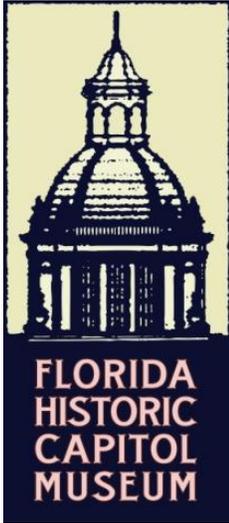


Press Release



What *Visit Paradise: Stories of Weeki Wachee and the Mermaids*

Where Florida Historic Capitol Museum
400 S. Monroe Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

Date & Time **Friday, December 2, 2011**
6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

FREE EVENT

FIRST FRIDAY GALLERY HOP & TROLLEY RUN

Contact Alma P. Hubbard, Director of External Relations
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tallahassee, FL, November 17, 2011-- The Florida Historic Capitol Museum invites you to Visit Paradise with us!

Have you ever wondered about the life of a Weeki Wachee mermaid? Local author Lu Vickers, one of the winners of the 2011 Florida Book Awards co-sponsored by The Florida Humanities Council, will present the amazing story of one of Florida's oldest roadside attractions. With her charming style of storytelling, she will describe the exotic crystal clear spring where mythical mermaids and mermen dwelled in the deep as she shares excerpts from her book *Weeki Wachee, City of Mermaids*, which she will also sign. Visitors will also be charmed by three of the original Weeki Wachee mermaids, as they share their personal stories of life underwater as they entertained thousands of tourists hungry for a taste of the real Florida dream.

For more than sixty years, the mermaids of Weeki Wachee have performed underwater for countless tourists and film crews. Following World War II, Florida tourism was booming and the appeal of the roadside attraction offering crystal clear waters and alluring mermaids put this tiny town on the map as a must-see destination. Newt Perry had been the manager of the Wakulla Springs Lodge since 1941, and in 1946 he helped to develop and manage Weeki Wachee Spring, which first opened on October 12, 1947, and became the exotic fantasyland promoted as a city underwater where mermaids performed the normal activities of daily life such as making coffee, eating fruit and primping before a mirror. They also performed ballet, and after ABC bought the attraction in 1959, began performing musicals, such as *Alice in Waterland*. The mermaids went through extensive underwater training in order to perform these amazing stunts in what appeared to be effortless fashion.

Lu Vickers was charmed by the image of mermaids as a child when she first got a glimpse of a faded billboard advertising Weeki Wachee Spring. As she sped down the Gulf Coast Highway on summer vacation with her family in their Ford Fairlane, she could only envision the life of a mermaid. Years later, as that childhood

memory bubbled up to the surface and tugged her imagination, she returned to Weeki Wachee to meet the real mermaids themselves. Vicker's delightful prose weaves the remarkable tale of Weeki Wachee's history and its beautiful mermaids.

We hope you will join us for this exciting evening with Lu Vickers and original Weeki Wachee mermaids. This event serves as the Closing Party for the temporary exhibit on Florida tourism, *Remembering Paradise: Souvenirs of Historic Florida Attractions*. The event is part of the First Friday Gallery Hop and Trolley Run. Music will be provided by *The Bothys*, a local folk group performing traditional and contemporary Celtic tunes. Refreshments will be provided. Visit www.flhistoriccapitol.gov to learn more about this event.

Funding for this program was provided in part through an award from the Florida Humanities Council with funds from the Florida Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs. Visit www.flahum.org to learn more.

The Florida Historic Capitol Foundation, as the Direct Support Organization for the Museum, extends its deepest appreciation to the following Partners for their support and efforts in making this event possible:

About Lu Vickers

Lu Vickers is a 2011 winner of the Florida Book Awards presented annually by the Florida Humanities Council. She won a Bronze Medal in the category of Florida Nonfiction for the publication of her recent book [*Cypress Gardens, America's Tropical Wonderland*](#). Lu Vickers has published numerous essays and short stories in magazines such as *Salon.com* and *Apalachee Review*, and she has received three Individual Artist's Grants from the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs. In addition to the novel [*Breathing Underwater*](#), she has published two books on Florida history, [*Weeki Wachee, City of Mermaids, a History of One of Florida's Oldest Roadside Attractions*](#), and [*Cypress Gardens, America's Tropical Wonderland*](#). With former mermaid Bonnie Georgiadis, Lu put together a collection of vintage photos, *Deep in the Spring: 30 Years of Underwater Photography at Weeki Wachee*, due out in 2012. She is currently working on a novel.

About The Florida Humanities Council

The Florida Humanities Council (FHC) is a private 501(3)C non-profit organization dedicated to building strong communities and informed citizens by providing Floridians with the opportunity to explore the heritage, traditions and stories of our state and its place in the world. Established in 1973, the FHC is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. FHC uses the disciplines of the humanities to develop public programs and resources that explore history, literary and artistic traditions, cultural values and ethics.

About Wakulla Springs Lodge

The beautiful Wakulla Springs Lodge sits amidst one of the world's largest freshwater springs, shaded by grand southern oak trees. Founded by Edward Ball in 1937 and formerly managed by the Department of Environmental Protection, Cape Leisure Corp took over management of the lodge on July 1, 2011 and is recapturing the 1930's splendor through its programs. The lodge offers visitors a timeless glimpse into Florida's pristine and elegant past. Surrounded by nature, including canopies of oak, hickory and beech trees, the natural spring, and Florida wildlife, the Lodge offers up old southern charm and a peaceful get-away. A great place for family vacations and reunions, weddings, anniversaries, conferences, and other special events, the Lodge is also a perfect retreat for artists, writers, or those that just want to "get away from it all."

Visit www.wakullaspringslodge.com to learn more.

Promotional images available upon request.

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