On Sunday morning, March 15, 1964, many residents of Apalachicola were arriving for the morning’s services at the various churches around town. As people greeted one another before going inside, they were startled to hear the roar of two deep blue jets approaching the airport west of town. A load crash signaled that one of them had not made the runway. It was a Blue Angel jet from Pensacola, returning from an air show in West Palm Beach. An engine malfunction had crippled his plane and he attempted to glide in to the Apalachicola airport, only to crash short of the runway, killing the pilot.

Lt. George N. Neale, 29, from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, had been a naval aviator since 1955. He joined the Blue Angels in 1962 and flew in the number 4 position on the world famous flight team. That morning at 9:38 the six members of the team took off from Palm Beach International Airport in their F-11A Grumman Tigers. Climbing to 22,500’ they headed northwest towards Pensacola and home. The flight was expected to take one hour and ten minutes.

Some ways into the flight Lt. Neale’s plane began to lag behind the others. He notified the leader that he was experiencing engine vibrations and was going to divert. He was advised to go to Tyndall Air Force Base, and Lt. Frank Mizzadri, flying in the number 5 position was detailed to escort Lt. Neale down.

Experiencing severe vibrations and an engine temperature of 1000 degrees, Lt. Neale shut down his engine. He switched to manual fuel control, but when he attempted to relight the engine the same problems persisted. Once again he shut down his engine. By this time he was flying at 22,000 feet. Sighting an airport, he was advised by the Tyndall control tower that it was the Apalachicola airport. Lt. Neale decided to try landing there.

His jet was rapidly loosing altitude as
Lt. Neale lined up along runway 23 for a landing. Lt. Mizzadri was flying about 500 feet to his right, slightly behind and above him. As his unpowered plane continued to drop he saw he was not going to make the runway. He ejected at an altitude of 150 feet.

Linda Glass, a freshman at Chapman High School, was sitting on her grandmother’s front porch reading when she heard the planes approaching. Looking up she saw the canopy fly off and the pilot eject. Lt. Neale’s ejection seat had enough force to throw him clear of the plane, but it was an older seat design and did not have enough force to throw him high enough. Before his parachute could fully deploy he hit the ground on the north side of Bluff Road, landing in the roadside ditch in front of Bud Wesson’s house. His plane hit the ground just to the south side of the road, gauging a 26-feet long hole and missing an unoccupied house by about 50 feet. The wreckage sheared off a fifty-foot pine tree about two feet above the ground as it broke apart. The area was sprayed with jet fuel from the aircraft, but the debris did not catch on fire.

W. H. Meadows, who lived 200 yards from the crash site, witnessed the crash with his son, Billy. They ran to assist, as did Linda Glass. Lt. Neale was still breathing when they reached him, but he only survived a few minutes before he died from his injuries.

Cleve Randolph, the airport manager, had noticed the plane in distress and called Tyndall. They acknowledged they had received a “May Day” call from the Navy pilot and dispatched an ambulance to assist.

Lt. Mizzadri circled over the town to attract attention and then landed at the airport. The cargo plane carrying the Blue Angels ground crew and equipment also landed at the airport to provide what assistance they could. Soon the military had the crash site cordoned off and prevented the taking of pictures, but not before the Tallahassee Democrat had snapped a picture for its Monday edition.

The Navy investigated the accident and determined the cause of the engine vibration to be a failed main bearing support assembly. Lt. Neale was faulted, however, for not following proper procedure and ejecting from the plane above 10,000 feet when he was unable to restart his engine.

Lt. Neale was survived by his wife, Donna, and his mother, Katherine Neale.

The crash site is at the curve of Bluff Road in front of Charles Thompson’s house.

You are invited to join the Apalachicola Area Historical Society. Dues are $10 per year. Fill out the information to the right, make your check payable to “Apalachicola Area Historical Society” and mail to P. O. Box 75, Apalachicola, Florida 32329.

Name: ______________________________
Address: ____________________________
____________________________________
Town: ______________________________
State: _________________ Zip: ____________
The following letter was taken from the McLean-Gillis Family Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. Duncan Gillis McLeod, the author of this letter, was from the Euchee Valley in east central Walton County. He was born in 1839. During the Civil War he served as a private in Company H, 6th Florida Infantry Regiment. After the war he was the Clerk of the Circuit Courts and a judge in Walton County.

The steamboat mentioned in the letter, the J. Jenkins, was built in Elizabeth, Pennsylvania in 1852 for service on the Apalachicola River. It was abandoned in 1859.

Although D. G. McLeod states that a gale destroyed the Presbyterian church building the previous August, the storm that blew down the sanctuary struck Apalachicola in August 1851. It was one of the worst storms to ever strike the town, destroying many buildings. Every building along Water Street was either destroyed or damaged.

The spelling and punctuation of the original letter is preserved.

January 30th, 1853
Apalachicola, Fla.

Mr. Daniel Gillis,

My Dear Uncle,

I now seat myself to redeem the promise I made to you, the day you so kindly accompanied us to the ferry. You said you wished me to give you a minute account of everything of importance which occurred to us while we were coming here, a description of the place, and our prospects for getting a long while we remained here &c. In the first place however, I will inform you that we have both enjoyed excellent health since our arrival. The first day we traveled as far as Norman Campbell’s, 18 miles from your place, Thursday the next day we journeyed 25 miles and put up with a very fine and sociable person by the name of Underwood who resides two mile on this side of Hickory Hill and were charged 50 cts a next morning, the next day Friday we traveled 25 miles and put up with a man by name of Dykes who live 6 miles on this side of Marianna, and were charged 25 cts apiece. Saturday we traveled 18 miles and arrived at Ochesee; where we expected to get on board the mail packet the next day, but she passed in the night and did not call for the mail, having cotton enough to enable her to pay the fine, which is 50 dollars, and have a handsome freight left besides &c. Ochesee is situated on the river side and owned by a gentleman by the name of Gregory, it is a place of little importance, composed of a steamboat landing, a very fine hotel, saw and grist mill, ware house, cotton gin. large plantation &c. Well! we arrived at Ochesee Saturday evening where to our great pleasure we met Mr. Edge, waiting to get to Apalachicola by the mail packet, but as I stated before it passed by without calling; and although we hailed several other steamboats, we did not succeed in getting on board of one until Tuesday morning; so we were detained at Ochesee two days and three nights. We were accommodated as well as we could wish and fared sumptuously while we remained and charged very reasonably (2 ¼ dollars apiece). I had the pleasure of getting acquainted with two very kind and sociable young scotsmen at Ochesee, whose names were Daniel & Alexr. Furgesson. Daniel appeared to be 30 some old years of age Alexr. 21 or 22 years of age. Daniel was well acquainted with Uncle John in Barbour City, Ala. he also saw him in Pensacola. They are both employed at Gregory’s saw mill. Daniel being a mill wright by profession. Tuesday morning we got on board
the Steamer J. Jenkins, at 9 o’clock and arrived in Apalachicola in the evening of the same day at 6 o’clock, the 18th of Jan. traveling over 150 miles in 9 hours, so I assure you the way we glided along was near a bout a caution, to those who are accustomed to travel with mules and oxen. We took cabin passage; the cabin of this steamer was truly superb and magnificent, the ceilings hung round with tapestry, and the numerous rooms had pannel doors with glass knobs.

The fare on board was also the fattest & finest with coffee & tea. However we paid pretty dear for the whistle, being charged 4 dollars apiece for our ride. Upon our arrival Mr. Edge invited us to make his house our home until we got employment, which we very readily and gladly accepted. Mr. Edge procured a situation immediately the next morning for Cousin John in a tailor shop, where he still continues to work, he is not pleased very well with his situation as the tailor only paid him 7½ dollars for ten days work last night &c. Cousin John says he intends to look out for some other employment next week, but he will remain with the tailor until he does get in to some other business. Mr. Edge also spoke to several of the leading merchants for a situation for me, but as David Barclay said about Tallahassee, “There is no chance for a person from the west here,” as the merchants get their clerks as well as their goods from the north. Most of the merchants here that does much business reside at the North, and leave here in the fore part of the summer, and at the north they can procure poor boys who are educated in the free schools almost for their victuals and clothes. The first day Mr. Edge tried there was one merchant who appeared to be willing to employ a clerk, but the next day he said he had declined the notion. Mr. Edge then procured me a situation in the cotton press, at 20 dollars for the first month and after that my wages are to be increased, my occupation is sewing up the heads & patching cotton bales, it is very light easy work but very confining; we work 10 hour per day. I was two days here without employment, and worked eight. We are boarding with Mr. Edge at 8 dollars per month. Mr. Edge has rented a very comfortable house, buys his own provisions and employs a cook. The cook he employs now is a very good one, Old Mary formerly owned by Hugh McLean. She washed for us also, her price is ___ cts per dozen garments. We have very good fare fresh beef and pork, corn bread, sweet potatoes, ________do, turnips occasionally, butter, flour doings and so on. The society here is better than I anticipated, but lacks a great deal of coming up with the moral standard of Uchee Valley. I visited three churches last sabbath, the Methodist, Baptists, and Episcopalians, the Roman Catholics have a very fine church here also but I did not visit it, the Presbyterians had a very good church here, but it was blown down during the gale which prevailed last August, and has not been rebuilt yet. Dray men get 40 dollars per month here it is very laborious labor. The hands at the cotton presses from 20 to 35 dollars per month, there are four presses in town, and I believe all fully supplied with hands; there are 48 hands at the press where I work. Mechanics get from 2 to 3 dollars per day but I understand there are a good many mechanics waiting for employment and can’t obtain any. I expect if we keep our health we will remain here until the later part of April. Give my warmest love to Grand Mother, Aunt Nancy, and all my relations.

Your affectionate Nephew,

D. G. McLeod
THE NEW YORK STORE

This two-story frame building stood on the corner of Commerce Street and Chestnut Street in Apalachicola, the current vacant lot awaiting the construction of the new Apalachicola State Bank. At the time of this photograph, which was taken prior to 1897, the building housed J. W. Bush’s store, The New York Store. The building burned in the May 25, 1900 fire. At that time there were two stores located on the ground floor: Charles Lichtenfielt’s grocery store was in the western half of the building and Simon Ginsberg’s dry goods store was in the eastern half, adjacent to Commerce Street. The scene below shows the building, with a repainted façade, located across the street from the Sponge Exchange prior to the 1900 fire.
The following description of Franklin County is taken from Florida: A Pamphlet Descriptive of its History, Topography, Climate, Soil, Resources and Natural Advantages by A. A. Robinson, Commissioner of the State Bureau of Immigration, and published in Tallahassee, Florida by The Floridian Book and Job Office in 1882.

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**FRANKLIN COUNTY**

Area, 690 square miles, or 441,600 acres. Population in 1840, 1,030; in 1850, 1,561; in 1860, 1,904; in 1870, 1,256; in 1880, 1,791. Number of schools, 3; of school age, 610 white, 421; colored, 189; school attendance, 189. Acres of improved land, 136. Horses and mules, 29; cattle, 1,950; sheep, 264; hogs, 247. Assessed value of property, $247,182.

The territory of this county, except a small portion on the west side of the Apalachicola river, near its mouth, is embraced in the extensive grant made by the Indians in 1819 to Forbes & Co., an English trading house, and is known as a part of the “Forbes Purchase.”

Apalachicola, the county site, is at the mouth of the great river of that name. At present the lumber business is the leading industry. In ante-bellum times, and before the upper river country in Alabama and Georgia was intersected by railways, large quantities of cotton were brought by steamboats to this point and shipped thence to New York and New Orleans. It was then a flourishing place. When railroads turned the cotton bales to the eastward to be shipped from Atlantic ports, Apalachicola declined. Through the lumber business it is again entering into like and real estate again appreciating. The location of this little city by the sea is peculiarly healthful and pleasant. In the early spring the town is quite a resort for excursionists down the river on the commodious boats from points inland in Georgia and Alabama. Much of the old spirit of hearty hospitality hangs about the old town, and while some of its busy life has departed, its air is as fresh and bracing and its seaside features as attractive as ever. The milling business is on the increase, and will in time assume more considerable proportions. A brisk and profitable trade is also being done here in fish and oysters by boats up the river. Corn, salt and fertilizers are conveniently and cheaply introduced by vessels coming for lumber, and that would otherwise arrive in ballast. The spongers on the reefs, not far east of this place, find also at Apalachicola a convenient depot for supplies and the disposition of their catch.

Very little agriculture is pursued in this county. Immediately along the river banks are some very handsome orange groves that give promise of inducing more extended investments in that direction.

The *Tribune* is a weekly paper published at Apalachicola.

We are glad to submit herewith a paper furnished by Mr. O. H. Kelly, the founder and moving spirit of the new port of Rio Carrabelle, situated in this county, on James Island:

**ST. JAMES ISLAND**

This is one of the most attractive and important points on the Gulf coast. The island is formed by a tide-water bayou known as Crooked river, which connects with the Carrabelle river at the west end and the Ocklockonee river on the east. It is located about midway between St. Marks and Apalachicola.

The island is the highest elevation on the coast between Pensacola and Tampa, ranging from twenty to seventy feet above the Gulf level. It is twenty-one miles in length, and averages about four miles in width. On it are several fresh water lakes well stocked with fish. The soil comprises the usual variety of the coast, embracing shell

(Continued on page 7)
hammock, bay-gall and pine land.

At the west end of the island the town of Rio Carrabelle is rapidly building up, and becoming a milling point of importance. At this place is the well known Dog Island Harbor, claimed to be the best harbor on the Gulf coast. The entrance is by way of East Pass, through which ships drawing twenty feet readily enter and anchor in the harbor in twenty-four to twenty-seven feet of water, with mud bottom anchorage.

Tributary to this harbor are the Chattahoochee, Flint, Apalachicola, Carrabelle, Crooked, Ochlockonee and Sopchoppy rivers. From all of these streams both hewn and sawn timber is rafted or lightered to ships loading here, and thence transported to Northern and foreign ports. The immense pine forests on these rivers are a mine of wealth to support the town which must inevitably become the Gulf port of Middle Florida.

The soil on the mainland adjacent to the island is principally sandy, with a clay subsoil, and considered some of the most productive in the State. As yet the principal business is furnishing logs for the mills, and but few have given any attention to cultivating the soil; yet those who have are well rewarded for their labor, finding a ready home market for all their produce.

The best fisheries on the coast are on James Island and in the immediate vicinity.

Owing to the location, the summers here are made agreeable by the regular Gulf breezes, and the island has long been known and popular as a summer resort.

Being in the same latitude with St. Augustine the same crops can be produced that mature there.

Crossing the Ochlockonee river by a short ferry, land communication is had with Tallahassee in a distance from Carrabelle of forty-five miles. Steamboat communication has also been established with St. Marks as well as Apalachicola.

The population of Carrabelle at this time is between five and six hundred, most of whom have located here within the past two years.

St. Teresa, the Long Branch of Middle Florida, is a delightful summer resort on the eastern end of St. James Island, where the Tallahassee people in large numbers spend the summer months, leading a cottage life, with Gulf breezes and bathing.

This church was located on the west side of 12th Street, between Avenues F and G. It was destroyed by a tornado that struck Apalachicola on Thursday night, September 17, 1947. The Apalachicola Times reported in its September 19 edition that “The Pentecostal holiness church on 14th Street and Avenue G and a colored church opposite the jail on 12th Street were ruined beyond repair.”
APALACHICOLA AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

October 29, 2009—Beverly Mount-Douds will speak on her new book *Apalachicola*, which will be published by Arcadia Publishing as part of their Images of America series. This book will be available on November 2. The meeting will be held at Camellia Hall, located at 80 Fifth Street in Apalachicola, across the street from the First Methodist Church. The meeting begins at 5:30 p.m. After the speaker’s presentation there will be a brief business meeting for those members who wish to participate.

December 13, 2009—The 2009-2010 Ilse Newell Concert series will be launched with a performance of Handel’s Messiah by the Bay Area Choral Society under the direction of Merel Young. The concert will be held at Trinity Episcopal Church, 79 Sixth Street, Apalachicola.

In January 2010 the Isle Newell Concert Series will continue with a performance by the Trio Internationale. Future concerts will be scheduled and announced soon.

Apalachicola Area Historical Society
P.O. Box 75
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