



# Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands

October 14, 2008

Dear Council Members:

Please find attached, a request being submitted to the City Council from the Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands in support of honoring the Gavin Walker family and other pioneering families of Sanibel. We would like to work with city council and other groups on the island to tell the in depth stories of diverse people that have helped make Sanibel a better place to live, work, play and visit. Along with other organizations on the island, we are interested in communicating to people a very important part of our history.

The Circle of Community Leadership, Inc. is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization d/b/a the Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands (CHCI). Our mission is to create cultural learning environments that foster a sense of community, build intercultural understanding of different ethnic groups, and showcase their diverse contributions to the development of southwest Florida.

CHCI provides a more intense view of history by using our exhibits to tell the stories of people and cultures primarily through pictures. We are committed to using the art of photoethnography to preserve the stories of Sanibel and Captiva. In more simplistic terms, we “tell the story behind the story” by taking what may already be known and going one-step beyond.

CHCI performs a valuable community service by helping to capture and preserve in an engaging visual format an older generation’s rich legacies for future generations. However, *time is of the essence!* Many of our storytellers are getting old and dying. We welcome the opportunity to work with the City of Sanibel and the community in this important endeavor.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

  
Eugene Gavin  
Executive Director



# Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands

## **SANIBEL PLAN**

### *How We Help....*

The Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands (CHCI) will assist the City of Sanibel in the continuing implementation of its vision. We will diligently strive to protect and preserve the irreplaceable historic resources of Sanibel.

CHCI is dedicated to:

- Identifying, capturing, and preserving the cultural heritage of Sanibel through the stories and people of the past and present
- Ensuring continued public access to cultural & historic resources
- Creating a community-building initiative that helps to foster a "sense of place" for both residents and visitors
- Maintaining the historical character of Sanibel
- Cherishing the cultural, social, ecological, and economic diversity of the island



# Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands

## Organization and Mission

The Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands, created in 2007, is a program of the Circle of Community Leadership, Inc., a 501c3 nonprofit organization whose mission is:

To create cultural learning environments that fosters a sense of community and builds intercultural understanding of the different ethnic groups and their contributions in Southwest Florida.

To accomplish this mission the Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands (CHCI) was created. CHCI's primary goal is to engage the citizens of Southwest Florida in community dialogues and story sharing among its diverse groups.

We tell the story of people and cultures through photography and are committed to using photoethnography (the art and science of representing cultures visually) to preserve the stories of Sanibel and Captiva. In more simplistic terms, we "tell the story behind the story" through pictures.

## Executive Summary

CHCI provides a more intense view of history by using our exhibits to tell the stories of people in depth. Time is of the essence! Many of our storytellers are getting old and dying. CHCI performs a valuable community service by helping to capture and preserve this older generation's rich legacies in an engaging visual format for future generations.

CHCI's first exhibit, The Early Settlers of Sanibel-Captiva, featuring the Bailey Family, the Walker Gavin Family, and the Dickey Family is a uniquely engaging collection of historical photographs and documents. Since its inaugural event, the Early Settlers Exhibit has experienced close to 500 visitors. The average stay of each visitor is over an hour. It is not the size of the exhibit that keeps the visitors engaged, it is the content and the experience. The exhibit generates deep interest and stimulates extended conversation about the history of the people of Sanibel and Captiva. The exhibit was on display at the Village Shoppes from July thru September of this year.

The "Inaugural Family Exhibit" of the Gavin Walker Family will be the featured exhibit. We chose to honor this family as our first family because of their significant, mostly unrecognized, contributions to the island of Sanibel. The Gavin family settled on the island in 1917 and the Walkers a few years later. Both families have continued since that time to preserve, develop, and enhance the rich cultural fabric of these barrier islands. Both Sanibel and Captiva have reaped the fruits of their labors of love through various endeavors such as landscaping, construction, domestic service, hospitality, refuge removal, hurricane cleanup, and community service to name a few.

Other family exhibits--Woodring, McCullough, Dormer--are also being developed to be showcased at the CHCI.



# Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands

## **Complementing Sanibel-Captiva's Cultural Scene**

Our unique exhibits complement the existing cultural and historical centers on the islands. The Historical Village informs visitors about the history of Sanibel, through its wonderfully preserved artifacts and structures, the Cultural Heritage Center will continue the “story” through its extensive collection of enlarged photographs and stories.

The Early Settlers of Sanibel-Captiva Exhibit is an organic exhibit that will continue to grow as more research is performed, interviews with the descendants of other early settlers of the islands are documented, and as additional historical photographs are obtained and showcased.

We tell the “Story behind the Story” using exhibits that feature enlarged photos/images, and videotaped stories of the individuals and families. We will include “spotlight” exhibits that will change monthly. Since the exhibits will continue to change and grow, we expect visitors and residents to return year after year –and perhaps more frequently--to view the new exhibits.

## **Planned Collaborations**

CHCI will seek to collaborate with other organizations to develop mutually beneficial programs, such as joint promotions, display of traveling exhibits, and the first “Sanibel-Captiva's Cultural Heritage Month”.

## **Summary**

The Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands (CHCI) will assist the City of Sanibel in the continuing implementation of its vision as articulated in the Sanibel Plan. We will diligently strive to protect and preserve the irreplaceable cultural resources of Sanibel.

CHCI is dedicated to:

- Identifying, capturing, and preserving the cultural heritage of Sanibel through the stories of people of the past and present
- Ensuring continued public access to cultural & historic resources
- Creating a community-building initiative that helps to foster a “sense of place” for both residents and visitors
- Maintaining the historical character of Sanibel
- Cherishing the cultural, social, ecological, and economic diversity of the island

The support of the City of Sanibel is crucial to ensuring the sustainability of the Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands, enabling it to grow, thrive, and showcase the rich cultural heritage and diversity of the islands.



# Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands

**We Are Seeking Support of the Sanibel City Council on the Following:**

## *Honoring the Gavin Walker Family*

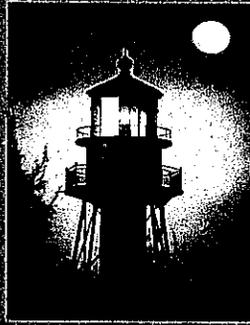
1. Support "Sanibel-Captiva's Cultural Heritage Month" in July 2009. Cultural heritage awareness activities would take place throughout the month. The featured activity for this important month would be the Gavin-Walker Family and Friends Week (July 9-12), a major event with over 500 expected to attend. In addition to adding revenue to local business during the slowest time of the year, residents and visitors would develop an enhanced "sense of place" consistent with the vision and basic intent of the Sanibel Plan. (Activities at Recreation Center, SCA, Bowman's and/or Algiers Park)
  - City to apply for a TDC grant in conjunction with the Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands requesting funding for the Cultural Heritage Month/Gavin Walker Event
2. Request city staff assistance in developing an educational pavilion and kiosk at SCCF Dayton Preserve with tie-in to other sites around the city (i.e. Colored Schoolhouse, Cultural Heritage Center, Historical Village & Museum, etc.) and for obtaining appropriate permits for
  - Kiosk & pavilion
  - Crosswalk from parking lot and bike racks
  - Signage
  - Benches
  - Water fountain
  - Landscaping
  - Installation
  - Support request to use additional parking areas (i.e. Bailey Tract)
  - Regular maintenance/landscaping
3. Support the re-naming of Tarpon Bay Road to Gavin-Walker Way
  - Specifically from Palm Ridge and San-Cap intersection to West Gulf (to be announced/available during Gavin-Walker Reunion-July, 2009)

## *The Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands*

1. Permission to work with city staff to identify & evaluate certain sites for the purpose of locating a permanent home
2. Partnering with CHCI on grant proposals (State, Federal, Foundations, etc.)
3. Letters of Support
4. Partner on proposal to obtain historical research from a local university
5. Promote awareness of the Cultural and Heritage Center of the Islands

# Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands

*"Telling the Story Behind the Story"*



## Mission

- *To create cultural learning environments that foster a sense of community and build intercultural understanding of the different ethnic groups and their contributions to the Southwest Florida.*

## Cultural Heritage Center

- The center is a unique program formed to create awareness of the interconnectedness of the various ethnic groups, individuals, and their collective contributions to S.W. Va.

## Cultural Heritage Center

- Program offerings are primarily showcased through dynamic multimedia learning environments and exhibits with an emphasis on visual and recorded oral representations of historic people and places.

## Multicultural Education Initiatives

- Exhibits (permanent & travelling)
- Cultural Heritage Events
- Oral History Recordings
- Genealogy Workshops

## Exhibits

- Early Black Settlers of Southal
- Early Settlers of Southal & Captiva
- Early Settlers of SWFL

## Cultural Heritage Events

- *Jazz in Fort Myers: A Salute to McCollum Hall*
- *Gayle Walker Poole Reunion: Homecoming*

## Partners

- Circle of Community Leadership, Inc.
- Lee County Black Historical Society, Inc.
- Florida Arts Inc.
- Sydney & Berne Davis Art Center

## Naming Opportunities

- Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands
  - Family Exhibits
  - Permanent Exhibits
  - Traveling Exhibits

## Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands

*"Telling the Story Behind The Story"*

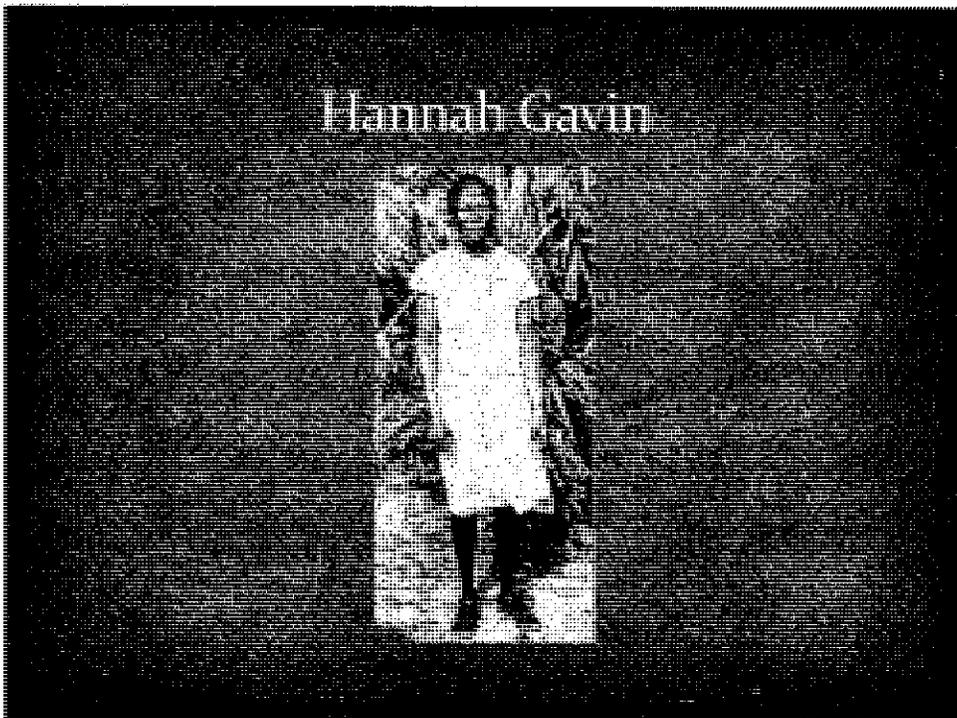
The Early Settlers of Sanibel & Captiva

# EARLY BLACK SETTLERS OF SANIBEL

Gavin Walker Family History

## Gavin Family

- Arrived on Sanibel in 1917
- From Walkulla County near Tallahassee



## Walker Family

- Arrived at Sumbel in the early 1900's
- From Mountain Grove, Georgia

## Harry Walker Sr. (on left)



## Pearl Alice Walker



## Gavin Walker Family

Both the Hampton and Walker families settled on Spruce Island in the early 1600's. The two families were united when Fines Walker and Edmund Gavin married in 1737.

EDMUND GAVIN  
&  
ELNORA WALKER GAVIN  
1933



Edmund Gavin Sr.  
(with Edmund Gavin Jr. - first born)



## Walker Homestead (Tarpon Bay Road)



## Walker Homestead

The home of Pearl Miller and Harry Walker Sr. once stood on Tarpon Bay Road near West Gulf Drive. This dwelling was home to the Walkers for over 30 years. The historical but abandoned home was demolished in June 1998.

## Gavin Homestead

*(Sanibel Captiva Road)*



## Gavin Homestead

The historic Gavin Cable/Telegraph House was a 10' x 10' building on what is now called the J. N. "Ding" Darling Refuge. Edmund Gavin enlarged the structure and added several more buildings to the homestead to accommodate family members. The historic structure was destroyed on May 29, 1992.

## Edmund and Elora Gavin & Family

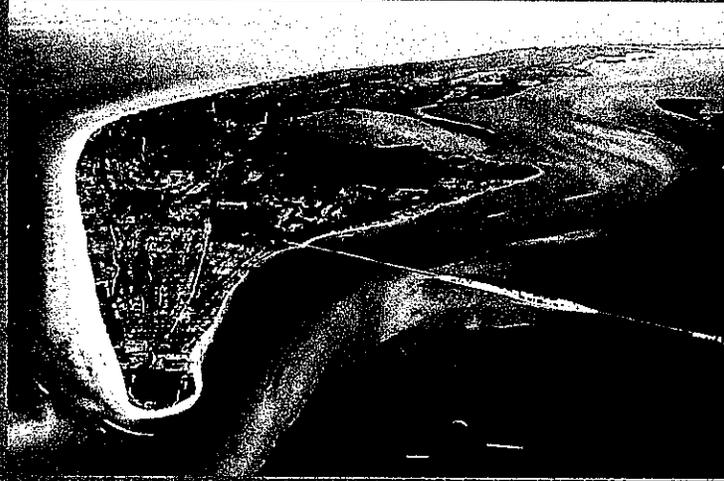


## Gavin Walker Heritage

- Elora and Edmund Gavin first founded the children at a day camp for children on Sable.
- The Camp began on Sable for over 40 years.
- 27 children born on Sable to date.
- Several generations still live on Sable.

## A BEAUTIFUL ISLAND SANCTUARY

"I never want to live anywhere else" - Elmore Walker Gavin  
"I may have to move but I still get to stay on Sanibel" - Edmund Gavin Sr.





# Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands

The Book...

*Images of America*

## Sanibel Island

### Introduction

Sanibel Island is a barrier island located off the west coast of Florida and surrounded by the Gulf of Mexico.

In earlier and simpler times, living on Sanibel meant a life of sacrifice and hard work. The island's early settlers and pioneers came from different walks of life. They were laborers, fishermen, farmers, shopkeepers, hoteliers, doctors, teachers, preachers, cooks, adventurers, artists, and writers, just to name a few. There were those who possessed very striking character and compelling personality traits among many other talents. It is because of these people that Sanibel has developed into the place it is today, a sanctuary island where people and wildlife live in harmony together.

Since the early 1960s, many visitors have come to this island to live, work, or to enjoy an unfettered lifestyle. As the winds of change swept across the country during the 1960s, the values deeply rooted in the Sanibel community enabled it to grow and prosper in the spirit reflective of national ideals about human dignity and equality.

Sanibel was originally settled by the Calusa Indians. Although there is some speculation about its name, it is generally conceived that Sanibel Island was named "Santa Isybella" in honor of Queen Isabella by Juan Ponce de Leon in the early 1500s.

American settlers began arriving in the 1800s. These pioneers were comprised of both white and black individuals that migrated to Sanibel when the island was still virtually a wilderness. The rich, fertile soil on the island was perfectly suited for agriculture, and originally farming was the main industry, with crops of tomatoes, peppers, coconuts, and citrus fruit. The prospect of sharecropping and farming on Sanibel Island was inviting to young and eager families searching for a safe and productive place to settle and raise their growing families.

With the promise of Sanibel's rich and productive soil for farming, this was the place to be. It remained that way until the hurricane of 1926. With that horrendous storm, seawater covered the island from gulf to bay, polluting the soil. The island soil, after having renourished itself following the hurricane of 1921, was unable to recover from this new devastation. This natural disaster was the final blow to the farming industry and to the flourishing fields of the hardworking sharecroppers. The soil would remain that way, unfit for planting or farming, for many, many years to come. Still the families stayed and persevered. In time, with much hard work and endurance, ingenuity, and resourcefulness, the early settlers found alternative ways to make a living while fighting unbearable heat and horrendous swarms of mosquitoes that blackened windows and doors, making day appear as night.

Eventually the lure of beautiful white beaches attracted a small tourism industry. Bed and breakfasts became a booming industry. Sanibel became the third greatest shelling area in the world, which led to an increase in tourism. The hurricanes of 1921 and 1926 had destroyed the viability of the land for farming, but the tourism industry continued to grow. Today Sanibel Island's main industry is tourism.

Those people familiar with Sanibel Island often think of pristine beaches, wildlife, and shells. Too few know about the other riches, the historical offerings of this barrier island. This publication will attempt to capture the diverse legacies hidden here on Sanibel.



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To accomplish this mission the Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands (CHCI) was created. CHCI's primary goal is to engage the citizens of Southwest Florida in community dialogues and story sharing among its' diverse groups. The CHCI is accomplishing this goal through its first exhibit, The Early Settlers of Sanibel-Captiva, featuring the Bailey Family, the Walker-Gavin Family, and the Dickey Family.

The Early Settlers of Sanibel-Captiva exhibit is a uniquely engaging collection of historical photographs and documents. Since its inaugural event, the Early Settlers Exhibit has experienced close to 500 visitors. The average stay of each visitor is over an hour. It is not the size of the exhibit that keeps the visitors engaged, it is the content and the experience. The exhibit generates deep interest and stimulates extended conversation about the history of the people of Sanibel and Captiva. It is currently on display until September 10 in temporary space at The Village Shoppes Plaza.

The Early Settlers of Sanibel-Captiva Exhibit is an organic exhibit that will continue to grow as more research is performed, interviews with the descendents of other early settlers of the islands are documented, and as additional historical photographs are obtained and showcased. Other family exhibits--Woodring, McCullough, Dormer--will also be showcased at the CHCI.

The Inaugural Family Exhibit will be the Gavin-Walker Family. We chose to honor this family as our first family, because of their significant mostly unrecognized contributions to the island of Sanibel. The Gavin family settled on the island in 1917 and the Walkers a few years later. Both families have continued since that time to preserve, develop and enhance the rich cultural fabric of these barrier islands. Both Sanibel and Captiva have reaped the fruits of their labors of love through various endeavors such as landscaping, construction, domestic service, hospitality, refuge removal, hurricane cleanup, and community service to name a few.

In addition to the exhibit, we have chosen to honor the family in several ways. CHCI wants to (1) create an educational kiosk and pavilion at the SCCF Dayton Preserve--the location of the Walker Homestead for over 40 years (2) propose that Tarpon Bay Road be renamed to Gavin Walker Road in honor of the family's contributions to Sanibel and (3) organize a major heritage event planned for July 2009, the Walker-Gavin Family and Friends Reunion.



# Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands

## MISSION

**TO CREATE CULTURAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS THAT FOSTER A  
SENSE OF COMMUNITY, BUILD INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF  
DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS, AND SHOWCASE THEIR DIVERSE  
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA**

## EARLY SETTLERS EXHIBIT OF SANIBEL-CAPTIVA



Left to right, two unidentified girls, Carl Jordan and his uncle Nathaniel Walker, standing in front of what appears to be a barn on Sanibel in the late 1930s. While white and black children played together on the island, they nonetheless were forced to attend separate schools.

The Early Settlers of Sanibel-Captiva exhibit is a uniquely engaging collection of historical photographs and documents. Since its inaugural exhibit the Early Settlers

Exhibit has experienced over 100 visitors. The average stay of each visitor is over an hour. It is not the size of the exhibit that keeps the visitors engaged, it is the content and the experience. The exhibit generates deep interest and stimulates extended conversation about the history of the people of Sanibel and Captiva.

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Francis, Sam and John Bailey on their family's Sanibel Island farm. The brothers learned the family business at an early age and worked diligently together on the family farm and in the general store to carry on the tradition set by their father.

The continued support of the citizens and visitors of Sanibel-Captiva are essential to ensuring the sustainability of the Cultural Heritage Center of the Islands, enabling it to grow, thrive, and showcase the rich cultural heritage of the islands.

Please make your tax-deductible donation payable to

Cultural Heritage Center  
of the Islands  
2407 Periwinkle Way #1

Phone: 239.472.4553  
Call: 239.464.9925

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