DeSoto County, Florida: Welcome to Historic Arcadia!
A leisurely stroll through time . . .

Settlement in the Arcadia area began in the mid-1850s as southwest Florida endured the Third Seminole War followed by the U.S. Civil War. Known first as Waldron’s Landing, Raulerson’s Landing, and “Tater Hill Bluff,” Arcadia was established as a post office in 1883; incorporated as a town in 1886 (nine months after the arrival of the first train); became the county seat in 1888; and was reincorporated as a city in 1901. (According to legend, the town was named for Arcadia Albritton Coker in gratitude for a birthday cake she baked.) Citrus cultivation and truck farms were early—and enduring—industries. During the “range wars” or “cattle wars” of the late 19th century, Arcadia was as wild as any frontier town. Following the devastating fire of 1905, Arcadia decreed only brick or block structures downtown.

Arcadia prospered through the teens and twenties: two railroads, the Dixie Highway (western route), a Tourist Camp, and the All-Florida Chautauqua Amphitheatre were built, and the first rodeo was held. During World War I, two U.S. Army Air Fields were established for training pilots, so Arcadia called itself “Aviation City.” They were rebuilt prior to World War II and initiated the city’s renewal following the Great Depression and its rapid growth in the late 20th century. In 1984, more than 370 historic homes and businesses were placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1985, the Florida Main Street program revitalized downtown when many shops began selling antiques. Arcadia was again in the Main Street Program after the disastrous hurricanes of 2004, including a direct strike from Hurricane Charley. The DeSoto County Historical Society was founded during the centennial celebrations for Arcadia and DeSoto County in 1986-1987. More details and structures are available in the Walking Tour of Historic Arcadia, Florida booklet on sale in shops and from the Society.

The DeSoto County Historical Society’s Annual Pioneer Day and BBQ Rib Cook-off is the 3rd Saturday in March. The festival features traditional Florida food and BBQ, demonstrations of old-time skills and crafts, legendary characters, live music, antique engines, vintage cars, hands-on children’s area, fossil-dig, and more. P.O. Box 1824, Arcadia, FL 34265 - www.historicdesoto.org

Arcadia’s “Mediterranean Revival” City Hall was built in 1926. Photograph courtesy of the DeSoto County Historical Society.

1. Tree of Knowledge
2. Railroad Depot, 4 W. Oak
3. Carlton Building, 2-8 W. Oak
4. Seward Stores, 10-14 W. Oak
5. Daniel/Houston Buildings, 30-32 W. Oak
6. First National Bank, 34 W. Oak
7. Owen Parker Building, 15 W. Oak
8. Morgan Building, 20 W. Oak
9. E.T. Smith Furniture, 35 W. Oak
10. Wey-Green Drugstores, 35-37 W. Oak
11. Heard Opera House, 102-108 W. Oak
12. Esplenahub Meat Market, 110 W. Oak
13. Rosin Arcade, 101-117 W. Oak
14. Morqus Block, 212-131 W. Oak
15. Arcadia Garage, 120 W. Oak
16. Gore Buildings, 128-134 W. Oak
17. IOOF/WOW Building, 202 W. Oak
18. Schlossberg Block, 203-221 W. Oak
19. City Hall, 212 N. Monroe Ave.
20. First Baptist Church, 27 N. Polk Ave.
22. Margaret Way Building
23. The Howard and Velma Melton Historical Research Library in the Ingraham Seed House 120 W. Whidden
24. John Morgan Ingraham House, 300 N. Monroe Avenue
Self-Guided Historic Tour

1. Tree of Knowledge, now a City of Arcadia Park, was so named because of the frequent “campaign oratory” beneath its boughs. In 1889, two trees were planted to honor two births, but the trees died in the early 1930s. A new oak was dedicated in 1938.

2. Railroad Depot, 4 W. Oak - Built by the Atlantic Coast Line in 1911, this train station replaced the original wood-frame depot built by the Florida Southern Railway in 1886, and later used by the Henry Plant System. Lee Stevenson rehabilitated the depot in 1988.

3. Daniel T. Carlton Building, 2-8 W. Oak, circa 1904, is one of 3 structures that survived the 1905 fire. Simon Rosin opened the Boston Store downstairs. Later, Miss Gertrude’s dress shop was downstairs. Many businesses rented the offices upstairs, including attorneys, milliners, and the DeSoto County Health Department.

4. W. H. Seward Stores, 10-14 W. Oak, built in 1900, was one of 3 buildings to survive the 1905 fire. Seward sold dry goods, hay and grain—with a livery stable in the rear. He built the shop to the west to sell clothing.

5. Daniel/Houstoun Buildings, 30-32 W. Oak, were built the year following the fire and proudly proclaimed the date “1906” in their facades. W. E. Daniels was a pioneer grocer—both retail and wholesale in Arcadia, and Houstoun lived in Arcadia only briefly.

6. First National Bank, 34 W. Oak, built in 1905, was one of 3 structures that survived the 1905 fire. The bank has been remodeled several times.

7. Owen Parker Building, 15 W. Oak, built in 1906, was the location of the Harry Cross Drugstore and later McCrory’s 5 & 10 Store downstairs. The upstairs offices are now a private residence.

8. Morgan Building, 20 W. Oak, was the first rebuilt after the November 30, 1905 fire. L. L. Morgan sold hardware and furniture downstairs and did undertaking on the 3rd floor—as did his competitor, E. T. Smith.

9. E. T. Smith Store, 35 W. Oak, was built in 1912 as noted in the tile foyer.

10. Weyer Green Drugstores, 25-31 W. Oak, built in 1906, by Dr. Edwin Greene and his son-in-law Jake Wey; later, Mercer’s Store sold men’s and women’s clothing.

11. Heard Opera House, 102-108 W. Oak, 1906. J. J. Heard opened his Florida Loan and Trust Company downstairs, followed by Dozier’s Department Store, which added their name in tile in the foyer floor. Later, Eaton’s Department Store opened.

12. W. F. Esplanalub Meat Market, 110 W. Oak, built in 1906, had the first refrigerator in DeSoto County.

13. Rosin Arcade, 101-117 W. Oak, 1907. Simon Rosin signed a 10-year lease with the post office for the arcade’s south half and opened the Boston Store in the north half. Later, it was Koch’s Drugstore and Soda Fountain. Len Hazen restored the flamboyant-style structure in 1989.

14. Morqus Block, 212-131 W. Oak, 1906. Friedman Morqus sold clothing, buggies, saddles, whips, harnesses, shoes—with repair shops—and jewelry. Merchandise was probably arranged in departments oriented to the five identical entrances.

15. Arcadia Garage, 120 W. Oak, 1910. J. C. Hickman built the one-story Arcadia Garage, home of the town’s first Cadillac dealership. In the 1920s, with the addition of a second floor, it became the Florida Trust and Banking Company.

16. Gore and Scott Buildings, 128-134 W. Oak, 1906. The 1905 fire began in the stable behind the Gore store. Afterwards, he rebuilt both structures. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Woman’s Club Library was located in the upstairs of the corner building.

17. IOOF/WOW Building, 202 W. Oak, 1914. Two fraternal organizations—Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) and the Woodmen of the World (WOW)—bought this three-story structure. Later, it was the Gordon Hotel, the Southland Hotel, the Elks Club, and finally apartments.

18. Schlossberg Block, 201-221 W. Oak, 1923. Michael Schlossberg designed this commercial block for the store that he founded in 1913. He started the first five-and-ten-cent store in Arcadia which operated for over 60 years, finally becoming a ladies dress shop known as Schlossberg’s.

19. Arcadia City Hall, 212 N. Monroe Avenue, 1926, was built in the Mediterranean Revival-style popular during the 1920’s building “boom”.

20. First Baptist Church, 27 N. Polk Ave., The congregation was organized in 1889, and the first wood-frame sanctuary, built in 1897, was moved to Elizabeth Missionary Baptist Church on Orange Ave. (It was demolished in 1987.) In 1977, the original stained glass windows were removed from this Romesque Revival church, for a new sanctuary on N. Brevard Avenue.

21. U.S. Post Office, 109 N. Polk Ave., was built in 1937 as a WPA project, with a basement. “Arcadia”—a frieze by WPA-Artist Constance Ortmary—hangs in the lobby.

22. Margaret Way Building, 23 N. Polk Ave., 1925, Harley Watson built this structure for his Ford dealership; later, he donated it to the church next door. The City purchased it and uses it now as “City Hall.”

23. John Morgan Ingraham House Museum, 300 N. Monroe Ave., circa 1890. Built by Robert E. Whidden, the home has high ceilings, cross-ventilation, and porches used as hallways to keep it cool. John Morgan Ingraham— who served two terms in Florida’s House of Representatives—bought the home in 1919 and lived there until his death in 1980. The Historical Society opens this museum from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Thursdays, (except second Thursday) 2nd and 4th Saturdays.

24. The Howard and Velma Melton Historical Research Library in the Ingraham Seed House, 120 W. Whidden. John Morgan Ingraham opened a Seed House downtown and later built a structure for it beside his home. The Historical Society operates their library in this replica: open 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Thursdays, except the 2nd Thursday of the month, plus 2nd and 4th Saturdays, and by appointment.