

## *Inside the Zora Neale Hurston Exhibit*



**Saturday, January 26, 2013:** The Grand Opening of the Zora Neale Hurston Exhibit, opened it's doors at 809 N. 9th Street in Ft. Pierce.

**Zora's Biography:** Born in Macon County, Notasulga, Alabama, on January 7, 1891. Anthropologist, American Folklorist and Acclaimed Author during the Harlem Renaissance, was dimly recognize in the Fort Pierce area. Today, she is known for her ground breaking collection of books and outspoken memoirs.

**Building's History:** In the Nineteen Fifties, 809 N. 9th Street was known as the Saint Lucie Welfare Home. A place where the sick, with no means of support was placed. One such sick person, was Zora Neale Hurston. The acclaimed writer of the well known novel "Their Eyes Where Watching God". (Oprah Winfrey's book choice) In the Seventies, after the county welfare home closed its doors, the building became the Helping Hand Neighbors Senior Citizens Center. Today, it is known to the area as the S.L.C. Agape Recreational Center. A safe place providing breakfast, lunch, activities and pleasant surroundings for seniors to enjoy, from 8:30 am until 1: pm.

**Death History:** Over the years there have been questions to the actual place of Zora's death. Many claimed she passed away in the hospital. A closer look proved she did not have medical insurance, nor did she have any income. Subsequently, in poor health the Lincoln Park Hospital, released her to the county welfare home just two blocks away. Hospital medical papers and a letter written by the nursing home's supervisor, Abbiejean Russell, speaks of Zora's illness at the home. Russell writes in her letter; On January 29, 1960, Zora Neale Hurston, passed away at the age of 69, at County Welfare Home, in Fort Pierce Fl. A death certificate was issued by Peaks Funeral Home, on Ave. D. A funeral presided and she was buried at the Heavenly Rest Cemetery with friends, teachers and students attending.

After creditable documentation of her stay at the building was confirmed, the Agape Senior Center Board, voted to place an exhibit in the building to honor the writer.

The building stands today almost as it did back then. A charming little building that if walls could talk, would tell the story of Zora's last days. Inside is a room designed to duplicate what the nursing home may have look like, during the time Zora rested there. In another area of the room, there is a desk, a typewriter, copies of her writings, letters, books, pictures, clothing and of course, *hats*.

For those who have not seen the Zora documentary "*that's livin,*" filmed right here in Ft. Pierce, the DVD's may be purchased at the Exhibit. Come visit the Exhibit and learn of this extraordinary woman named, ..... *Zora Neale Hurston*.

During the weekday, scheduling for students are made. On Saturdays by appointment only, community and out of town visitors may call: 772/332-1220

## History Of The Site

The building 809 N. 9th Street, was once known as the S. L. C. Lincoln Park Welfare Home. A place for the elderly and sick with no means of support lived. One such person residing there until her death in 1960, was the writer, author and anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston. Best known for her novel *"Their Eyes Where Watching God"*.

During Zora's stay, another known person working at the facility was Abbyjean Russell, supervisor for the County. In a letter Ms. Russell speaks of Zora's illnesses and of the many conversation they both had, about Zora being a writer. (letter on display at the building)

Ms. Russell's work affiliation with the county most have been of some significant. So much so that a Nursing Home facility was named in her honor.

In the early eighties, the welfare home closed its door only to reopen as the SLC Helping Hand Neighbors Senior Citizens Center. A place where seniors received breakfast, lunch, and six hours of recreational fun in a safe place with others of their piers. As of today, seniors and the disable come for meals and to socialize. However, they are not the only ones who enjoy coming to the center. Students and visitors also drop by to see an exhibit of the famous author, now on display. Today visitors from Connecticut, New Jersey, Nevada and various parts of Florida, stop in to see the place were Zora Neale Hurston spent her last days.



Zora Neale Hurston



809 N. 9th Street



Abbiejean Russell

May 7, 1971

Mr. Robert Hemenway  
Associate Professor  
American Studies Program  
University of Wyoming  
Box 3334 University Station  
Laramie, Wyoming 82070

Re: Zora Neale Hurston

Dear Mr. Hemenway:

Your letter of May 10th in regard to the above cautioned person was referred to me for reply since I was executive director of St. Lucie County Welfare Association for twenty-two years prior to my retirement in February 1967.

On May 12, 1959 Zora Neale Hurston applied to this agency, and was granted assistance for prescription drugs. At the time her other needs were being met from the rent of one of her rooms and benefits from a sick and accident insurance policy.

On May 9, 1959 she had drawn the last of her insurance claims for the calendar year, and in addition to drugs, was approved for food vouchers.

The latter part of September 1959 Miss Hurston, a victim of hypertensive heart disease, was regressing both physically and mentally. On October 29th she was admitted to St. Lucie County's Lincoln Park welfare home, 809 N. 9th Street, and died in the home on January 28, 1960.

Prior to Miss Hurston's admission to the welfare home, we had a number of friendly chats. She referred with pride to Eatonville, Florida where she grew up and to her early days at Columbia University. She spoke of her work as a novelist and we discussed other subjects pertaining to local and national affairs of the day. I was attracted to Miss Hurston as a person, not because of her accomplishments.

I contacted Mrs. Marjorie Silver and Mr. Leroy Floyd, and learned that you had visited Fort Pierce and had spent

Mr. Robert Hemenway  
Associate Professor  
Laramie, Wyoming

June 7, 1971

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Time with both gathering information for your biography. I also called Dr. C. C. Benton's office and was informed by his secretary that you and the doctor had corresponded relative to Miss Hurston. Therefore, I feel that anything I might say would be of no use to you.

I am happy to know that you are writing a biography of Miss Hurston. She is a woman her race can be proud of.

Sincerely yours,

(Mrs.) Abbiejean Russell  
Welfare Home Coordinator

cc: Mrs. Gladys Smith

**Zora Neal Hurston Exhibit**  
Acclaimed Author and Anthropologist

**Something you may not know**

In 1957, Zora arrived in Ft. Pierce to write for a black newspaper called the Chronicle. The Publisher and Owner C. E. Bolin, wrote Zora requesting she come. She agreed and soon after, began writing articles on Community Concerns, Race Relations and Local Features. Before her arrival she had depleted her savings, her health had already began to fail and by the fall of 1959, she was forced to enter the hospital for hypertension and a stroke. Shortly afterwards, her insurance ran out and she was placed at the St. Lucie County Welfare Home.

In a letter written by the supervisor of the home, Miss Abbiejean Russell, she writes: "The patient, after having a stroke is unable to care for herself. She has difficulty walking, speaking and there is lost of movement on her left side. During her stay here, Miss. Hurston and I had a number of friendly chats. She stated she was a reporter for a black newspaper in town, is an author of several books. She often would speak of her travels and works as a novelist. I found myself attracted to Miss Hurston as a person and not because of her accomplishments".

On January 29, 1960, Zora Neale Hurston passed away. While living in Ft. Pierce, she was not known as an accomplished person. Therefore, with no family members near, none of her personal things at her home were kept.

Today, the building still stands. It is now a recreational center for seniors to enjoy as well as to host the Zora Neale Hurston Exhibit. Letters and other documentation of her stay at the home can be found on the exhibit walls. Looking down a narrow hallway, you see a image of Zora, welcoming you. Of course she is no longer with us, but her presents is everywhere. In the exhibit room you hear the charm of her voice and the sounds of southern music. Pictures of her, books she's written, a typewriter, period clothing and of course hats, are all on display.

As told by family and friends, the authentic documentary story of her life "That's Living" filmed right here in Ft. Pierce, can be purchased as well as books and other items.

The exhibit is open during the Zora events in Ft. Pierce, Black History and during Women In History month. At other times by calling: Brenda Cooper at 772-332-1220

## Zora Neale Hurston Biography

Author, Civil Rights Activist (1891–1960)



Anthropologist and novelist Zora Neale Hurston was a fixture of the Harlem Renaissance before writing her masterwork, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

### Synopsis

Born in Alabama on January 7, 1891, Zora Neale Hurston spent her early adulthood studying at various universities and collecting folklore from the South, the Caribbean and Latin America. She published her findings in *Mules and Men*. Hurston was a fixture of the Harlem Renaissance, rubbing shoulders with many of its famous writers. In 1937, she published her masterwork of fiction, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hurston died in Florida in 1960.

### Early Life

Born on January 7, 1891, in Notasulga, Alabama, writer Zora Neale Hurston created several acclaimed works of fiction, including the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She was also an outstanding folklorist and anthropologist who worked to record the stories and tales of many cultures, including her own African-American heritage.

Hurston was the daughter of two former slaves. Her father, John Hurston, was a pastor, and he moved the family to Florida when Hurston was very young. Following the death of her mother, Lucy Ann (Potts) Hurston, in 1904, and her father's subsequent remarriage, Hurston lived with an assortment of family members for the next few years.

To support herself and finance her efforts to get an education, Hurston worked a variety of jobs, including as a maid for an actress in a touring Gilbert and Sullivan group. In

1920, Hurston earned an associate degree from Howard University. She published one of her earliest works in the university's newspaper. A few years later, she moved to New York City's Harlem neighborhood, where she became a fixture in the area's thriving art scene.

## Writing Career

Living in Harlem in the 1920s, Hurston befriended the likes of Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen, among several others. Her apartment, according to some accounts, was a popular spot for social gatherings. Around this time, Hurston experienced a few early literary successes, including placing in short-story and playwriting contests in *Opportunity* magazine.

Hurston also had serious academic interests. She landed a scholarship to Barnard College, where she pursued the subject of anthropology and studied with Franz Boas. In 1927, Hurston returned to Florida to collect African-American folk tales. She would later publish a collection of these stories, entitled *Mules and Men* (1935). Hurston also contributed articles to magazines, including the *Journal of American Folklore*.

Also in the mid-1930s, Hurston explored the fine arts through a number of different projects. She worked with Langston Hughes on a play called *Mule-Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life*—disputes over the work would eventually lead to a falling out between the two writers—and wrote several other plays, including *The Great Day* and *From Sun to Sun*.

Hurston released her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, in 1934. Two years later, she received a Guggenheim fellowship, which allowed her to work on what would become her most famous work: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). She wrote the novel while traveling in Haiti, where she also studied local voodoo practices. That same year, Hurston spent time in Jamaica conducting anthropological research.

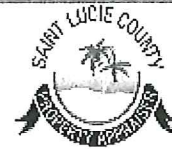
In 1942, Hurston published her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*. This personal work was well-received by critics, but her life and career soon began to falter. Hurston was charged with molesting a 10-year-old boy in 1948; despite being able to prove that she was out of the country at the time of the incident, she suffered greatly from this false accusation.

PROPERTY RECORD CARD

St Lucie County Record: 1 of 1 <<Prev Next>> Spec Assmnt Taxes Exemptions Permits Home Print

Property Identification

Site Address: 809 N 9th St ParcelID: 2403-710-0012-000-0  
 Sec/Town/Range: 03 :36S :40E Account #: 16110  
 Map ID: 24/03S Use Type: COUNTIES  
 Zoning: R4 City/Cnty: Fort Pierce



Ownership and Mailing

Owner: St Lucie County  
 Address: %Management & Budget  
 2300 Virginia Ave Fort Pierce FL 34982-6632

Legal Description

GLIDDEN'S TERRACE BLK 4 LOTS 5, 6, 8 AND 9 (DB 188-12)

Sales Information

Date	Price	Code	Deed	Book	Page
1/1/1900	0				

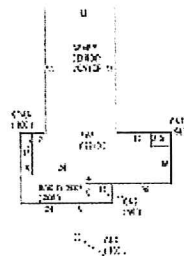
Assessment 2013

2013 Final: 139200  
 Assessed: 139200  
 Ag.Credit: 0  
 Exempt: 139200  
 Taxable: 0  
 Taxes: 0

Total Land and Building

Land Value: 46200 Acres: 0.64  
 Building Value: 92000  
 Finished Area: 3270 SqFt

BUILDING INFORMATION



Exterior Features

View:	-	RoofCover:	FS - Fiberglass Shg	RoofStruct:	GA - Gable
ExtType:	HD - HD	YearBlt:	1958	Frame:	-
Grade:	D - D	EffYrBlt:	1979	PrimeWall:	BP - Conc Block
StoryHght:	0010 - 1 Story	No.Units:	1	SecWall:	-

Interior Features

BedRooms:	0	Electric:	MX - MAXIMUM	PrmIntWall:	DW - Drywall
FullBath:	0	HeatType:	FHA - FredHotAir	AvgHi/Ft:	
1/2Bath:	0	HeatFuel:	ELEC - Electric	Prm.Floors:	VT - Vinyl Tiles
%A/C:	100	%Heated:	100	%Sprinkled:	0

Special Features and Yard Items

Type	Y/S	Qty.	Units	Qual.	Cond.	YrBlt.	No.	Use Type	Type	Measure	Depth
ASP2 - ASP2 LOW	Y	1	7399	AV	AV	1983	1	8600-COUNTIES	205 -Front Ft	280	100.08
CURB - CEMENT CURB	Y	1	78	AV	AV	1978					
FEN6 - CHAINLINK 6'	Y	1	360	AV	AV	2001					