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1875 SESQUICENTENNIAL EDITION—JUNE 7-25 No.012-06-2025<<

A FREE NEWSPAPER Take One! The Wewa News Newspaper



Wewa Celebrates 150 Years — Our Sesquicentennial 2025

By Tom Wynn

The City of Wewahitchka, lovingly known as Wewa, is proud to announce our 150th anniversary — a time to remember our heritage and celebrate our rich history as a strong and caring community.

Founded in 1875, Wewa became known as the sweetest little city in Florida. This special celebration will take place on **June 7, 2025**, on the grounds of the **Ole' Gulf County Courthouse** — a place full of stories, struggles, and triumphs that have shaped our town.

Many local folks have worked hard behind the scenes to make this event possible. The Wewa Historical Society, the Friends of the Library, our dedicated Library Staff, the Local Woman's Club, and the Wewa City Staff have all played a part. From planning to set up, helping with permits, and spreading the word — it's been a true team effort. We thank every volunteer and city worker who gave their time. This is more than a party — it's a family reunion for our city and surrounding communities. We welcome everyone home to Wewa.

A Forecast of The Celebration

Guests can look forward to a full day of fun, food, and fellowship. The courthouse grounds will be filled with American flags, live music, and old-time games for the kids. Folks dressed in 1800s-style clothing will stroll the area, giving us a glimpse of the past.

Local vendors will be on hand with handmade crafts, home-cooked goodies, and displays celebrating our local culture. Churches, schools, civic groups, and small businesses will set up booths across three key locations: **on the grounds of the Ole' Gulf County Courthouse**, the **Wewa Library**, and the **Senior Citizen Center**.

A special highlight will be the unveiling of a **City Historical Quilt**, constructed and supervised by **Mrs. Janet Johnson**. This one-of-a-kind quilt features the names of many founding and longtime families from Wewa's past and present. It tells the story of our town through fabric and thread. The quilt will be proudly displayed at the Wewa Library for all to enjoy.

Free photos will be taken and given out to those who want to capture a memory of the day — sponsored by **The Wewa News** in partnership with

SayCheesePhotoBooth.com.

Guest speakers, local artists, and musicians will bring the celebration to life throughout the day. Stories will be shared, heritage will be honored, and the spirit of Wewa will shine, a perfect way to honor 150 years of community, culture, and celebration.

The city of Wewahitchka, or Wewa, is proud to announce our 150 years of existence as a city and a loving community. This marks the 150 years of Wewa being the sweetest little city I Florida. Our Celebration lands of the 7th of June 2025 at our beloved old Gulf County Court House.

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(Photos of Logos from the T-shirts made for the Occasion, which can be purchased at the Wewa Library)



GULF COUNTY FIRST COURT HOUSE LOCATED IN WEWA, Built in 1925-27

On June 7, 2025, Gulf County, Florida, will proudly celebrate its centennial with a series of events across Wewahitchka, Port St. Joe, and the surrounding communities. This milestone commemorates 100 years since the county's establishment in 1925, honoring its rich history, industries, and the individuals who laid its foundations. TW

A Century of Gulf County History

Gulf County was officially formed on June 6, 1925, carved from the southern portion of Calhoun County. Wewahitchka was designated as the first county seat, and in 1927, the county's first courthouse was constructed there. This Classical Revival-style building, featuring prominent columns, was built by W.H. Taylor and served as the county's judicial center until the seat moved to Port St. Joe in 1965 [.hmdb.org+1floridamemory.com+1](https://www.hmdb.org+1floridamemory.com+1)

The inaugural county government comprised several key figures: [hmdb.org+1en.wikipedia.org+1](https://www.hmdb.org+1en.wikipedia.org+1)

- **County Judge:** E.C. Lewis
- **County Commissioners:** J.J. McDaniel (Chairman), H.E. Rish, S.F. VanHorn, A.D. Lawson, G.A. Patton, and W.L. Mowbray [.hmdb.org](https://www.hmdb.org)

These officials played pivotal roles in establishing the county's governance.

Economic Evolution Over 100 Years

Throughout the past century, Gulf County's economy has undergone significant transformations. In the early years, industries such as honey production, lumber, and fishing were predominant. The establishment of the St. Joe Paper Company in 1936 marked a turning point, with its paper mill in Port St. Joe becoming a major employer and economic driver until its closure in 1999. floridamemory.com/visitgulf.com

Today, Gulf County embraces tourism, capitalizing on its natural beauty and coastal charm. The region's beaches, parks, and historical sites attract visitors year-round, contributing to a diversified local economy.

Centennial Celebrations

The centennial festivities will culminate on June 7, 2025, with events throughout the county. In Wewahitchka, the Charles Whitehead Public Library will host a celebration from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM Central Time, featuring guest speakers, music, food, historical exhibits, and crafts. visitgulf.com

Port St. Joe will also partake in the celebrations, with activities highlighting the county's history and community spirit. These events aim to honor the past while looking forward to the future, bringing together residents and visitors alike.

Reflecting on a Century

As Gulf County marks its 100th anniversary, the community reflects on a century of growth, resilience, and transformation. From its early industries to modern tourism, the county's journey is a testament to the dedication of its people and the enduring allure of its landscapes.

For more information on the centennial events and Gulf County's history, visit the official Gulf County Centennial Celebration page.

Wewahitchka-Our New Fire House on Display and Shines like a New Penny!

By Tom Wynn

The completion of the fire station was a proud moment for Wewahitchka. The community has shown its resilience through the process, and we are thrilled to see the project come to fruition. The new fire station is

more than just a building; it's a symbol of the progress and strength of our town, after all the damage Hurricane Michael caused our beloved Firehouse and City Hall.

As an eyewitness to this entire journey, it's rewarding to see the hard work, dedication, and cooperation of our city leaders, contractors, and residents come together in this "beautiful" new facility.

Looking to the Future

With this new fire station now open, Wewahitchka is set to enjoy improved safety, greater preparedness, and a continued path toward growth and prosperity. As we continue to expand and improve, it's clear that our community is on the rise. **TW**



First Presbyterian Church Repairs Nearly Complete for Tours

By Pastor Carol Woods

The Psalmist writes: "Unless the Lord builds a house, the builders labor in vain." This truth resonates deeply with the history of First Presbyterian Church, a house of worship built from local cypress and heartwood pine, envisioned by faithful builders long gone. The Carpenter Gothic structure, consecrated in 1903 as St. John the Baptist Episcopal Church, has withstood numerous trials—lightning strikes, a hot-rod road race, fires, and hurricanes. But it was Hurricane Michael that caused the most significant damage, shifting the building off its brick piers and leading to structural concerns.

The restoration process faced delays after lead paint was discovered in the ceiling, but on October 10—six years after the storm—FEMA approved the scope of work needed to proceed. After the approval, the church

went through the procurement process, and Star Contracting was awarded the restoration contract. Skip Drish's crew began work on February 18.

The church looks forward to completing most of the restoration by June 7th, when the congregation will celebrate the church's sesquicentennial. The Location of First Presbyterian Church is at 317 Pineview Drive, Wewahitchka, FL 32465.

The church is also excited to announce that the Wewahitchka Historical Society has approved an application for a Historical Marker, which will be placed in front of the church. The double-sided marker will honor both the founding of St. John the Baptist Episcopal Church and the journey of First Presbyterian Church since 1943. Donations toward the \$2,540 cost of the marker can be sent to Ann Johnson at PO Box 310, Wewahitchka, FL 32465. Please note: "For Historical Marker Fund."

Volunteers are also needed to help with ongoing improvements to the interior and exterior of the hall. To get involved, please contact Rev. Carol Wood at 850-866-9850 or woodrink@gmail.com. CW



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HISTORICAL PERIODICALS BY TOM WYNN

Two historical periodicals by the Wewahitchka Historical Society and Friends of the Library are for sale at the Wewa Library. So, look for them and pick up a copy for a donation of \$5.00 each. Please contact the library to share historical information about the centennial.

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The History of Wewahitchka and Surrounding Areas (1818–2024)

By Tom Wynn

Early Beginnings (1818–1870)

Wewahitchka and its surrounding communities have a long and rich history that dates back to the early 19th century. The region was home to Native American tribes, including the Creek and Seminole peoples, who lived along the Chipola and Apalachicola rivers. European American settlers arrived in the early 1800s, with many drawn to the fertile land and abundant waterways.

One of the earliest recorded events in the area was the survival of young Jehu Richards during an Indian massacre in 1818. His family later became prominent settlers in the region. By the mid-1800s, small farming and logging communities began to emerge, laying the foundation for what would become Wewahitchka. The town's name comes from a Native American word meaning "water eyes," inspired by the two nearby lakes, Lake Julia and Lake Alice, which resemble a pair of eyes.

Growth and Development (1870–1925)

By the late 19th century, the timber and turpentine industries flourished in the region. Sawmills were established along the rivers, providing jobs and economic growth. The town of Wewahitchka was officially incorporated in 1926, though its history as a settlement dates back several decades earlier.

During this time, neighboring communities such as Blue Gator, New Eden, Stone Mill Creek, Honeyville, Dalkeith, Howard Creek, and White City also saw growth. These settlements were primarily built around industries such as logging, farming, and river trade. In 1925, Gulf County was created from the southern part

of Calhoun County, with Wewahitchka originally serving as the county seat before it was later moved to Port St. Joe.

Economic Changes and Cultural Shifts (1925–1965)
The mid-20th century saw significant economic changes in the region. Wewahitchka became known for its beekeeping industry, particularly the production of Tupelo honey, which remains a major product of the area today. Meanwhile, the paper mill industry in Port St. Joe brought economic growth but also environmental challenges.

Veterans returning from World War II and the Korean War played an important role in shaping the community, contributing to local businesses and civic organizations. The development of highways and bridges improved access to the region, further integrating it with the rest of Florida.

Modern Developments (1965–2024)

From the 1960s onward, Wewahitchka and its surrounding communities continued to evolve. While some industries, such as timber, declined, others, like fishing, tourism, and small-scale agriculture, remained strong. The natural beauty of the Dead Lakes and the Chipola River has drawn outdoor enthusiasts, boosting ecotourism.

In recent years, local efforts have been made to preserve historical sites and celebrate the area's heritage through festivals and community events. Wewahitchka remains a close-knit community, honoring its past while embracing modern opportunities.

Notable People and Events

Throughout its history, the region has been home to many notable individuals, including veterans, community leaders, and entrepreneurs. Events such as hurricanes, economic shifts, and political changes have shaped the identity of Wewahitchka and its neighboring areas. The resilience and determination of its people continue to define this historic region. As Wewahitchka moves into the future, it remains a place of natural beauty, historical significance, and strong community values. **TW**

JOHN 14:1



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Our library, the Friends of the Wewahitchka Library and the Wewahitchka Historical Society have been busy preparing for the celebration of Wewahitchka's 150th anniversary and the County's 100th anniversary. This is such an exciting time for our community! Mark your calendar for this free family event on Saturday, June 7th from 9:00-3:00 pm CT. It will be located at the library, the surrounding grounds and the courthouse grounds. There will be food and craft vendors, music, fun for the kids, demonstrations, speakers, exhibits and much more. Help us spread the word!

Do you have photographs of local events, businesses or places? How about the bicentennial celebration from 1975? If you have any photos that you would like to share with the library, we ask that you call and make an appointment. Your photos will be scanned and given back to you at that time. Your photos may be used in our exhibits, which we are currently working on.

The Wewahitchka Library is partnering with the Wewahitchka Historical Society to make a community memory quilt in honor of this celebration. It will be on display at the event. This is a fundraiser that will support the Wewahitchka Historical Society and the Wewahitchka Library's sewing programs. The funds will purchase supplies to make the quilt, and then any additional funds will be divided between the two. \$10.00 donations for a name strip and \$15.00 for a square for multiple names. Would you like your family name on the quilt? Do you know how to embroider? Do you need a refresher? Have you never learned?

We plan to have several workshops at the Wewahitchka Library and the Wewahitchka Senior Center to assist you. If you are skilled in this craft, we invite you to work on yours at home, if you prefer. For additional information or questions, please contact us at (850) 639-2419. Our library hours are Mondays 9-1, Tuesdays 9-5, Thursdays 9-5, Fridays 9-5, and Saturdays 9-1.

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Who Are the Creek Indians? Honoring Their Legacy and Role in the Founding of Wewa and Gulf County, In Celebration of Their Contribution

By Tom Wynn

Long before roads, railways, and county lines were drawn, the lands we now call **Wewahitchka** and **Gulf County, Florida**, were part of a thriving and complex Native American culture. The **Creek Indians**, or **Muscogee**, are central to this history. Their presence, influence, and endurance helped shape the spirit and land of today's Wewa community. Their story—combined with the pioneering resolve of early settlers—built the foundation of our town and county.

Who Were the Creek (Muscogee) Indians?

The Muscogee were a confederacy of several southeastern tribes, known for their intricate social structures, advanced farming methods, and strong trade networks. They originally inhabited large parts of what are now **Alabama**, **Georgia**, and **North Florida**, including the **Apalachicola River basin**—the very area where **Wewahitchka** now rests.

The name "Creek" was given by British settlers in the 1700s, referencing the tribe's tendency to settle near waterways. While "Muscogee" is the proper name, "Creek" became the lasting term in American history books.

These were strong, intelligent, and adaptable people, living in towns connected by kinship, council laws, and shared values. Their lives centered around farming, hunting, fishing, and community governance.

Chief John Blount and the Apalachicola Muscogee

One of the most important historical figures in our region's native history is **Chief John Blount**, of the **Apalachicola band** of the Muscogee Nation. In the early 1800s, Blount formed critical alliances with the U.S. government during the Seminole conflicts. In recognition of his loyalty, **Andrew Jackson** granted him land—now **Blountstown**, named in his honor.

Blount and his tribe moved from **Iola** to higher ground in Blountstown after the Second Seminole War, holding onto their identity and community as long as they could. He stood tall as a leader during turbulent times, when many Native American tribes faced removal and hardship.

The Trail of Tears and the Resilience of Those Who Stayed

The **Indian Removal Act of 1830** marked a dark chapter in U.S. history. Thousands of Muscogee people were forced to march westward in what became known as the **Trail of Tears**. The journey was brutal—many died from hunger, exposure, and disease. Yet, **some Muscogee families stayed**, hiding in the swamps and forests of the Panhandle, continuing to live quietly and carry on their way of life secretly and in plain sight.

Among those who stayed were families who would blend into the fabric of what would become **Wewahitchka**, **Iola**, **Kinard**, and **Scott's Ferry**. Their descendants live here to this day, their bloodlines carried forward through names such as **Blount**, **Armstrong**, and **Weeks**.

Wewahitchka: Water Is Here

The very name **Wewahitchka** is of Muscogee origin. As explained to me personally by **Chief Alonso** of the Muscogee Nation during a 2002 interview, the translation is: "**Wewa**" = Water "**Hitchka**" = Is Here

And indeed, water is at the heart of Wewa—between the Dead Lakes, the Chipola Cutoff, and the mighty Apalachicola River, this area remains a haven of natural abundance.

Communities here thrived on fishing, trapping, agriculture, and beekeeping. Chief Alonso also confirmed that the **Armstrong family** was the first to practice **beekeeping** in the Wewahitchka area tradition that led to the unique **Tupelo Honey** culture we celebrate today.

The Muscogee Legacy in Wewa Landmarks

There are several places in and around Wewa tied to Muscogee and early settler history:

- **Jehu Cemetery Road**, once known as **New Eden**, hosted the first Methodist and Baptist churches in the region.
- The original **First Baptist Church** was moved by mules on rolling logs to its current site across from Subway.
- **Scott's Ferry**, named after a Muscogee man who adopted the name "Scott" in honor of a white friend, was once a vital river crossing. He was one of the **wealthiest men in Calhoun County**, second only to Mr. Stone, a foundational figure in **Gulf County's formation** alongside his son **T.H. Stone**.
- **Iola**, now a ghost town, was once a flourishing lumber town that hosted both settlers and Muscogee families.

Wewa and Gulf County: Built by Hands of All Kinds

Gulf County was formed in **1925**, and its **first courthouse**, built in **Wewahitchka**, symbolized the unification of local communities. Families—Native and settler alike—joined hands in building what we now call home. These families, who fished the rivers, planted gardens, ran sawmills, built churches, raised children, and kept the old ways alive, are the backbone of our county's identity.

Our community today is not simply a product of paper boundaries or modern governance. It is the living result of friendships, kinship, resilience, and respect among those who were here first and those who came later.

From **Chief Blount's diplomacy** to **T.H. Stone's vision**, from the **Armstrong beekeepers** to the faithful congregations of **New Eden**, from the ferryman **Scott** to the log-pulling pioneers who moved churches by mule—**this is Wewahitchka.**

Preserving Legacy

In 2002, I directed two documentaries:

1. **"Tupelo Honey and the Amazing Beekeeping"** (available free on YouTube)
2. A private film on the **Muscogee Museum**, featuring **Chief Alonso**, was never publicly released.

Both taught me how deeply the Muscogee people are in our land, our history, and our community. The preservation of these stories is not just history, it is heritage. It is who we are.

Today, many residents still carry Muscogee ancestry and hold dear their cultural and spiritual heritage. Events, schools, and historical societies now work harder than ever to bring these stories to light.

We must never forget: The Muscogee are not just part of our past—they are part of our present. Alongside early settler families, they helped build the community we love. **Wewahitchka stands as a testimony** to those who came before, survived hardship, worked the land, and built homes and futures with their own hands.

May we always honor that. TW



"100 Years of Grit: Gulf County's Hidden Spirit" By Tom Wynn

As Gulf County celebrates its 100th year, we take a look back—not just at courthouses, churches, and schools, but at the grit and gumption that built Southern life, including the secret craft of moonshining.

1 Peter 2:9-10

In the early days, Gulf County wasn't just shaped by sawmills, turpentine stills, and fishing boats. It was also shaped by hidden stills deep in the pinewoods, where men and women, scraping to get by during the Great Depression and Prohibition, turned corn mash into liquid gold. Moonshine wasn't just about rebellion—it was survival.

The rich soil, thick woods, and winding creeks of Wewahitchka and the surrounding areas provided perfect cover. Families passed recipes down like heirlooms. Some did it quietly, trading jugs for groceries. Others ran fast cars at night, heading up to Blountstown or across the state line. It was dangerous, sure—but it was honest work to some, done for the good of kin and neighbor.

Over time, moonshine became woven into Southern life. It sat on back porches next to gospel songs and family dinners. It brought folks together, fueled Saturday night dances, and sometimes helped pay the preacher.

Today, Gulf County wears its scars and stories like badges of honor. From humble roots and hard seasons came a proud, strong, resilient, and resourceful. The old moonshiners are mostly gone now, but their legacy remains in the freedom-loving spirit of our people and the tales told by the fire. TW



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The Tupelo Festival 2025 at Lake Alice: A Record Day for Visitors

By Tom Wynn

Wewahitchka, FL – The sweet smell of Tupelo honey filled the air as Lake Alice came alive for the 2025 Tupelo Honey Festival. This year set a record for attendance, with more families, vendors, and visitors than ever before. People came from all over to celebrate Gulf County's famous honey and the hardworking beekeepers who produce it.

The day was bright and sunny. The lake sparkled, children laughed, and smiles were everywhere. Local beekeepers proudly displayed jars of golden Tupelo honey, known for its light color and smooth taste. Many said this was the biggest crowd they had ever seen.

Music and a magic show, as well as, a honey tasting contest and much more filled the day with excitement. Vendors sold crafts, food, and handmade goods all around the park. The sidewalk that circles Lake Alice is a quarter mile long, and this year, **both sides** of the sidewalk were packed with vendors. In the middle area, where the **big oak trees grow**, many civic and community groups had booths set up.

One of the most popular events was the **honey tasting contest**, sponsored by the **Gulf County Beekeepers Association**. According to the association's president, **Mrs. Leslie Cantu**, this year's winner was **Mr. Travis Wynn**. The contest was judged by the public, who tasted honey from unmarked containers using wooden sticks. No one knew which honey belonged to which beekeeper. After tasting, voters dropped their choice into a blind container. It was a fun, fair way to celebrate the hard work of local beekeepers.

Local artists, the Wewahitchka Women's Club, school groups, and area churches were also represented, helping raise money and awareness for their causes. People enjoyed cold drinks, fresh-squeezed lemonade, and delicious Southern cooking.

Law enforcement and medical volunteers said the day went smoothly. One EMT said, "We stayed busy handing out water and helping with little things like sunburn, but it was all smiles and good people. Nobody got seriously hurt. Just a great day for Wewa."

Special thanks to the Wewahitchka City Workers for doing a beautiful job on the park grounds and equipment. Your hard work was noticed. **Thank you to everyone who made this day possible.**

This year's turnout showed just how special this event is to our community. If you miss it, don't worry, **Lake Alice will be waiting for your next visit, and you can get honey from the list of beekeepers on page 16.**

Some years ago, I was told by my fellow members of the **Gulf County Beekeepers Association** and other local beekeepers that **approximately 80 percent of all Tupelo honey produced was sold at the festival each year.** That tradition continues today and plays a big part in supporting our local honey industry.

Officially, this was the most vendors we have ever had in the festival's history. TW

Yawolla or Iola — A Name That Still Cries Out Something to Consider

By Brother Tom Wynn

Iola, Florida, was once a thriving town in what is now Gulf County. Long before settlers came, the local Muscogee (Creek) tribe called the place **Yawolla**, which means “crier” or “caller.” This was a person who would call out to the people to gather — for worship, meetings, or warnings. The word had deep spiritual meaning among the tribe. Settlers eventually transliterated the name into **Iola** to make it easier to pronounce in English.

In 2002, during a Bay County Muscogee (Creek) pow wow, a Creek language teacher told me something remarkable: the Creek language is full of Hebrew words. Its roots, she said, are **Hebraic**. That revelation stuck with me, especially considering the name **Yawolla** sounds strikingly similar to the Hebrew word “**Olah**,” meaning “**burnt offering**.” In the Bible, an “olah” was a complete sacrifice offered to God, rising up in smoke as a sweet aroma to the LORD.

This connection is more than just interesting, it's spiritual. The original tribal name “Yawolla” may have meant one who called others to worship, while its echo in Hebrew reminds us of a sacred offering to God. A place name that once gathered people to worship now holds a memory — and perhaps a message — of deeper spiritual calling.

Today, the town of Iola no longer exists. But at the **original location** of that once-bustling community now stands a **Gulf County boat ramp** — a popular launch for locals on the Apalachicola River. It's a quiet place now, but in the 1800s, this was a thriving hub of trade, steamboats, and timber.

Timeline of Yawolla / Iola

Prior to 1800 – The **Muscogee (Creek)** people live along the Apalachicola River and call the settlement **Yawolla**, meaning “crier” or “caller.”

1830s – Florida begins constructing one of its earliest railroads, ending at Yawolla and bringing trade and settlers.

1839–1841 – Settlers rename the area **Iola**, building sawmills, docks, and a post office. The town grows and becomes an economic hub.

1860s – The Civil War brought hardship. Trade slows, and families begin to leave.

Late 1800s – The town of Iola fades into obscurity. Buildings disappear, and the name vanishes from most maps.

2002 – At a Bay County Creek pow wow, a language teacher tells me that the Creek language has **Hebrew roots** — a connection that may explain the spiritual depth of names like Yawolla.

Today – A Gulf County boat ramp marks the site of old Iola, where riverboats once docked and the community once flourished.

Something to Consider

Could the name **Yawolla**, later known as **Iola**, have been more than just a word? Could it have been a divine whisper across cultures and time — a call to worship, a symbol of sacrifice, or a spiritual landmark? Whether by tribal meaning or Hebraic connection, it still calls out to us today. **TW**

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A Legacy of Service: Historically Remembering Gulf County Commissioner Carmen L. McLemore

By Tom Wynn

Carmen L. McLemore is a name well remembered in Gulf County, Florida, especially among those who value long-standing community service and dedication to public life. Known by friends and neighbors simply as “Carmen,” he spent many years serving the people of his district and helping to shape the county through both quiet efforts and strong leadership.

From Corrections to County Hall

Before stepping into politics, Carmen McLemore dedicated much of his career to the Florida Department of Corrections. Working within the state’s prison system, he gained firsthand experience with law enforcement, discipline, and rehabilitation. Those who knew him during those years often spoke of his firm but fair approach and his desire to see inmates turn their lives around. His years in the correctional system taught him the importance of second chances, hard work, and personal responsibility—values he carried into his public service career.

Serving the People of Gulf County

Carmen McLemore was elected as a Gulf County Commissioner for District 1, a position he would hold for multiple terms throughout the 2000s and 2010s. His work on the Board of County Commissioners reflected a deep connection to the community and a determination to keep local government responsive to the needs of everyday citizens. He served at times as Vice Chairman of the board and played an active role in passing important ordinances, zoning changes, and development plans.

He was never one to shy away from a tough decision. Whether it involved economic development, infrastructure repairs, or protecting the interests of local fishermen, Carmen approached every issue with a common-sense attitude and a plainspoken style that earned him respect from both colleagues and constituents.

One example of his leadership came during hearings involving comprehensive land-use planning. Carmen understood how land decisions affected not just today’s residents but future generations. He worked hard to strike a balance between growth and

conservation, never forgetting the rural roots of Gulf County.

A Family Tradition Continues

Carmen’s service did not end when he stepped away from public office. In November 2024, his legacy took a new turn when his son, **Spike McLemore**, was elected as the new County Commissioner for District 1. It’s a rare and special thing to see public service passed down from father to son, and the people of Gulf County once again placed their trust in the McLemore name.

Spike hit the road running. He has already impressed our community by looking into various issues that have been sordid for those of us living in the northern parts of our beloved county. He has teamed up with two other newly elected County Commissioners and the Wewahitchka City Council to get things hopping in “God’s Country”—Wewa.

We pray this pattern of “Getter Done!” attitude by our new Commissioners continues. **TW**

13th Annual Taunton Family Festival Brings Sunshine and Southern Hospitality to Wewa

By Tom Wynn Jr.



The 13th Annual **Taunton Family Festival** brought smiles, sunshine, and heartfelt fellowship to Wewahitchka on **May 24th, 2025**, as the community came together to support the mission of the Taunton Children’s Home.

Held every year at **200 Taunton Family Road**, this beloved event continues to grow, thanks to the enduring vision and labor of the **Jackson Sisters—Abigail Taunton, Marilyn Robinson, and Martha Tidwell**—descendants of President Andrew Jackson. Their shared dedication has shaped the home and festival into more than just a cause, but a deeply meaningful tradition.

The sisters, joined by volunteers and family, worked joyfully under the Florida sun to create a beautiful experience for every guest. “It’s about love and purpose,” one of them shared. “This is family, and we welcome everyone into it.”

Guests were treated to a mouthwatering southern meal featuring BBQ sandwiches, chips, drinks, and other delights. Children played games in the grass while families enjoyed swimming in the deep blue lake with its sugar-white beaches. Music, laughter, and the spirit of generosity filled the air.

It was a family reunion of sorts for many who come every year to help out and or donate their time, money, and love for the children's home and those who work there. We old folks enjoy the time to relax and share stories and experiences. The day offered something for everyone while also raising support and awareness for the home’s year-round mission of care, guidance, and hope for children in need.

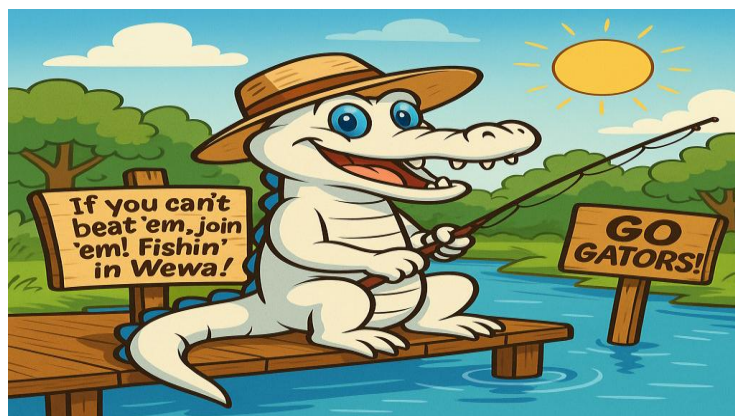
For those interested in contributing, volunteering, or learning more about future events, **Diana Taunton Miller** serves as the main contact for the Taunton Children’s Home and can be reached at **850-819-0451**.

As the sun set over Wewa, festival goers left with full hearts, full bellies, and knowing they were part of something lasting, something good, something that our Creator enjoys seeing us do, loving one another and caring for those in need. **TW**

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Matthew 8:16



The Legend of Blue Gator

By Tom Wynn

Legend has it, just down the hill from Jehu Cemetery in Wewahitchka, Florida, lived a creature unlike any other—**Alford the Alligator**, a 14-foot-long white-skinned gator with piercing blue eyes.

I gave him the name "Alford the Alligator," but "**Blue Gator**" was the name of the fish camp and boat ramp beside **West Arm Creek**, where he made his home. He became a familiar figure to locals, especially those who fished the creek in small johnboats. Newcomers unaware of his presence were often startled when he glided silently past, hoping for a tossed fish or snake near supper time. But to the old-timers, Alford was just part of the landscape.

A bit of history: the Blue Gator boat ramp wasn’t always for launching boats. **Long before Highway 71**, this spot was used by Native Americans as a **river crossing and ferry point**, linking communities before roads were built. Later, it served as the landing site for a hand-pulled ferry that transported settlers, cattle, and wagons across the water.

The adjacent area was once the location of **an old sawmill**, which for decades was a key part of Wewa’s timber economy. I once owned half of that very boat ramp before trading it for a nearby lot. Up the hill from the ramp was **New Eden**, known as the white man’s village, before Wewahitchka was founded. That’s also where you’ll find **Jehu Cemetery**, named after **Jehu Richards**, one of two survivors of the Richards Indian Massacre.

And just up the rise, on **BoJohn Lester Sr.’s homestead**, is where the **Baptist congregation built the original First Baptist Church**, long before it was moved to downtown Wewa. The land itself holds deep spiritual and historic roots in the community.

Alford, the rare **blue-eyed white alligator**, was more than just a curiosity—his ghostly glide through the dark creek waters made him a legend. Most days, he swam peacefully, hoping for a gift from passing fishermen. But if you didn't know him, **he'd scare the bajesus out of you!**

So, “**Blue Gator**” and “**Jehu Road**” are full of **stories**—the kind locals still share at **morning coffee clucks**, where old men swap tales, half-truth and half memory, but always told with pride.

In Wewa, legends don't just live in books; they float quietly by, just beneath the surface. **TW**

Wewahitchka: A Sweet Slice of Florida History and Peace *by Tom Wynn*

Wewahitchka Joins the Map

Wewahitchka became a city in **1875**, hugging the edge of the Dead Lakes and surrounded by the untamed beauty of Northwest Florida. The town's earliest days were shaped by **Florida Crackers**—rugged pioneer settlers who lived off the land, skilled in hunting, fishing, and farming the piney woods.

The area came alive with paddle boats gliding across the lakes, trains billowing smoke as they brought goods and people in, and wagons filled with families seeking a better life. These scenes laid the foundation for the town's future growth.

In **1925**, the creation of **Gulf County** shifted to regional power. Carved from the eastern section of Calhoun County, Gulf made Wewahitchka its county seat—a role it proudly holds to this day.

Backbone of Industry

Wewahitchka thrived on the strength of several vital industries. The **turpentine trade** boomed in the late 1800s, with workers tapping longleaf pines to collect resin used in naval stores. It was grueling work, but it fed families and built communities. At the same time, the **lumber industry** flourished.

Towering pines and cypress were felled and floated down rivers to sawmills. Logs traveled from the swamps to the coast, supporting both local jobs and national demand.

Fishing was and remains a central part of Wewa's way of life. The rich waters of the Dead Lakes and Apalachicola River yield catfish, bream, and bass—feeding families and fostering traditions that still endure.

The Sweetest Legacy: Tupelo Honey

For more than **150 years**, Wewahitchka has been home to a one-of-a-kind treasure: **Tupelo honey**. Harvested during a narrow bloom season each spring, this light, smooth honey is one of the rarest and most sought-after in the world.

The honey comes from white tupelo trees that grow in the swampy lowlands of the Apalachicola basin. Local beekeepers work against the clock during the short bloom, capturing a product that resists crystallization and is praised globally.

Wewa's fame for honey is so great, the town now hosts an **annual Tupelo Honey Festival** to celebrate this sweet heritage.

Cattle, Climate, and Community

Gulf County and Wewahitchka also carry a long history of **cattle raising**, with open pasturelands supporting ranchers for generations. This agricultural tradition remains a key part of the area's identity.

The region's **average temperature of 67°F** offers a mild climate perfect for those looking to retire or slow down. Spring breezes, mild winters, and abundant greenery make it a peaceful retreat from city life.

Wewahitchka Today: A Town of Peace

Today, Wewahitchka is proud to be known as a **welcoming retirement community**, nestled in nature and rich in heritage. With over **25 churches**, **small family-run restaurants**, and a **small but efficient city hall**, the town runs on personal connections and local care.

Clean air, low noise, and scenic views define daily life. Whether you're fishing by the river, enjoying homemade food, or savoring a spoonful of golden Tupelo honey, there's a rhythm to Wewa that's as sweet as its past.

EPHESIANS 3:14-19

THE MIRACLE OF THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

By AECS Tom Wynn Jr., USCG (Ret.)

“In a world of thousands of pages of laws, regulations, and codes, it is truly a miracle that the foundation of the United States of America fits on fewer than ten pages of ordinary school paper. The U.S. Constitution, handwritten with ink made from olive oil and burnt wood, crafted by men using feather quills and candlelight, governs a nation of nearly 360 million people today.

No supercomputers. No satellites. No digital databases or artificial intelligence. Just pure thought, prayer, debate, and a sincere desire to build a land where liberty could live.

These men—our Founding Fathers—labored not for power, but for peace. They dreamed of a land ruled not by kings or chaos, but by law. Simple laws. Clear laws. Written plainly, so every citizen could understand them.

They gave us a system based on checks and balances. A system where the power belonged not to the few, but to all. A system where freedom of speech, the right to worship, and the right to protect one’s family were not granted by men, but recognized as God-given rights.

And from this humble start, a great nation was born.

We are one people from many different countries and languages, cultures, and customs, but the Constitution binds us together as one. It doesn’t tell us how to live; it protects our right to choose how to live. And that is why millions have come to these shores: for the right to dream, to speak, to worship, to build, and to be free.

Through this document, we govern ourselves in overall peace and love. Even in times of disagreement, the Constitution holds us together. It is not a document of division, but of unity. It brings order where there could be chaos, and hope where there could be tyranny. And in our greatness, we do not hoard freedom—we share it. We show the world our highest calling by being friends to other nations. We feed the hungry, defend the weak, and offer help in times of disaster—not because we are forced to, but because we choose to.

We the People... still stand. Because of fewer than ten pages. Because of faith. Because of courage. Because of the simple belief that all men are created equal and that our rights come from God, not government.

And on every coin and dollar we print, we still remember the foundation of it all: “In God We Trust.”

Our military stands tall in this world because it believes in these truths.

They love you, America, more than you will ever know or understand—until you have stood in their shoes. So be it!” TW

THE WINE SKIN VS MODERN UNDERSTANDING

By Brother Tom Wynn

During a recent Men's Bible Study Group, we discussed Jesus' teaching about not patching old garments with new cloth or putting new wine into old wineskins (Matthew 9:16–17, Mark 2:21–22, Luke 5:36–39). The core message Jesus was sharing is that **his new covenant, teachings, and spiritual life can't be forced into the old religious system or mindset**—doing so would cause damage to both.

To help modern people understand this better, here's an updated example I used (or similar to what I likely said): **Modern Example:**

“It’s like trying to install a brand-new phone operating system into a very old phone that can’t handle the update. The phone might crash, freeze, or become useless because it wasn’t built to support something so new. In the same way, Jesus was saying that the fresh, living relationship He was bringing couldn’t fit into the old, rigid system of religious rules and traditions.” TW

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THE PUBLISHER AND EDITOR, BROTHER TOM WYNN JR.

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The Wewa News operates in the Private. Freedom of speech and of the Press are fundamental to our efforts of expression, as well as God given rights as men and women on the land called Florida. The Wewa News will be published approximately 4 times a year, Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall Issues. Due to travel, family time, and health issues. I may decide to publish a Surprise, “Special Edition, occasionally. Thank you all for your support and positive feedback.

The publishing of The Wewa News will be a periodical as of 1 January 2024 until further notice. We will notify the public via word of mouth and via Facebook pages the day it is published. Hard copies will be placed at the Wewa Subway entrance and the City Library. TW

Upcoming Events and Other: Mark Your Calendars

The Local Bee Association meets 6 pm at Glad Tidings Assembly of God Church, 138 E. Orange Ave. in Wewa, meeting room in the far Eastside of the Church on the first Tuesday of each month at 6 pm.

The Friends of the Wewa Library meet at the Wewa Library on the 2nd Thursday of each month, at 10:00 AM. Come early and “Meet & Greet” with us in the conference room.

Wewahitchka Historical Society meets every month on the Third Thursday at 6 pm at the Presbyterian Church in Hwy 71.

City Hall Meetings: The city meetings are held on the last Thursday of each month, at 6 PM CT, unless posted otherwise. Contact the City Hall for possible changes due to weather or holidays.

The Big All County 100th Year Centennial Celebration will be June 7th, 2025. Come to Wewahitchka and celebrate our birthdays. The City will be 150 years old, and Gulf County will be 100 years old.

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