14 Columbus Day</p> <p><b>17</b> North Okaloosa Historical Association Board meeting, 6 p.m.</p> <p><b>18</b> <b>Creepy Cabins</b> 7-9 p.m.</p> <p><b>19</b> <b>3rd Saturday</b><br/>Museum is open from 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m.<br/><b>Creepy Cabins</b>, movie under the Pavilion 7-9 p.m.</p> | <p>11 Veterans Day</p> <p><b>16</b> Heritage Day, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Heritage Park</p> <p><b>21</b> North Okaloosa Historical Association Board meeting, 6 p.m.</p> <p><b>28</b> Thanksgiving</p> <p><b>29</b> Museum closed</p> <p><b>Regular Museum hours:</b><br/>Tuesday-Friday, every 3rd Saturday, 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m.</p> | <p>7 Pearl Harbor Day</p> <p><b>19</b> North Okaloosa Historical Association Board meeting, 6 p.m.</p> <p>24 Christmas Eve</p> <p>25 Christmas</p> <p>31 New Year's Eve</p> <p><b>Museum will be closed for the holidays Dec. 23-Jan. 1</b></p> |
|---|--|---|

## Don't get caught napping!



Find that perfect  
Christmas gift  
at the  
**Baker Mercantile  
Gift Shop**



# Little Free Library<sup>®</sup> in the Heritage Park

Take a Book. Share a Book.

**Did you know the Museum has TWO Little Free Library<sup>®</sup> book exchanges in the Jeanette and Charles Henderson Heritage Park? The little red schoolhouse library near the day care center has children's books while the cabin library facing Georgia Avenue has reading material for grownups.**

**The libraries are near large oak trees with bench seating so readers can sit and enjoy their book selections.**

**Both libraries are registered with the Little Free Library<sup>®</sup> system.**

