

Stuart Fritch moved to Weirsdale, Florida from Pennsylvania as a twenty year old man in 1920 to help build citrus packing houses in the area. While here, he met and married Elizabeth Knobloch whose family owned East Lake Weir Grocery Store. Her mother was the local postmistress.

Weirsdale was a bustling little town in the early 1930s attracting many winter visitors. The town itself had several citrus packing houses, a hotel, several restaurants, and a variety of other businesses. Stuart opened a construction office in Weirsdale and began building houses in Marion and Lake counties, many of which are still standing.

During his early years in the construction business, he met one of the winter residents who had built a large home in Weirsdale. Fritch was contracted to build the stucco wall that fronted the house and property on East Highway 42. The flame vine covered wall still remains as somewhat of a local landmark. Stuart built his family's lifetime home on the property adjacent to the wall.

His relationship with those winter residents led Stuart to oversee the planting of over 200 acres of citrus groves on their property. This began his involvement in the area's citrus industry as he and his family planted their own groves and became part of a close knit community.

Stuart and Elizabeth were active in the little town, being involved members of the Weirsdale Presbyterian Church and the Lake Weir Yacht Club. Fritch was a charter member of the Lake Weir Kiwanis Club, and Elizabeth was elected to be the first woman elder in their church. Stuart taught World War II veterans woodworking and shop skills at what is now The Orange Blossom Opry venue, and Elizabeth was the president of the local Garden Club. Her club helped make Red Cross bandages for the WWII soldiers. Stuart was also known for his beautiful baritone singing voice and was a popular soloist for many weddings and events.

Weirsdale became an isolated town when the state moved US Highway 441 five miles west of town. The beautiful citrus groves that dominated the landscape of the area are now gone due to disease and freezing weather. At this time, the Fritch's younger son, Richard, is now the oldest surviving resident to have been born in Weirsdale. He and his wife still reside in the house behind that stucco wall that his father built.