



LEVY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

397 E. Hathaway Avenue • Bronson, Florida 32621

1st Annual 1800s Pioneer Festival Report

The first annual 1800s Pioneer Festival, held on October 18, 2025, was a resounding success and proceeded without incident. The Levy County Historical Society funded hands-on educational supplies, including a children's butter-making activity, which proved to be especially popular and engaging.

Festival attendees experienced a wide range of living-history demonstrations and interactive exhibits. These included Florida Cracker cowboy camp, a Seminole trade camp, and a working blacksmith forge. Traditional spinning demonstrations and 19th-century children's games presented by the Order of the Confederate Rose were a particular hit. Historical artifacts displayed by both the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the Sons of Union Veterans provided meaningful opportunities for learning and dialogue.

Additional highlights included a genealogy research tent hosted by FamilySearch, numerous local food vendors, and an exhibit featuring the H.L. Hunley, further enriching the educational value and regional appeal of the event.

Looking ahead, the Board of Directors has approved October 17, 2026, as the date for the next 1800s Pioneer Festival, and planning is underway to build upon the success of our inaugural event.



*Levy County
Historical Society, Inc.*

397 E. Hathaway Avenue
Bronson, FL 32621

Preserving the Past ~ Enriching the Future

1800s Pioneer Florida History Festival

Saturday, October 18, 2025

9:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Downtown Bronson - Behind the Historical Society

Special Attraction:

A half-scale model of the H.L. Hunley - our nation's first submersible submarine - will be on site for viewing!



**BUTTER MAKING
LESSONS!
TO TAKE HOME FOR KIDS
FREE OF CHARGE!**

Calling Vendors, Artisans, Food Trucks & Re-enactors!
Join us for a fun, educational day celebrating Florida's Rich 19th-century frontier heritage!

*Showcase traditional crafts & heritage goods

*Offer local foods & unique treats

*Bring history alive with reenactments

*Engage with history lovers of all ages



**RAFFLE FOR A
HANDMADE QUILT!**

Be part of history - bring your craft, your passion, and your stories to life!

Vendor Fee: By Donation (All proceeds support Levy County Historical Society programs)
Set-Up Time: 7:00 AM – 8:30 AM

Spaces are limited! Reserve your spot by October 1st



352-441-5497



LevyCountyHistory1845@gmail.com

SUCCESSFULLY IN THE BOOKS!

Thank you to everyone who made our 2025 Pioneer Florida History Festival a success!

We'll see you again October 17, 2026!

PIONEER FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS



Butter Making Station

Children learned how butter was made before modern conveniences. One of the most popular activities of the day.



Order of the Confederate Rose – Preserving Domestic Traditions

Members of the Order of the Confederate Rose shared displays of nineteenth-century toys, household items, and traditional crafts, offering visitors a glimpse into the everyday lives, pastimes, and creativity of families during the Civil War era.



Spinning Demonstration – Preserving Traditional Crafts

Children and adults alike were captivated by a spinning wheel demonstration that illustrated how families transformed raw fibers into yarn and cloth, an essential skill for everyday life in nineteenth-century America.



Blacksmith's Anvil

Blacksmithing demonstration gave visitors a close look at 19th century metalworking techniques in action.



Sons of Union Veterans Exhibit

Members of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War engaged festival guests in conversations about military artifacts, soldier life, and the experiences of Union troops, helping bring an important chapter of American history to life through living-history interpretation.



Civil War Field Cannon Exhibit

Visitors viewed a nineteenth-century field cannon representative of the artillery used during the Civil War, providing insight into the military technology and battlefield tactics of the era.



H.L. Hunley Replica – A Southern Innovation in Naval History

Visitors examined a replica of the H.L. Hunley, a Confederate submarine developed in the South during the Civil War that made history in 1864 as the first submarine to successfully sink an enemy warship in combat. Built in Mobile, Alabama, and later deployed from Charleston, South Carolina, the Hunley represented a remarkable engineering achievement for its time. Though its combat career was brief, the vessel demonstrated the potential of underwater warfare and marked an important milestone in naval innovation. Today, the Hunley remains one of the most significant technological developments of the Civil War era and a lasting example of Southern ingenuity and nineteenth-century engineering.



Florida Cracker Cowboy Camp

Living history interpreter recreated life in Florida's cattle and ranching culture.



Seminole Trade Camp

Re-enactors brought Florida's frontier past to life through demonstrations of camp life, trade goods, and traditional crafts during the 2025 Pioneer Festival.

A Rare View of Early Commerce: The Mysterious E. Kelley Saloon Trade Token

The Levy County Historical Society recently acquired a trade token from a full-service saloon operated under the name E. Kelley, offering a glimpse into commercial life in Levy County’s lumber and industrial camps during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such tokens were commonly used as advertising, small-denomination currency, or store credit in remote settlements.

Saloons were central to company towns, providing drinks, meals, cigars, gambling, and bathing facilities, and serving as informal social and business hubs. Records indicate that E. Kelley’s saloon last operated in the sawmill camp at Bee Tree Ford, near present-day Henry Beck Park, supporting timber cutters, mill hands, and teamsters in this bustling but temporary settlement.

Research has brought to light several spellings of “E. Kelly” and “E. Kelley” as well as the name Mrs. Elaine Kelley, which may have been an assumed or business name. The absence of a clear match in U.S. census records supports this possibility, as the use of aliases or business names was not uncommon during the period. Limited evidence shows establishments using the E. Kelley name appearing in several short-lived industrial towns, suggesting the operator may have been contracted to provide saloon services rather than remaining permanently in one location.

Although little is known with certainty about E. Kelley herself, the trade token provides direct evidence of the business and its role in Levy County’s early industrial landscape. The Society is pleased to add this artifact to its collection as part of its ongoing effort to document and interpret the county’s working past.



GOOD FOR 5¢. Kelley Token



Reverse Side: E. Kelley

★ Special Thank You to Our Sponsors, Judges & Supporters ★

The Levy County Historical Society extends its sincere appreciation to everyone who helped make our 2025 Pioneer Festival and Chili Cook-Off a tremendous success. From sponsors and vendors to volunteers, reenactors, demonstrators, judges, and festival attendees, your enthusiasm and support helped bring Florida's frontier heritage to life while strengthening our mission to preserve and share Levy County's history.

We are especially grateful to the individuals who graciously served as judges:

- Bruce Greenlee, Mayor of Bronson
- Laurence Vorisek, Mayor of Yankeetown
- Charlie Kennedy, Vice Chair, Levy County Commission
- Bobby Williams (R), Candidate for Governor
- Dr. Frank Collige (R), Candidate for Florida Chief Financial Officer

And many others who generously donated their time, talents, and support. The Pioneer Festival and Chili Cook-Off was more than just an event—it was a celebration of community, history, fellowship, and the traditions that connect generations. Thank you for helping us preserve the past and enrich the future.

From the Archives Desk — Bronson Year Books

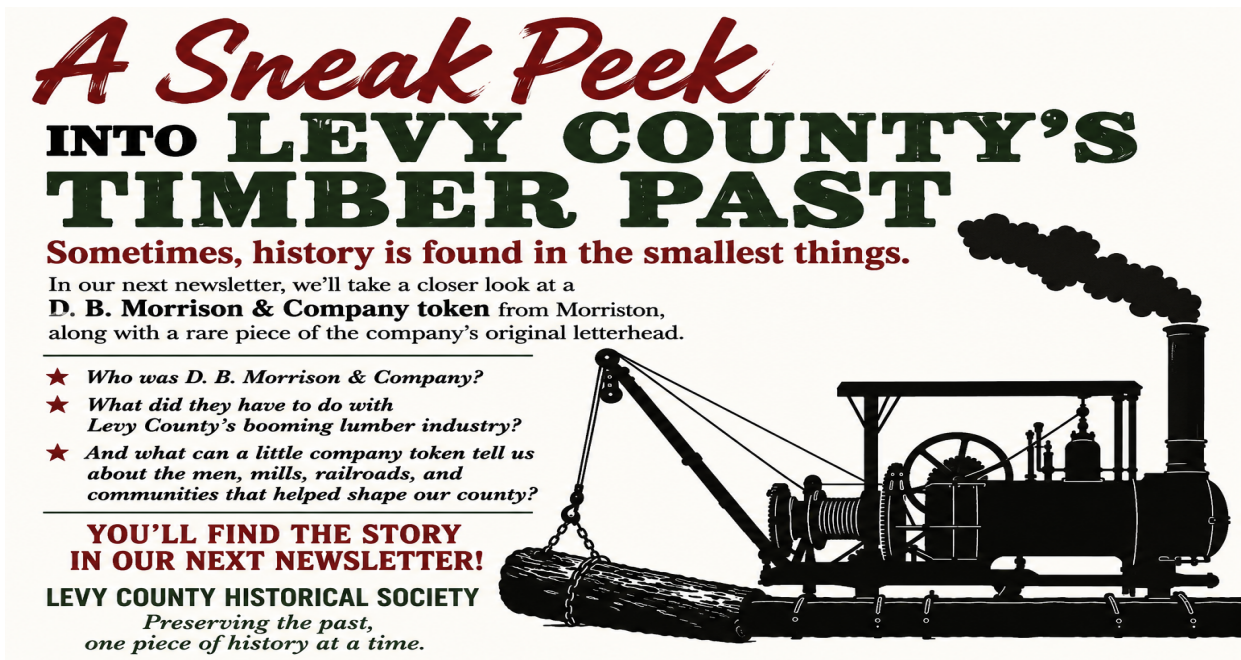
A special thank you to Cameron Asbell for the generous donation of the Bronson Yearbook Collection. This valuable addition to our archives helps preserve local history and provides an important resource for researchers, students, and the community.

We are grateful for Cameron’s support and commitment to safeguarding Levy County’s past.

Fill-A-Bag-of-Books-for-a-Donation Corner

On January 16, 2026, we received a truckload of donated books for our Fill-A-Bag-of-Books program! The new arrivals include a wide variety of titles from novels and history to children’s and teen books, popular authors such as James Patterson, a few westerns, and even several Bibles.

We invite everyone to stop by, browse, and enjoy the new selections while supporting the Society through this popular fundraising effort. A special thank you goes to Mr. Bob and Frances Campbell for delivering this generous donation and for all they do in support of the Levy County Historical Society.



Levy County Stagecoach History

Our history lesson begins in the territorial town of Sodom in 1844, located in what would soon become Levy County. The community experienced something of an identity crisis over the years. In 1852, the name was changed to Mount Pleasant, and in 1856 it was renamed again as Levyville. Levyville served as the county seat for several years. However, by 1870, the seat of government moved to Bronson, then known as Chunky Pond, largely because developing transportation routes and later rail connections made Bronson a more central and practical location.

As Florida prepared for statehood in the late 1830s, which came on March 3, 1845, the United States Mail began organizing transportation routes across the region. Contracts were issued for stage line mail service, establishing regular overland routes that carried mail, passengers, and small freight between inland settlements and coastal ports.

These early stage routes linked communities such as Levyville, Chunky Pond, Long Pond, Daniel, and the Gulf port of Atsena Otie, helping connect the sparsely settled interior of Levy County with the outside world. Travelers, merchants, and government dispatches all relied on these stage lines during the years before railroads reached the Gulf Coast.

For a time in the mid-1800s, the rattle of four-horse Concord coaches and the arrival of the U.S. Mail stage were familiar sights along the sandy wagon roads of Levy County.

Four known routes were established under the name Florida Stage Line. Two of these we will discuss in detail, as much of the information about the other two routes has been lost to history.

The first route ran from Chunky Pond (Bronson) to Sodom (Levyville), then on to Long Pond, Daniel, and finally to Atsena Otie (modern-day Cedar Key).

Long Pond served as an important transfer point for travelers and mail heading north. From there, connections were made to Fort Fanning, Fort Jennings (Clay Landing), and Hardeetown, the settlement that would later become Chiefland, which was not incorporated until 1913.

Along the road between Bronson and Cedar Key, there was at least one known stage stand "Daniel", where horses could be changed and repairs made, passengers could rest, enjoy a hot meal waiting for them, use the outhouse (the alternative was a chamber pot carried on the route, as stops were rare), and transfer the mail before continuing the journey.

The second route ran from Newnansville (present-day Alachua) to Fort Wacahoota with stops between, then to Stafford’s Pond, with a stage stand on the southeastern side of modern-day Morriston. This stand is notable for its stage cemetery. If someone died along the route, they would be buried at the stage stand or the next town. The next of kin would be notified, and a headstone delivered later if the family desired.

This stage stand also served as a southwestern change-out point for routes to Brooksville, Black Dirt, Fort Clinch, and all other points south and west, before heading to Fort King (Ocala).

Hopefully this journey into early Levy County transportation hasn’t overloaded anyone’s mind and helps provide the context many have asked for in the recent discussion of a stagecoach stand by our county government. Considerable research went into this article to present the information as accurately as possible, relying on documented sources rather than speculation or historical revision. We were fortunate to find a detailed description of an original 1850s Florida Stage Line advertisement, which served as the inspiration for the recreated illustration accompanying this article, "on display at our Headquarters in Bronson stop by and see this unique verbal description brought back to life more than 150 years later."

Become a Sponsor of the 2026 Pioneer Florida History Festival

The Levy County Historical Society invites local businesses, organizations, and community supporters to become sponsors of our 1800s Pioneer Florida History Festival on Saturday, October 17, 2026, in downtown Bronson.

This family-friendly event celebrates Florida's rich frontier heritage through living history demonstrations, traditional crafts, reenactors, exhibits, artisans, music, and educational activities for all ages.

Sponsorship opportunities help preserve and share the history of Levy County while providing valuable community recognition. Sponsors will be acknowledged in festival promotions, social media, event materials, and throughout the festival grounds.

Your support allows us to continue offering engaging educational programs, preserving historical artifacts, and inspiring future generations to appreciate the stories and traditions that shaped our community. Join us in preserving the past and enriching the future. Become a sponsor and help bring history to life!

For sponsorship information, contact the Levy County Historical Society at 352-441-5497 or LevyCountyHistory1845@gmail.com.



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PRESERVING THE PAST ~ ENRICHING THE FUTURE

1800s PIONEER FLORIDA HISTORY FESTIVAL

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2026

★ 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM ★

 **DOWNTOWN BRONSON**
Behind the Historical Society

CALLING ALL VENDORS!!!

Calling Vendors, Artisans, Food Trucks & Re-enactors!
Join us for a fun, educational day celebrating Florida's Rich 19th-century frontier heritage!



SHOWCASE
TRADITIONAL CRAFTS & HERITAGE GOODS



OFFER LOCAL
FOODS & UNIQUE TREATS



BRING HISTORY
ALIVE WITH REENACTMENTS



ENGAGE WITH
HISTORY LOVERS OF ALL AGES



JOIN US FOR
A FUN, EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE!

VENDOR INFORMATION

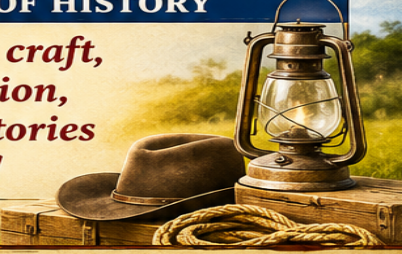
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★ **SPACES ARE LIMITED! RESERVE YOUR SPOT BY OCTOBER 1ST** ★

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Bronson, FL 32621

PLACE
STAMP
HERE

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____
Email _____

MEMBERSHIP TYPE (Check One)

☐ Individual \$25
☐ Student \$10
☐ Family \$35
☐ Business Friend \$100
☐ Life Membership \$1,000

AMOUNT ENCLOSED \$ _____

Make checks payable to:
Levy County Historical Society
397 E. Hathaway Avenue
Bronson, FL 32621

Thank you for helping preserve
Levy County's history for future generations!