



A National Scenic Byway

# Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Newsletter

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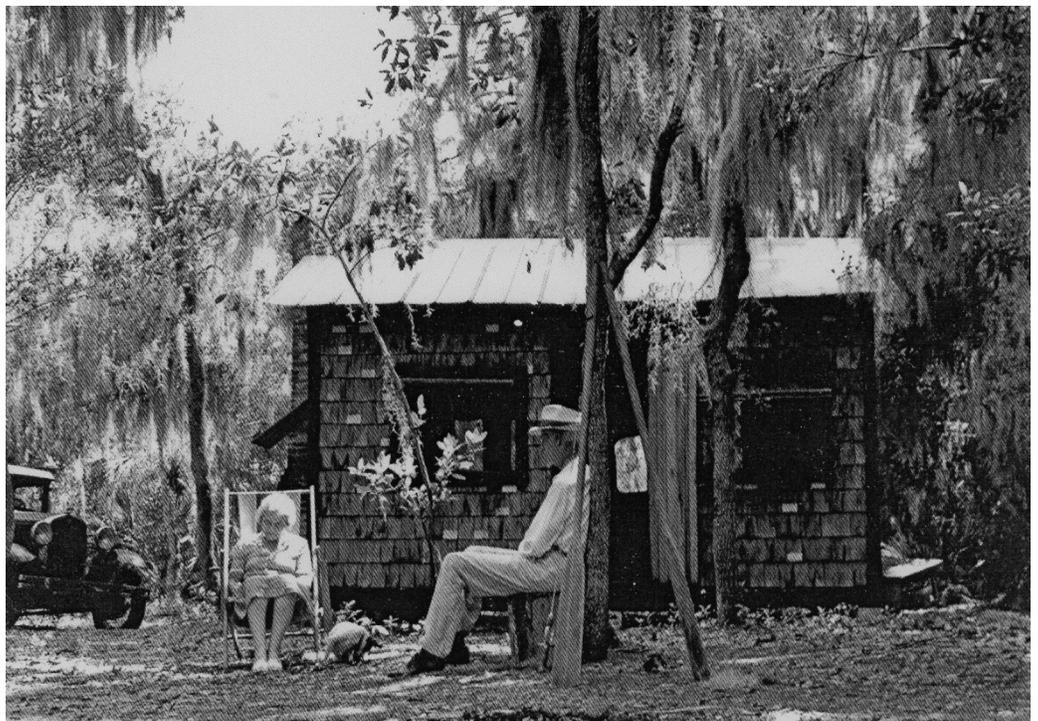


## In The Middle of Nowhere--the Amazing Carr Family Cabin

By Anthony Ehrlich

In October of 2023, our newsletter carried my article titled “The Woman Who Saved Nature.” It was about one of my heroes, Marjorie Harris Carr. Mrs. Carr organized a group of scientists and environmentalists who were concerned about the ecological damage that the federally funded Cross Florida Barge Canal would do to Florida’s flora and fauna. They were successful in stopping that project and their efforts led Congress to task the U.S. Corps of Engineers to develop the Environmental Impact Statement form. Now an EIS is required for any federal project before it can be implemented. Everyone concerned with maintaining our country’s environment can thank Mrs. Carr. She was married to Archie Carr, another environmentalist and a very important one. While writing the last article, I learned much about Archie’s extraordinary family and the cabin that contributed so much to their development, which now deserves renewed attention.

The Carr family moved to Umatilla in 1930 and the patriarch, the Reverend Archibald F. Carr, became the pastor of the Presbyterian Church and was known as “Parson” Carr. According to the *History of First Presbyterian Church, Umatilla, Florida, 1886-1986* by Lucy Elizabeth Yancey, “His sermons often reflected his interest in the natural and scientific worlds.” Parson’s wife, Mrs. Louise D. Carr, nicknamed Mimi, played the piano during service and gave piano lessons to local children, some of whom still live in the area. Between Parson and his wife, they developed deep roots in the community.



*Parson and Mimi relaxing at the cabin with their Model A in the background.*

Parson Carr enjoyed nature and liked to hunt and fish both as hobbies and as sustenance for his family. In 1938 he bought 46 acres at the southern edge of the Ocala National Forest and had a primitive 15-foot by 20-foot cabin built. It had a pump for water and eight unglazed windows with shutters, but no creature comforts. It was on the shore of Lake Nicotoon, a fine place for fishing and shooting waterfowl, secluded from civilization.



*The cabin, restored with award-winning craftsmanship.*

spider unsuccessfully trying to ensnare a measuring worm resting on a leaf above Lake Nicotoon. He describes in fascinating detail the different roles the spider's front and rear legs play in the hunt.

The young men loved being at the cabin and, in the years to come, they would bring their children for picnics and sometimes to camp. The children, too, learned to care about the plants and critters in the surrounding woods, and went on to become conservationists and academics as well. So, the cabin was the grooming place of three generations of this extraordinary family.

Parson was successful in shaping his sons. Tom Carr got his PhD in astrophysics and had a successful career as a professor. For the U. S. government, he worked on instrumentation for the nuclear bomb tests at Enewetak Atoll. (Unfortunately, these tests resulted in high levels of radiation that made the Marshall Islands, including Enewetak, uninhabitable.) In the 1970s he worked for NASA, where he developed instrumentation for the Voyager 1 and 2 spacecraft, twin NASA probes launched in 1977, exploring interstellar space beyond the solar system. Using data from these probes, Tom derived new information about the planet Jupiter.

Archie Carr got his PhD in herpetology, the study of reptiles. Like his brother, he also had a long successful career as a professor. He sometimes took his students on field trips to the area near the cabin. His academic specialty was turtles, and he travelled extensively both within and outside the United States, helping to

Parson Carr brought his two sons to the cabin on weekends and during school breaks. At the time, Archie, Jr., was a student at the University of Florida and his younger brother, Tom, went to Umatilla High School. Parson wanted to encourage their burgeoning interest in nature and for them to learn more about wildlife.

Archie, especially, learned to observe the minutiae of nature. This was documented years later in his anecdote called "The Spider." In this tale, he tells of watching a jumping

establish and preserve sanctuaries for many turtle subspecies. Through his writings, teachings, and international outreach he became known as “the man who saved turtles.”

Archie was a natural writer and storyteller. While still a young man, his first published article, called “Hound Magic,” appeared in a 1947 issue of *Field and Stream*. It was a hilarious and informative tale of deer hunting with dogs, a common practice in the Florida wilds in that time. E. O. Wilson, another great biologist, later wrote of Archie’s writing style, “...Carr shows himself to be a Southern writer whose craft is disciplined by scientific knowledge. Most times he is a professor of biology, explaining such matters as the jubilees of Mobile Bay and the origin of the fishes of Lake Nicaragua. Then he adds a dash of the good old boy, a southern traditional, plain-spoken and wise.” There was more than a dash of the good old boy in “Hound Magic”.

The magazine paid Archie \$100 for it, which he used to add a porch onto the family cabin. Over his lifetime, Archie wrote many magazine articles and ten books, the last one being his masterwork, *A Naturalist in Florida, A Celebration of Eden*, edited by his redoubtable wife, Marjorie Harris Carr, and published posthumously in 1994.

In the ensuing decades Parson and Mimi passed away and the family dispersed throughout Florida, the U. S., and the world to pursue their careers. The cabin was not used and eventually fell into disrepair and the level of Lake Nicotoon fell dramatically, In the 1990s private homes were built just outside the Ocala National Forest within eyesight of the cabin through the trees; its original seclusion was a thing of the past.

Without maintenance the cabin might have collapsed and just disappeared completely into the forest floor, ending its existence. But the actions of Tom Carr, some local Umatillians, the U.S. Forest Service, and other stakeholders gave way to a new chapter in its life.

Tom Carr was the remaining heir to Parson’s estate, Archie having passed away in 1987. In the early 2000s, retired and living in Gainesville, he pondered the fate of the cabin and the land on which it sat. He conceived the notion of simply giving the cabin and the land on which it sat to the US Forest Service for incorporation into the Ocala National Forest which it abutted. This set off a year-long series of meetings and brainstorming sessions between the Forest Service, the Carr’s, and scientists and conservations. They determined how the transfer could be accomplished, what regulations would apply for being on federal land, and how the cabin might be used. The result was that the ONF would accept ownership and use it as an interpretive destination for the public if partnerships could be developed to raise funds, restore the cabin, provide transportation and access for tours, and promote such usages.



*The rafters are new, but most of other structural pieces were salvaged from the original.*

About the same time, a curious group of history-minded folk in Umatilla were working to highlight and promote the city, its citizens, and their accomplishments. A Umatilla resident named Dr. Evelyn Seabee, nee Collins and known locally as “Sis,” the great granddaughter of Umatilla’s founding father, Nathan Trowell, had founded the Umatilla Historical Society. The Society arranged for the conversion of the old, no longer used Umatilla School building to become the Umatilla Museum of History. The Society attracted many members, including Mrs. Helen Scott. High among its interests were Parson Carr and Mimi and their famous and accomplished descendants. The museum currently displays many exhibits of the Carr’s and the family cabin.



*Even the original front porch was restored.*

The interests of the Society members coincided with those who had formulated the ongoing life of the cabin and they formed a non-profit organization called Friends of the Carr Cabin, or FOCC, to work as one of the partners. The first president of FOCC was Lowell Collins, brother of Sis Seabee. He was succeeded by Dalton Yancey, a fourth generation Floridian and citrus grower, whose family hunting and fishing camp shared Lake Nicotoon and the surrounding forest with the Carr’s, and who were personal friends of Tom and Archie. An eight-member board of directors for FOCC was formed including Archie Carr the third, Tom’s granddaughter Susan Carr and five distinguished biology educators, writers, and

influencers.

With its broad outreach into many different environmental and conservationist communities, FOCC was able to raise money for the cabin’s restoration. It helped establish some of the needed partnerships. One of these not mentioned earlier was between Archie the third, his brother Tommie, the Forest Service, and a local Boy Scout going for his Eagle badge to create a nature trail showing where Archie and Tom had walked as young men. And very importantly, when it established an online page, FOCC became the public face of the Carr Family Cabin. Starting in 2008, the Forest Service started conducting tours to the Carr Cabin from its booth at the Umatilla Bear Festival, later renamed as the Wildlife Festival. Other entities have also conducted tours as late as 2016.

Today, the landscape has changed once more in the life of the cabin. The COVID 19 pandemic has taken its toll on the entire country in many ways. The Umatilla Wildlife Festival was discontinued for several years. The Forest Service has had to change its priorities and activities in accordance with reductions in both staff and funding. The original board members of FOCC aged, some can no longer be as active; some have died.

In 2023, Dalton Yancey handed the FOCC presidency to Mike Cross, who inherited his interest in history from his mother, Helen Scott. In preparing for this article I asked Mike to take me out to the cabin. We hiked on a rough trail where the old half-mile road in had been, now completely overgrown. The cabin is no longer accessible by vehicle, and the hike was a challenge (but that’s another story). The cabin still stands sturdy, but there is work to be done on site, such as making the road once more passable, blazing the nature trail, fence repair, etc. New partnerships need to be formed to fund and carry out this work.

Today with ever more development in Florida and the rise of digital media, our lives and the ways we recreate have changed. The need to interact with nature has never been greater. Of course, the lifestyle of the Carr family of eighty and ninety years ago cannot be recreated, but an understanding of how they grew and what they observed could set an example for us. As Forest Service Archeologist Ray Willis said, “I just can’t get over the fact that from this little tiny cabin out in the middle of the forest, in the middle of nowhere, two young men developed into world class, world famous minds and intellects”

To find out more and possibly to get involved, Google on Friends of the Carr Cabin. Their site contains two inspiring short videos about the award-winning cabin restoration, narrated by Archie’s granddaughter Mimi. It also contains news of the cabin being placed on the National Registry of Historic Places, many eloquent quotes, links to other resources, forms for donating, and much more information.

For sheer enjoyment and a fuller appreciation of our natural world, check out Archie Carr’s masterpiece book, *A Naturalist in Florida, A Celebration of Eden*. Get a taste of what it felt like to be a scientist and a good old boy!

*Anthony Ehrlich is a past president of the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway entity who currently serves on its board. He enjoys writing articles for this newsletter. In addition, he is a poet and photographer who lives on the FBBSB in Barberville. He took all the pictures for this article except for the black and white photo of Parson and Mimi Carr and that of the restored cabin, both by unknown photographers. The U.S. National Forest Service managing the ONF is a partner of the FBBSB entity.*

### **NOTE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN...Jim Thorsen**

We wish all of you a very Happy and Healthy New Year! Yes, 2025 went very fast and we are beginning another year with planning activities along the Florida Black Bear Byway. First, some Florida Black Bear facts for January.

Current populations in Florida are approximately 4050 bears. This is far from the population that we had in the 1800’s. During the winter period, they are in a state of torpor or quiet period. They eat very little and may come out on sunny afternoon days to graze. If seen, they appear “drunk”, but they retrieve to their den quietly. What a great life!

There are two key adventurous engagements that we are participating and planning for 2026:

\* The Umatilla Bear Festival on January 31, 2026 in Cadwell Park. This will be a one-day fun event with vendors, displays and exhibits. We will have our Scenic Byway tent with lots of information and FL Black Bear stories! We also will be giving tours out to the Byway at 1130 am and 2:30 pm to observe nature and to show the recreational sites on the Byway. We invite you to attend and enjoy a day of fun.

\* We also will have a “Kids Fishing Day” along the Byway at a pond at Essex Restaurant on April 11 th . More information on this will come later.

As you travel along State Road 40, you may see caution signs that may “flash” when wildlife is detected near the roadway. This is a project that FDOT has funded that is known as “Animal and Low Visibility Warning System” which aims to reduce risks and improve travel conditions in this critical corridor. We are proud to announce this new valuable feature to protect drivers along the Byway and the wildlife. This is technology at our best and hopefully road kills will be reduced!



Jim Thorsen, Chair [thor1505@aol.com](mailto:thor1505@aol.com)



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**Board Meetings:** Our next Board Meeting on January 13 (Tuesday) @ 2pm at The Greater Umatilla Museum, **299 N. Trowell Avenue, Umatilla 32784**. This will be our Annual Meeting in accordance to our Bylaws for the election of new directors or re-election of directors and

Board members. Visitors are welcome. Attending a board meeting is a great way to learn more about the byway. Please let us know if you plan to attend. [tomrose43@gmail.com](mailto:tomrose43@gmail.com)

*Our Mission: To enhance, encourage and promote the preservation and protection of the outstanding natural, ecological, cultural and historical resources of the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway for its residents, inhabitants, visitors and future generations.*

**Officers:** Jim Thorsen, Chairman - Kristee Booth, Vice Chair - Nikki Thorsen, Secretary. **Board of Directors:** Tony Ehrlich, Georgia Turner, Mike Cross, Janet Lewis, Jessica Meinhofer, Carlee McKinney, Tom Rose

**Editor:** Tom Rose ..... **Contact:** [tomrose43@gmail.com](mailto:tomrose43@gmail.com). Your letters, comments, suggestions and submissions are encouraged and welcome.