

"On The Town"

Dr. Richard (Rick) Martorano

The Halifax Historical Museum A Must See

This is an invitation to visit the Halifax Historical Museum. It's good to learn some facts pertaining to our local ancestors as well as the interesting history which brought us to the society and culture that we enjoy today. The Halifax Historical Society will do just that. Below is a short history as to how the society came to be, and some notes regarding the exhibits and displays for visitors today. I have purposely not mentioned names of volunteers, staff and supporters who have been involved with the museum over the years. They number in the hundreds and it would be discourteous not to mention all that have made this wonderful museum a vital part of our community.

After the Second World War, many of the citizens of Daytona Beach and surrounding communities were seriously concerned about preserving the community's history and heritage. With the financial help of several local citizens, **The Halifax Historical Society** was chartered in 1949, and held their meetings in various locations throughout the city. Over the years it acquired documents, photographs, and other artifacts representative of the area's history. In 1959 the society was opened to the public in its first home, 145 North Halifax Ave, on the peninsula of Daytona Beach. Here at last, they were able to operate a museum and to better stockpile and display their growing collection of historical material.

Today the museum is housed in the 1910 Merchants Bank building. The bank was opened on September 11, 1911 and is architecturally important as Daytona's finest example of classic early 20th century design. The bank closed in 1929 during the "Great Depression" years, and went through several metamorphosis changes until 1981, when it was purchased by a private investor. The Society, with the financial help of Volusia County, bought the building and has maintained it ever since. Renovations began in 1984, and in September of 1986, the Halifax Historical Museum reopened on the 75th anniversary of the completion of the original building.

The actual bank building located at 252 South Beach St. is listed on the National Register of historical places. The surrounding coastal area around Daytona Beach is called "Halifax" because the Intracoastal Waterway is known as the Halifax River. It was named in 1764 after Lord Halifax of England, by a British surveyor. The following are some of the many exhibits contained in the museum for your viewing pleasure.

History of Auto Racing in Daytona. For many years Daytona Beach has been synonymous to speed and racing. Much of the back section of the museum contains material commemorating the speed-time trials and competitive races on the beach. From 1903 to 1936 all land speed records were set on the beach, giving it the designation of "The World's Most Famous Beach". Racing legends, such as Campbell, Seagrave, Lockhart and Oldfield became associated with Daytona Beach. If you're a race fan, you'll enjoy spending time at this exhibit.

The Daytona Beach Volunteer Lifeguard Corps. This exhibit displays examples of old swimsuits, and a huge old paddle-board made in shop class at Seabreeze High School in the early days. Hundreds of lifeguards have protected swimmers in the waters of Daytona Beach. Memorabilia collected over the years is on display.

The War Room. Under the archway you will find memorabilia from the Spanish-American war, World War I, and World War II. Especially note the great material on the WAAC's. You can see many photos from the encampment of the over 40,000 members that were in Daytona Beach during World War II.

The First Spanish Period – 1565-1763. The Spaniards claimed Florida and settled in St. Augustine in 1565. At this exhibit you can see the first recorded survey of the Halifax area made in 1605.

Then, British Period – 1763-1783. The Spaniards relinquished the Florida territories in 1763 to the British. Richard Oswald's plantation, now the site of Tomoka State Park north of Ormond Beach, was the first permanent settlement in the Halifax area. Also during this time, Andrew Turnbull's colony at New Smyrna was established. In 1783, Britain ceded Florida back to Spain.

The Second Spanish Period 1800-1836. This was the period of large, Sugar Mill plantations in the area. The United States government wanted to move all Native Americans to Oklahoma in 1833. The Seminole Indians refused to go, and in 1835, began raiding the plantations, and finally burned down the Mills which drove out the white settlers.

The Civil War and Victorian era. 1850-1900. With the Civil War ending, those who began to seek refuge from northern winters were attracted to Florida for the climate. Shipbuilders from New England came to Florida and began harvesting the outstanding Live Oaks for building. Millionaires Henry Flagler and John D. Rockefeller built hotels and private residences in the Daytona Beach area.

Most of the exhibits along the north wall and the exhibits on the south wall of the museum follow a timeline beginning with early Native Americans. Included in this section are drawings and artifacts of the first inhabitants, the Timucua Indians. The largest of the six tribes comprised of approximately 10,000 members was located along the Halifax River where Daytona Beach stands today.

I have only mentioned a small selection of the many exhibits at the museum. The museum is truly a must see for any and all residents or visitors to the area. The museum is located at 252 South Beach St. in downtown Daytona Beach. Call 386- 255-6976 for more information or go online at www.Halifaxhistorical.org.

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