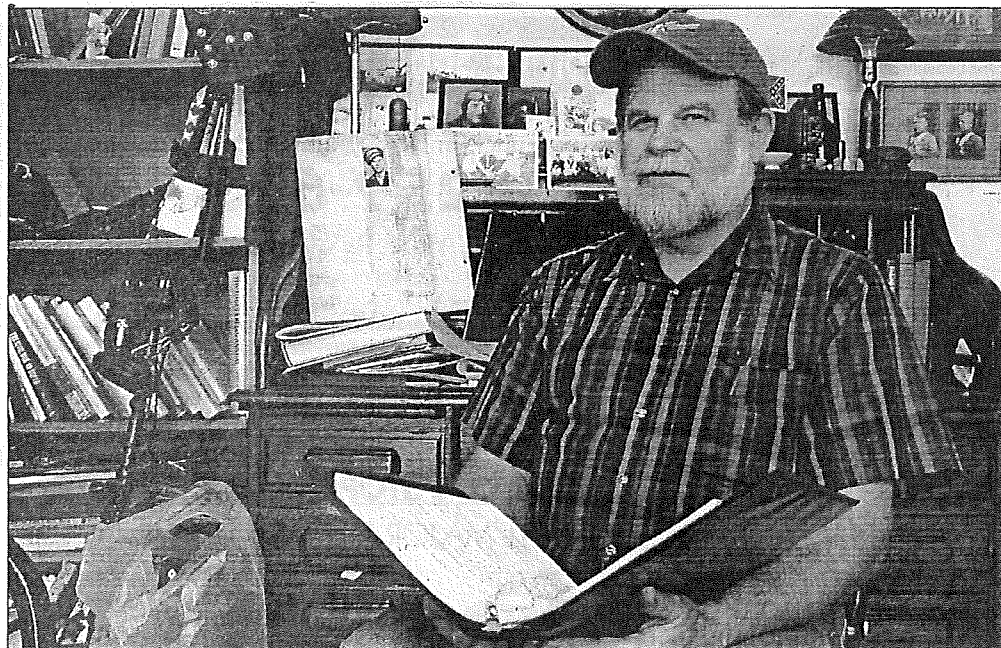


THE BAKER COUNTY PRESS



Mr. Ferry will direct his lifelong love of history toward finishing the late Gene Barber's Baker County archive.

Seeking photos, images to round out Barber's history

BY KELLEY LANNIGAN
Press Staff

Dickie Ferry fondly remembers his first encounters with the late Gene Barber when he was a third grader at Macclenny Elementary School.

"Gene taught art in the public schools. He made the classes really interesting because as he was teaching us about art, he also told us stories of the history of Baker County, too," says Ferry.

Mr. Ferry, owner of United Racing Supply on N. 121, credits those stories and the influence of his mother, who used to take him to Confederate battle sites, as the start of his personal life-long passion for history.

"Gene was well-known for his writing about the history of this county," he says. "We were never extremely close friends, but over the years, he and I would run into each other, often at the post office and we always got to talking about local history.

Since I was doing research myself on different historical topics, I was able to supply him with information from time to time."

When Mr. Barber understood that a battle with Parkinson's disease would probably claim his life, he sent word through friends that he needed to see Ferry.

"He told me he wanted me to make sure his history of the county was finished," said Mr. Ferry. "He sort of made me trustee of the pro-

ject. I'm now working with a manuscript of the research he compiled over the years."

Dickie Ferry also points out the significant contributions of certain local folks who helped Mr. Barber with his historical research. Cathy Mendolera, owner of The Franklin Mercantile in Glen St. Mary and her sister Angela Lowry have been very involved. Larry and Linda Rosenblatt, also of Glen, volunteered a lot of time to the project.

Mr. Ferry is now in the process of considering the best way to finish the history.

"Gene's Baker County history is pretty much complete, but there are some gaps that need to be filled in and editorial decisions about the best way to present some of the material need to be made," he said. "One thing I want to make sure of is that we leave the material as much as possible in 'Gene's voice,' the way he wrote it."

It was Mr. Barber's last wish before he died April 21 of last year that his history be finished and made available to the people of Baker County. Mr. Ferry is making an appeal to local contributors to help with the history of the area by allowing him to use family photographs.

"I feel sure that local folks have some wonderful images of life in the county over the last century and a half. Photos really tell the story," he says. "Photos of all historical images are necessary - buildings, landmarks and residents prior to 1960. I'm especially interested in

photos and news clippings with photos of our WWII veterans."

Mr. Ferry vows the photos will be returned and if owners aren't comfortable with loaning photos, arrangements can be made to have them scanned so they don't have to leave their possession.

Once the history manuscript is complete, Dickie Ferry plans to self-publish it and make it available to the public. The Barber history will be a significant contribution. According to Mr. Ferry, Baker County is the only county in the state of Florida that doesn't have a published history on record.

Gene Barber recognized the need to start collecting and documenting the history of the county for the benefit of future generations, which he did for many years.

In 2005, The Florida State Genealogy Society awarded him its Outstanding Achievement Award, recognizing his significant contributions to Florida history.

"Gene Barber was an accomplished artist, writer, historian, teacher and horticulturist. There is even an orchid that bears his name," notes Mr. Ferry. "I feel so strongly about completing and publishing Gene's history of the area because it was the last wish of a dying man who contributed so much to Baker County. I believe we owe him that."

For anyone interested in sharing photographic images prior to 1960 and particularly pictures of Baker County WWII veterans, please contact Dickie Ferry, 259-9154.