

# 19th Century Ghost Town Brought Back to Life

*A two-day free celebration of the lost town of Ethel*

LONGWOOD, FL, UNITED STATES, February 20, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- History will come alive again at the 12th annual East Lake Heritage Festival to be held at Rock Springs Run State Reserve, 31515 Wekiva River Road, Sorrento, between 10am and 4 pm on March 21 and 22, with a special nod to America's 250th Birthday.

The free two-day event, organized by the East Lake Historical Society, Friends of Ethel and the Wekiva Wilderness Trust, will celebrate the ghost town of Ethel, a wilderness community that sprang up after the Civil War and then mysteriously disappeared almost without trace in the 1920s. The sprawling town of Ethel extended across what is now Rock Springs Run State Reserve and was located next to the pre-Civil War William Delk plantation in what is today known as Kelly Park.

The Heritage Festival will feature exhibitors, vendors, arts and crafters, and reenactors, who will demonstrate what life was like for the early pioneers. Visitors will also enjoy a guided tram tour through the lost town of Ethel, as well as guided walks, live music, entertainment, children's games, and more. Festival food will also be available for



Cabin built at Ethel around 1888



life-size replica of Click cabin

purchase.

Prior to the Civil War, William Delk owned the largest plantation in the area. A Union supporter, he freed his slaves in 1863 and went to work with the Union Army. After the war, Delk returned to reclaim his property. Some of his freed slaves, which included Anthony Frazier, and other homesteaders moved into the surrounding area and soon Ethel was born.

More than 15 years of research has uncovered the names of most of the people who lived in Ethel through the years, along with the exact location of their homesteads. Much information about their daily lives were uncovered from vintage photos, letters and postcards written at the time. By the late 1800s, Ethel included a general store, post office, a one-room schoolhouse, train station, and a cemetery. In its heyday, the growing community along the railroad line between Tavares and Sanford had a population of nearly 300 residents.

In 2024, the Historic Ethel Trail was opened with a 1.5-mile wheelchair accessible loop through what would have been the center of the township. Twelve interpretive panels along the route describe what life was like back then for Ethel's early settlers. Guided walking tours are held every month, and a self-guiding brochure is available at the trailhead for those who want to explore by themselves.

At this year's Heritage Festival, a life-size replica of a 10-foot by 12-foot cabin will be unveiled. It is a copy of the cabin built by Finley Click in Ethel in 1888. Click, his wife, and their three children all lived in that small space.

Don Philpott  
Wekiva Wilderness Trust  
[email us here](#)

---

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/894061754>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2026 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.