



WALTON

RELATIONS & HISTORY

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Walton County Heritage Association

July 2020



WALTON COUNTY HERITAGE ASSOCIATION, INC.

OFFICE LOCATION

Walton County Heritage Museum, (Old Train Depot)
Hours: Open Tuesday – Saturday, 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Postal Address

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Newsletter Cover Collage Photos

Clockwise from top left:

1. Darlington, Florida, early 1900s, Courtesy of Baker Block Museum, photographer unknown. Edited by Sam Carnley.
2. *Henderson-Mathis turpentine still in Glendale or Gaskin*. 1904. Black & white photoprint, 4 x 6 in. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. <<https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/42107>>, accessed 28 June 2017 by Sam Carnley.
3. William Lewis (Luke) Hurst Family, Fleming Creek/Clear Springs area, north Walton County, ca 1894, from “The Heritage of Walton County, Florida,” p. 190.
4. Old Paxton High School, “1961-62 Paxtonian” Year Book, photographer unknown. Edited by Sam Carnley
5. Walton County Heritage Museum, photo and editing by Sam Carnley.
6. Gladys D. Milton (1924-1999), Midwife, Flowersview/Paxton, photo by her daughter, Maria Milton. Also in “The Heritage of Walton County, Florida,” p. 249, and the September 2018 Newsletter at <http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/GenSoc/NL2018Sep.pdf> Edited by Sam Carnley.
7. Lake Jackson, South Side, in Paxton City Limits, photo and editing by Sam Carnley.
8. Paxton Water Tower, Paxton, Florida, photo and editing by Sam Carnley.
9. Old Freeport School, constructed ca 1908, burned 1943. Photo from “The Heritage of Walton County, Florida,” p. 45. Photographer unknown. Edited by Sam Carnley.
10. *Floralia Saw Mill Company's engine number 3 - Paxton, Florida*. 1907. Black & white photonegative, 4 x 5 in. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. Photographer unknown. <<https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/146972>>, accessed 7 September 2019 and edited by Sam Carnley. [Built in 1873 and Originally owned by New York, Ontario and Western Railroad Company as engine number 60; then owned by Southern Iron and Equipment Company as engine number 568 in 1907; then owned by Floralia Saw Mill Company as engine number 3 on March 3, 1907; returned to Southern Iron and Equipment Company and number changed to 915 on March 13, 1913; then owned by Louisiana Saw Mill Company as engine 50 in May, 1913.]

The **Walton County Heritage Association, Inc.** is an 501 (C) 3 Florida Not for Profit Corporation Recognized by the IRS as a Public Charity Organization for Tax Deductible Donations.

The Walton County Heritage Association was organized for four main purposes:

- To promote the preservation and restoration of buildings and other landmarks of historical interest within Walton County;
- To maintain the Walton County Heritage Museum to preserve the heritage of Walton County for the education and enjoyment of current and future generations by collecting, preserving, and exhibiting artifacts and information from the time of its original inhabitants to the present;
- To foster and enhance the development, education, and sense of history which is unique to Walton County; and
- To secure cooperation and unity of action between individual citizens, businesses, and other groups as may be necessary to fulfill these purposes.

The Association depends upon the support of its members and the business community to accomplish its goals. Annual dues are \$25 for individuals, \$40 for families and \$100 for corporate memberships.

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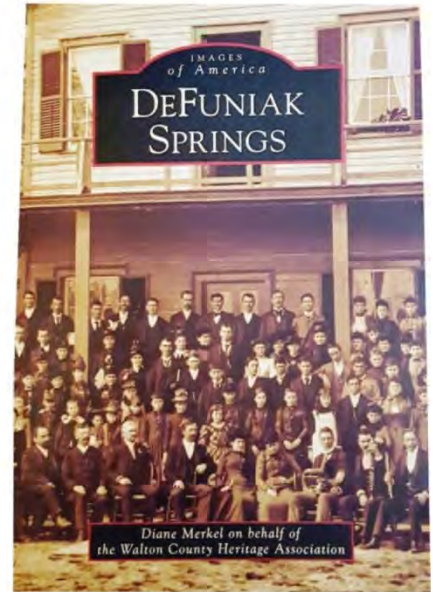
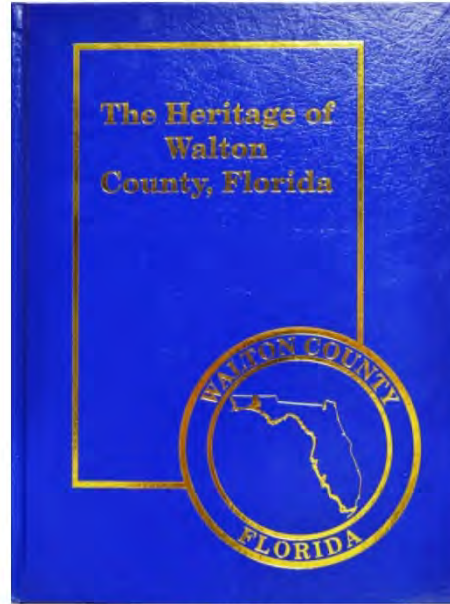
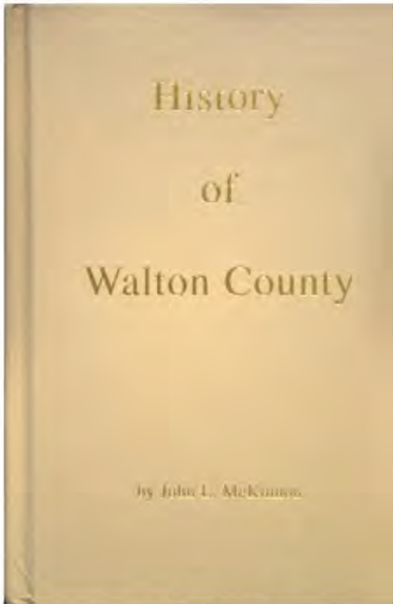
Member Benefits:

- **Automatic** membership in the **Walton County Heritage Museum** and the **Walton County Genealogy Society**.
- **Invitations** to Quarterly Members Meetings
- **Discounts** on Special Events
- **The Museum Research Center:** Members get free copies of documents and use of the Genealogy Society computer when the Museum is open.
- **The Museum Gift Shop:** Members receive discounts on books, special publications, postcards, photographs, CDs, DVDs, videos, and gift items.
- **Free subscriptions** to the WCHA Newsletter and Journal.

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From the Museum Gift Shop

Our most popular books



History of Walton County
by John L. McKinnon. The Museum has sold out of this book and it is out of print, but it is available on line free of charge at this link,
<https://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/georgiabooks/pdfs/gb0503.pdf>

The Heritage of Walton County, Florida. Item code **B13**. History of Walton County's organizations, churches and people. Hard cover, 316 pages, indexed.
\$59.00 plus tax and shipping.

Images of America, DeFuniak Springs. Item code **B06**. By Diane Merkel. Softcover, 128 pages, 185 photos, indexed.
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The Tung Nut History Of Walton County, Florida

By Sam Carnley

In the early 1900s mostly out of state lumber companies laid waste to the long leaf yellow pine timber in Walton County. They acquired the timber either through buying up extensive tracts available for sale by the Federal government at dirt cheap prices, or entered into timber deeds with local private owners to harvest their timber at equally cheap prices. Cutting the timber and sawing it into lumber; they marketed it throughout the U.S. and abroad at profits ranging in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

When the timber was gone, they fired the workers, shut down the mills and sold the property for what they could get. In some instances what they could get was not worth the effort of selling it and they simply walked away leaving it to be sold for unpaid taxes. That left solving the problem of what to do with the vast acreage of deforested land and unemployed workers to the locals.

A possible solution on the horizon was an agriculture product that had been under development in the U. S. since 1905¹. That year an agricultural explorer of the USDA brought the first Chinese Tung nuts to America. The Chinese had used the oil of the nut in finishing furniture and other fine wood products for thousands of years. In addition to furniture oil, it was used in paints and varnishes, and to lubricate and fuel machines. Up until it began development in the U. S., the Chinese enjoyed a monopoly in the Tung nut oil market supplied exclusively without mechanized production methods.

To determine the suitability of the Tung nut as a viable agricultural crop in the U. S., the American government distributed seedling trees to experiment stations in the southern U. S., where climate and soil conditions seemed most conducive to the nut's production. In 1912, the University of Florida's Agricultural Experiment Station in Gainesville planted a small test plot of the trees. From that modest beginning the acreage in Alachua and neighboring counties had grown to over 10,000 by 1927 with the participation of 400 growers.

In 1928, L. P. Moore established the world's first mechanized mill for extracting Tung nut oil, beginning its commercial production in the U. S. Moore, owner of the Alachua Tung Oil Corporation in Gainesville, was a relative of the Benjamin Moore Paint Company founder.

¹ Brown, Karen and Keeler, *William, The History of Tung Oil*, (Southeast Exotic Pest Plant Council, Wildland Weeds Winter 2005), <https://www.se-eppc.org/wildlandweeds/pdf/Winter2005-Brown-pp4-6.pdf> accessed 6/13/2020 by Sam Carnley

H. W. Bennett, another early promoter of commercial Tung oil production, planted 2,000 acres in Alachua County during 1930-32².

Over the next half dozen years, Tung nut production spread west across the Florida panhandle from Leon to Escambia County and into south Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. A few orchards were also established in those South Georgia counties adjacent to Florida's northern border with that state.

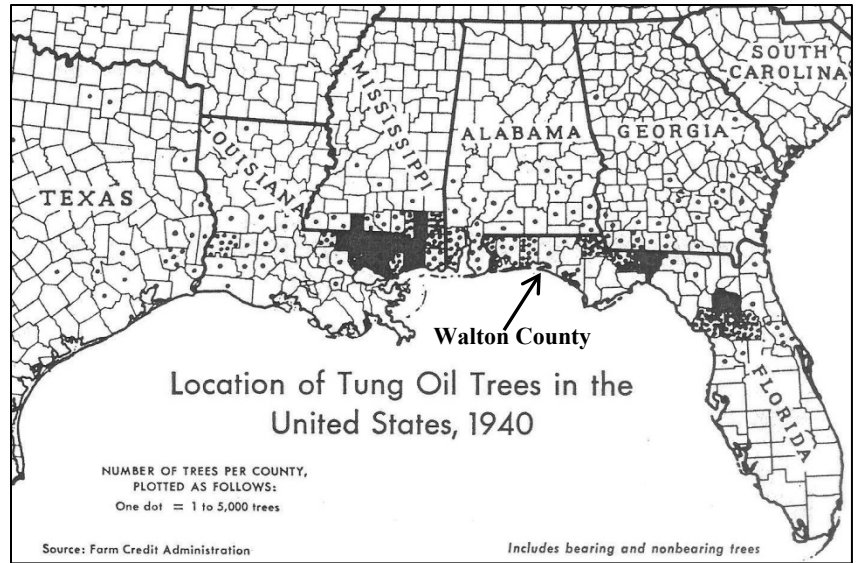


Figure 1

The Florida counties with the greatest acreage outside of Alachua were Leon, Jackson and Okaloosa counties. These distributions are depicted in the map above (Figure 1).³ According to the map legend, one dot = 1 to 5,000 trees. In view of that, Walton County as of 1940, which shows a single dot, had between 1 and 5,000 trees planted in Tung Nuts as of that year.

A search of Walton County deed records on the Clerk of Courts website revealed those companies and individuals playing a role in the county's Tung nut history. The earliest company appearing in the records seemed to be Valparaiso Tung Planters, Inc., a Florida corporation whose address was Valparaiso, Okaloosa Florida.⁴ It made its first purchase of land in 1937 by warranty deed from G. F. and Gertrude A. Webster.⁵ Included were parcels in sections 3, 4 and 10 of township 5, north and range 21, west, shown on the map in figure 2 as located west of Paxton. Acreages consisted of 260, 329 and 200, respectively. Between 1937 and 1950 the corporation made a total of 75 purchases, by far the greatest number of Tung nut related acquisitions by a single entity in the Walton County deed records.

² Brown, Karen and Keeler, William, *The History of Tung Oil*, (Southeast Exotic Pest Plant Council, Wildland Weeds Winter 2005), <https://www.se-eppc.org/wildlandweeds/pdf/Winter2005-Brown-pp4-6.pdf> accessed 6/13/2020 by Sam Carnley. Here after, Brown and Keeler, *The History of Tung Oil*.

³ Fraser, *The Tung Oil Industry: Growth and Prospects*, (Monthly Review, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Vol. XXX, Number 11, Atlanta, Georgia, November 30, 1945), https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/files/docs/publications/frbatlreview/pages/63846_1945-1949.pdf access by Sam Carnley, 6/13/2020.

⁴ Valparaiso Tung Planters Inc., General Index to Deeds, Walton County, Grantees, 11582, 11583, &11581, http://orsearch.clerkofcourts.co.walton.fl.us/LandmarkWeb/orindex/orb_CORPORATIONS_AND_FIRMS_Indirect_EPR_1971.html, accessed 6/10/2020, by Sam Carnley.

⁵ Warranty deed from G. F. Webster and Gertrude A. Webster, Grantors, to Valparaiso Tung Planters, Inc., Grantee, deed book 79, page 497, 1937, Deed Books, Walton County, DeFuniak Springs, Florida.

Apparently, land speculation was a secondary objective of the corporation. It saw in those purchases an opportunity to make a profit by re-selling a portion of them soon after their acquisition. During the 31 years between 1938 and 1969 it sold considerably more parcels than the initial 75 it purchased by breaking them up into smaller units. A total of 45 parcels were sold during the period of 1937 to 1939 alone.⁶

The individual on record as making the largest number of Tung nut related acquisitions was George Earl Wallis. Born 5 December 1893 in Yorkville, Racine, Wisconsin, he was a 23 year old-student at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, as of his WWI draft registration date of 5 June, 1917. On that document he gave his height and build as medium, with blue eyes and dark brown hair. He identified his prior military service as captain and major in the U. W. Cadet corps – signal corps, 3 years. A note at bottom of p. 2 states he was turned down on account of flat footedness for officer training course and Signal Corps.⁷

As of the 1920 U. S. census he was a lodger in the household of John T. Sowers residing in Chicago, Ward 7, Cook County, Illinois.⁸ On the 1930 census he remained in Illinois but resided in Evanston, Cook County and was the head of a family including besides himself his wife, Elizabeth Jane (maiden name, Hooper); daughter, Elizabeth J., age 6, born in Illinois; daughter, Winifred, age 2, born in Illinois and Elizabeth Hooper, mother-in-law, age 66, born in Wisconsin. He and Elizabeth married between 1920 and 24 based on his oldest daughter's age of 6 years.⁹

By 1940 he had arrived in Florida where he appeared on that year's U. S. census as residing in Valparaiso, Election Precinct 22, Okaloosa County. His family included himself and wife, Elizabeth; daughter, Winnie (Winifred) and son, George, age 9, born in Illinois. His oldest daughter, Elizabeth did not appear, probably having married and left home. Neither was

6. Valparaiso Tung Planters Inc., General Index to Deeds, Walton County, Grantors, 07588,-07591 http://orsearch.clerkofcourts.co.walton.fl.us/LandmarkWeb/orindex/orb_CORPORATIONS_AND_FIRMS_Direct_EPR_1971.html, accessed 6/10/2020, by Sam Carnley.

7. "United States World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918", database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:K8QY-7C3> : 24 August 2019), George Earl Wallis, 1917-1918. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:K8QY-7C3?from=lynx1UIV8&treeref=9VLC-54B>, accessed 6/18/2020 by Sam Carnley.

⁸ "United States Census, 1920," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MJ37-N3K> : accessed 18 June 2020), George E Wallis in household of John T Sowers, Chicago Ward 7, Cook (Chicago), Illinois, United States; citing ED 391, sheet 6A, line 34, family 127, NARA microfilm publication T625 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1992), roll 315; FHL microfilm 1,820,315. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MJ37-N3K?from=lynx1UIV8&treeref=9VLC-54B>, accessed 6/18/2020 by Sam Carnley.

9. "United States Census, 1930," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XSR9-9HD> : accessed 18 June 2020), George E Wallis, Evanston, Cook, Illinois, United States; citing enumeration district (ED) ED 2132, sheet 12B, line 79, family 191, NARA microfilm publication T626 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2002), roll 500; FHL microfilm 2,340,235. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XSR9-9HD?from=lynx1UIV8&treeref=9VLC-54B>, accessed 6/18/2020 by Sam Carnley.

his mother-in-law shown, likely because she had died. Another person included was Carrie Broxton, maid, age 29, born in Alabama.¹⁰

Although George Earl first appeared there on the census of 1940, he was in Valparaiso as early as 1937. This is known because he was president of the Valparaiso Tung Planters Corporation, which as earlier stated, purchased its first Walton County property that year. His wife, Elizabeth was corporate secretary and his brother, Charles Henry and sister-in-law Francis, were also principals of the company. These individuals were identified as the sole surviving trustees of Valpraiso Tung Planters, Inc., a dissolved Florida Corporation, in an Indenture dated 1971. George Earl's address on the document was 113 Park Lane, Milton Fl.¹¹ At what point he moved from Valparaiso to Milton is unknown. Walton County deed records indicate the corporation was dissolved between 2 February 1949 and 6 November 1950.

As to why George Earl chose to purchase land in his own name as opposed to doing it in the name of the corporation was not revealed in the records. The location of properties he acquired in his name in Walton County are shown on the map in figure 2. His orchards extended from near Paxton to the community of Children's Home, a distance of about 10 miles. The community's location on the map in figure 2 is near the intersection of highway 147, the western most road running north and south, and highway 2, which runs east and west. In 1940, these thoroughfares existed as unnamed dirt roads.

These roads were well familiar to my father, Walter Samuel Carnley, Sr., who grew up there. When he registered for the WWII draft in July 1941, he listed his occupation as Tung Oil laborer and his employer as Mr. Earl Wallis. He gave his place of employment as near Children's Home, Walton, Florida.¹² It was only through my research for this and other Walton Relations & History newsletter articles that I learned of my family's connection with George Earl Wallis.

In addition to the Tung nut orchards he owned in Florida, George Earl built the first Tung oil mill in Alabama at Florala, adjacent to the state line with Florida, which he established about

¹⁰ "United States Census, 1940," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:VTC4-769> : 27 January 2020), George Wallis, Valparaiso, Election Precinct 22, Okaloosa, Florida, United States; citing enumeration district (ED) 46-28, sheet 1B, line 43, family 15, Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940, NARA digital publication T627. Records of the Bureau of the Census, 1790 - 2007, RG 29. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2012, roll 602. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:VTC4-769?from=lynx1UIV8&treeref=9VLC-54B>, accessed 6/18/2020 by Sam Carnley.

¹¹ Indenture, George Earl Wallis, etc., deed book 611, page 282, 1971, Deed Books, Walton County, DeFuniak Springs, Florida.

¹² Sam Carnley, *Walter Samuel Carnley, Sr., Memories of a WWII Veteran on the 75th Anniversary of D-Day*, (Walton County Heritage Association, Inc, Newsletter, Walton Relations & History, Volume 10, Issue 6, June 2019), p. 1 <http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/GenSoc/NL2019June.pdf>, accessed 6/18/2020 by Sam Carnley.

1940 as the Wallis Tung Mill Company. Others associated with the company were C. H. Wallis, George Earl's brother, Henry A. Stromsem and Julian Saphier, owners of large Tung acreages.¹³ Wallis also operated under the name, Florala Nut Oil Co. It served as the market for the Tung growers clustered in the north-west corner of Walton County where the major portion of the county's orchards were concentrated. It also served as the local market for peanut farmers in the area. On 21 July 1947 the mill burned, leaving George Earl faced with a fiasco.¹⁴ Trying to find a way out, he managed to raise enough money to build two new mills, one on the burned site at Florala, and a second one in Gulfport, Mississippi, both of which shared the name, American Tung Mills.

George Earl, in the name of Florala Nut Oil Co. served as purchasing and sales agent for the two new mills. In June 1948, Florala Nut Oil Co. received orders for 4 tank cars of Tung oil from the Masonite Corp. of Laurel, Mississippi. Neither of the two new mills had produced enough oil to fill the order so George Earl approached the Commodity Credit Corporation about buying the oil he needed to fill the order.

The CCC is a U. S. government corporation, under the U. S. Department of Agriculture, charged with supporting various activities related U. S. domestic agriculture. It sets target prices for various commodities, in that instance, Tung oil, and when the market dropped below the support price, the CCC purchased the oil from producers and paid them the support price. As a result, it held inventories of the products it supported, which it was free to re-sell at the best price it could get.

The CCC sold George Earl the oil at less than the support price and he delivered it to the customer, who paid him in cash as was their custom. He deposited the cash and wrote a draft on it to pay the amount due the CCC. But instead of going to the CCC his bank applied the draft to a delinquent loan it held on George Earl and the CCC never received payment for the oil they sold to Florala Nut Oil Co. Not having the money to make the payment, George Earl put up his stock in the two mills as collateral with CCC who extended his due date a few months longer. But when the due date arrived and he was unable to pay CCC they seized the two mills and sold them to paint companies.¹⁵ That ended George Earl's Tung mill business in Florala.

George Earl remained a resident of Florida until his death at age 81. He died on 28 August, 1975 in Milton, Santa Rosa, Florida and was returned to his home town of Rochester in

¹³ The Florala News, (Florala, Alabama), 4 April 1940, Thursday, Page 1, Newspapers.com, by Ancestry, accessed 6/21/2020 by Sam Carnley.

¹⁴ The Montgomery Advertiser (Montgomery, Alabama), 22 July 1947, Tuesday, page 1, Newspapers.com, by Ancestry, accessed 6/21/2020 by Sam Carnley.

¹⁵ Utilization of Farm Crops, Fats and Oils, U. S. Senate Hearings, Subcommittee of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, S. Res. 36, U. S. Printing Office, Washington, 1949, pages 119-124. accessed 6/21/2020 by Sam Carnley.

Racine County, Wisconsin where he was buried in the City Cemetery, Find A Grave memorial # 34480862.¹⁶

Two individuals who purchased property from Valparaiso Tung Planters, Inc. were Henry and Harold Stromsem aka Stromsen, father and son. They were from Chicago, Illinois. Henry, born about 1872 in Norway, immigrated to the U. S. in 1893. He married Maggie Hansen 23 April 1898. Harold Julius, born 2 February 1900, was their oldest child. He appeared at age 0 in the household of Henry on the 1900 U. S. census enumerated at Precinct 9, Chicago City, Ward 15, Cook, Illinois.

In an indenture recorded 14 July 1938, Henry purchased from Valparaiso Tung Planters 270 acres in section 3, township 5, north, range 21, west, for the price of \$13,250, to be paid in 4 installments of \$3,375.00 each. The property was a portion of the land Valparaiso Tung Planters acquired from G. F. and Gertrude Webster in 1937 west of Paxton. Henry's address was given as 1218 North Wells Street, Chicago, Illinois. As previously noted, Henry was an associate of George Earl Wallis in the Florala Tung Mill venture of 1940.

Henry acquired additional property from Valparaiso Tung Planters in a warranty deed dated 2 June 1947, located in section 16, township 5 north and range 21 west. Henry's address on the deed was Cook County, Illinois as it had been in his first acquisition.

In Henry's last land transaction of record he issued a quit claim deed dated 22 January 1952 to Harold J. Stromsem, his son, for all his land in Walton County. Henry's address was not stated but Harold's was given as Cook County, Illinois.

Harold remained in Henry's household from birth in 1900 to age 18 in 1918 when he registered for the WWI draft on 12 September of that year. He gave his address as 1133 N. Spaulding Avenue, Chicago, Ill. Under present occupation he listed "Student at Lewis Institute," now Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago. He listed his physical attributes as tall, medium build, grey eyes and brown hair. Sometime after registering for the draft he served in the military, the date of which was not revealed of record. The place of service was St. Louis, Missouri where he held the rank of private, SATC. At age 19, he was back in his father's household as of 1920. At age 23, on 18 April 1923, he married Marjorie Blomgren, age 22, in Cook County.

In 1930 he and Marjorie were enumerated on the census in Cook County along with Harold W. Stromsen, son, age 5, born in Illinois; and Janet M. Stromsen, daughter, age 3, also born in Illinois. The year 1939 found him in Broward County, Florida at the age of 38 where he married Evahlyn E. Burdine, age 30, of Chicago, Illinois. Under the question, "Married

¹⁶ George Earl Wallis death and burial, Find A Grave website, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/34480862>, accessed 6/10/2020 by Sam Carnley.

before,” he entered no and for “Divorced?” he left blank. She gave the same responses to those questions. He gave his occupation as Mfgr, presumably meaning manufacturing. She gave her occupation as manicurist. The marriage license was dated 21 January 1939 and the marriage ceremony was performed by the county judge.

In 1940 Harold and Evahlyn were back in Chicago, Ward 2, of Cook County. He was 40 and she was 31, born in South Dakota. The number of children had grown to three, with the addition of Thomas, son, age 8, born in Illinois. A maid, Frances Taylor age 30, born in Kansas, was also listed.

Harold bought his first Walton County property from Valparaiso Tung Planters on 11 May 1940. It was described as being in section 2, township 5 north, range 21 west, containing 100 acres, more or less. This is the section where Paxton is located, as shown on the map in figure 2. His second purchase from the same seller was 60 acres located in the same section, township and range. The deed was dated 22 August, 1941 and his address was given as Cook County, Illinois.

As of 1945 he lived in Walton County (temporarily) as evidenced by a Florala News article dated 13 December in which he reported on the value of the county’s Tung oil crop that year:

A Tung oil crop in excess of \$50,000 in value is being harvested from the Tung oil trees in Walton County from the 1945 season, according to Harold J. Stromsem, manager of the Tung groves in the north end of the county, operated by the Valparaiso Tung Planters’ organization.

“Next year will see an even greater crop—possibly double this year’s crop—“ says Mr. Stromsem, who lives in the Children’s Home district, and directs the Florida end of his organization’s holdings. “Our groves have had an excellent growing season and for the first time are producing in accordance with our original plans. We have found, too, that better care brings better crops and makes the trees more resistant to frost damage, the only hazard to the Tung crop. For the past two years we have been following a strong fertilizer program and we expect to see the results in 1945.”

Twenty-five war prisoners have been employed in picking the Tung nuts. About 4,000 acres are planted in Walton County, and all nuts will be processed in the Florala Tung Oil mill.

Walton county owners of Tung oil trees should save the nuts from this past year’s crop and take them in to L. J. Harris at DeFuniak Springs for weighing and sale, or get

directly in touch with the Tung oil mill at Florala, Ala., which is operated by the Florala Nut Oil Company.

Mr. Stromsem, with his father, H. A. Stromsem of Chicago, is one of the early Tung growers in this area. –Breeze, DeFuniak Springs, Fla.¹⁷

In 1952, Henry Stromsen quit claim deeded all his Walton County holdings to Harold as previously noted. That same year Harold Stromsem is listed with Earl and C. H. Wallis as trustees of Valparaiso Tung Planters, Inc., a dissolved Florida Corporation. This appeared in a warranty deed dated 8 November 1952, which was issued to Harold J. Stromsem of 1218 North Wells Street, Chicago, Illinois. The purpose of the deed was to clarify all those Walton County deeds previously issued to Henry and Harold J. Stromsen, aka Stromsem.

On 7 October 1953, Harold entered into matrimony for the 3rd time when he married Margaret Alma Davis in Orleans Parish, Louisiana. No information was found on what happened to his second wife, Evahlyn Burdine whom he married in 1939.

Apart from Harold's marriages, his ambitions went beyond just growing Tung nuts. He wanted to mill the nuts and market the oil as well. To do this he either built or purchased existing mills, apparently in two different locations. One seems to have been located a half dozen miles north of Florala on the Opp highway, known today as U. S. Hwy 331 north. The other was described as being north-east of Florala, near Hacoda, Alabama. He called his operations Alabama Tung Farms and Mill, which in addition to the mills consisted of several thousand acres of Tung groves in the vicinity of Hacoda as well as those he owned in Walton County.

On 24 January, 1958, all of Harold's earthly ambitions abruptly ended forever as revealed in The Florala News edition of 30 January:

Mr. Harold J. Stromson, age 58, owner of the Alabama Tung Farms, died suddenly at his home on the farms four miles northwest of Hacoda last Friday night, Jan. 24.

Mr. Stromson had eaten his supper and was preparing to attend a business meeting and was thought to have left for DeFuniak Springs, Fla., but upon noticing that his car was still on the yard after he was supposed to be gone, Mrs. Stromson investigated and found him dead in the yard.

The Alabama Tung Farms and Mills consisting of several thousand acres of groves in Alabama and in Florida and the mills for extracting the oil from Tung nuts were

¹⁷ The Florala News (Florala, Alabama), 13 December 1945, Thursday, Page 7, Newspapers.com, by Ancestry, accessed 6/24/2020 by Sam Carnley.

established by Mr. Stromson several years ago. The mills and a large portion of the groves are located some ten miles northeast of Florala.

Mr. Stromson came to Florala from Chicago to begin the culture of the Tung nut and had made many friends in this vicinity since coming here. He was esteemed in both business and social life.

He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Margaret Stromson of Florala; two sons, Harold Stromson, Jr., of St. Louis, Mo., and Tom Stromson, of the University of Florida; one daughter, Mrs. Janet Igin, of Elmwood Parks, Ill.; and his father, Henry A. Stromson, of Chicago.

The remains were prepared for shipment by Evans Funeral Home here and the body sent to Chicago for burial some time this week.¹⁸

Harold Julius Stromsem was laid to rest at the Ridgewood Cemetery in Des Plaines, Cook County, Illinois, Billion Graves Record 9372445.

After Harold established his mills near Florala a few years before his death, his competitors in the business were the proprietors of the American Tung Mills Company formerly owned by George Earl Wallis. After the CCC seized it they sold it to Michael Lisanti and M. B. Sweet, controlling stock holders of the Chromatic Paint Manufacturing Company of Chicago. After acquiring the mill Lisanti relocated to Florala to manage it. He arrived on the scene about mid-December 1948.¹⁹ In the interest of public relations between his company and the local citizens he continued a custom that began with George Earl Wallis. In March each year when Tung orchards were in full bloom, the mill sponsored a Tung Blossom Festival in which a queen was crowned, followed by a parade, speeches by dignitaries, barbeques, baseball games and other activities. The event concluded with a blossom viewing tour of nearby orchards on both sides of the state line. The Florala News dutifully reported on the events both in advance and afterwards, making many references to Michael Lisanti and the American Tung Mills.

The paper often quoted him saying how he valued the local community and his desire to work with them in making Florala and environs a much better place to live and work. He was also mentioned in many local social events reported in the paper. But like his predecessor, George Earl Wallace, the CCC would soon bring him down. His troubles were the outgrowth of events that occurred in 1956 when George Earl still owned the mill. That year the mill entered into an agreement with the CCC to store 800,000 pounds of its oil. The agreement gave

¹⁸ The Florala News, (Florala, Alabama), 30 January 1958, Thursday, Page 1, Newspapers.com by Ancestry, accessed 6/24/2020 by Sam Carnley.

¹⁹ The Florala News (Florala, Alabama), 16 December 1948, Thursday, Page 1, Newspapers.com by Ancestry, accessed 6/23/2020 by Sam Carnley.

the CCC the right to inspect the mill's books and warehouses to ensure compliance. It required the mill to keep CCC oil separate from other oils stored at the plant and to deliver it to CCC on demand. The oil was still in storage at the mill when it was acquired by Lisanti in 1958.

He refused however, to cooperate with the terms of the CCC contract. He denied access to his books and plant by CCC representatives in violation of the agreement. His letters in responses to those of the CCC were hostile, insulting and designed to frustrate cooperation in the matter. He delivered all but a quarter million pounds of the oil which he refused to release on the grounds that the CCC owed him over forty thousand dollars on a warehouseman's lien. He threatened that if the lien was not paid by March 17, 1958 he would sell the oil he still held at public auction. When he published notice of the sale in the *Floral News* the CCC got a restraining order to prevent it from going forward. Allegedly, he sold some of the oil in violation of the order. For that reason, and continued lack of cooperation with the court orders he was eventually charged with criminal contempt by the judge in the case and fined \$2,500.00.

It was later learned that the mill had co-mingled the CCC oil with that of a lower grade, another contract infraction. Because of the mill's continued violations the CCC took it off its approved warehouse list. Taking Lisanti and the American Tung Mills to court, the CCC won a \$62,125.44 judgement against the "troubled *Floral Tung oil company*," as reported by *The Montgomery Advertiser* on 14 November 1958.²⁰ When Lisanti and company failed to make the payment, the CCC, for the second time, seized the mill and put it up for sale. The first public notice of the sale appeared in *The Floral News* on 19 March 1959.²¹ Apparently no offers were received because a second notice was published in the paper on 15 September 1960.²² No information was found indicating if the mill was ever sold, and if so, to whom.

Michael Lisanti was mentioned in a 7 March 1963 article of *The Floral News* about a burglary of the Sixty-Six Service Station located on Hwy 85 (Crestview Highway) south of Floral just inside the Florida state line. He was identified as the owner of the station.²³ Anyone growing up in north Walton County in the late 1950s and 60s who drove to Floral on a regular basis will remember the station as Phillips 66 service station, on the left side of the road, if headed north, between Clear Springs and the Alabama State line.

Michael Lisanti probably was not the first owner of the business, or the last, but he happened to be at that point in time. He was last mentioned in *The Floral News* on 27 June

²⁰ *The Montgomery Advertiser* (Montgomery, Alabama), 14 November 1958, Friday, Page 32, Newspapers.com by Ancestry, accessed 6/23/2020 by Sam Carnley.

²¹ *The Floral News* (Floral, Alabama), 19 March 1959, Thursday, Page 4, Newspapers.com by Ancestry, accessed 6/25/2020 by Sam Carnley.

²² *Ibid*, 15 September 1960, Thursday, Page 4.

²³ *Ibid*, 7 March 1963, Thursday, Page 4.

1963 in an article stating that his daughter, Judy, of Chicago, visited her father recently.²⁴ When he died at age 55, two different locations were listed as his place of death. His Find A Grave Memorial, No. 79864590 lists it as Florala, Covington County, Alabama on 29 April 1970.²⁵ If that was where he died, The Florala News apparently attached little importance to it, because there was no mention of it in any of its editions printed around that time. His Alabama death record however, lists Montgomery, Alabama as his place of death.²⁶ His remains were returned to Cook County, Illinois, for burial at Forest Home Cemetery, in Forest Park, a suburb of Chicago.

During Lisanti's involvement with the American Tung Mill there was no indication that he owned any Tung nut orchards in the area. In addition to the previously mentioned individuals and companies who played major Tung nut related roles in Walton County's past, there were only two others of record identified by name as connected with Tung nuts. They were Kaybee Tung Corp. and Tung Oil Corporation of N Y. The former purchased land from Valparaiso Tung Planters in 1940. The latter purchased land from individuals in 1939 and 1940 and sold it to other individuals during the same two years. They appeared to be minor players with no significant roles in the Tung nut history of Walton County. For that reason no locations are shown for their properties on the map in figure 2.

At the time the CCC seized the American Tung Mill in Florala, the Tung nut as a viable agricultural crop was already in serious decline due to many factors. It was extremely sensitive to cold, resulting in hard freezes wiping out the entire crop for some years; imported oil was cheaper than that produced in the U. S.; synthetic oils were being developed that competed with Tung oil and hurricanes wiped out large swaths of the orchards in other states, particularly Mississippi, on several occasions. The point was finally reached when Tung nut growers could no longer make a profit, forcing them to turn to other forms of agriculture.²⁷

Growing up in Children's Home, Tung nut groves were for me a familiar sight. They lined the roads the school bus I rode to Paxton High School for twelve years passed along. In a way, their history in Walton County corresponded with mine. They were just coming into vogue when I was born in 1943. When I left for college in 1961 many of the groves were still there but had been abandoned for all intents and purposes. I never returned to live in the county

²⁴ Ibid, 27 June 1963, Thursday, Page 2.

²⁵ Michael Lisanti, Find A Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/79864590>, accessed 6/23/2020 by Sam Carnley.

²⁶ Michael Lisanti, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JNWR-T2F>

²⁷ Brown, Karen and Keeler, *William, The History of Tung Oil*, (Southeast Exotic Pest Plant Council, Wildland Weeds Winter 2005), <https://www.se-eppc.org/wildlandweeds/pdf/Winter2005-Brown-pp4-6.pdf> accessed 6/13/2020 by Sam Carnley

and now when I go back for a visit the many Tung nut groves once so familiar are nothing but a memory.

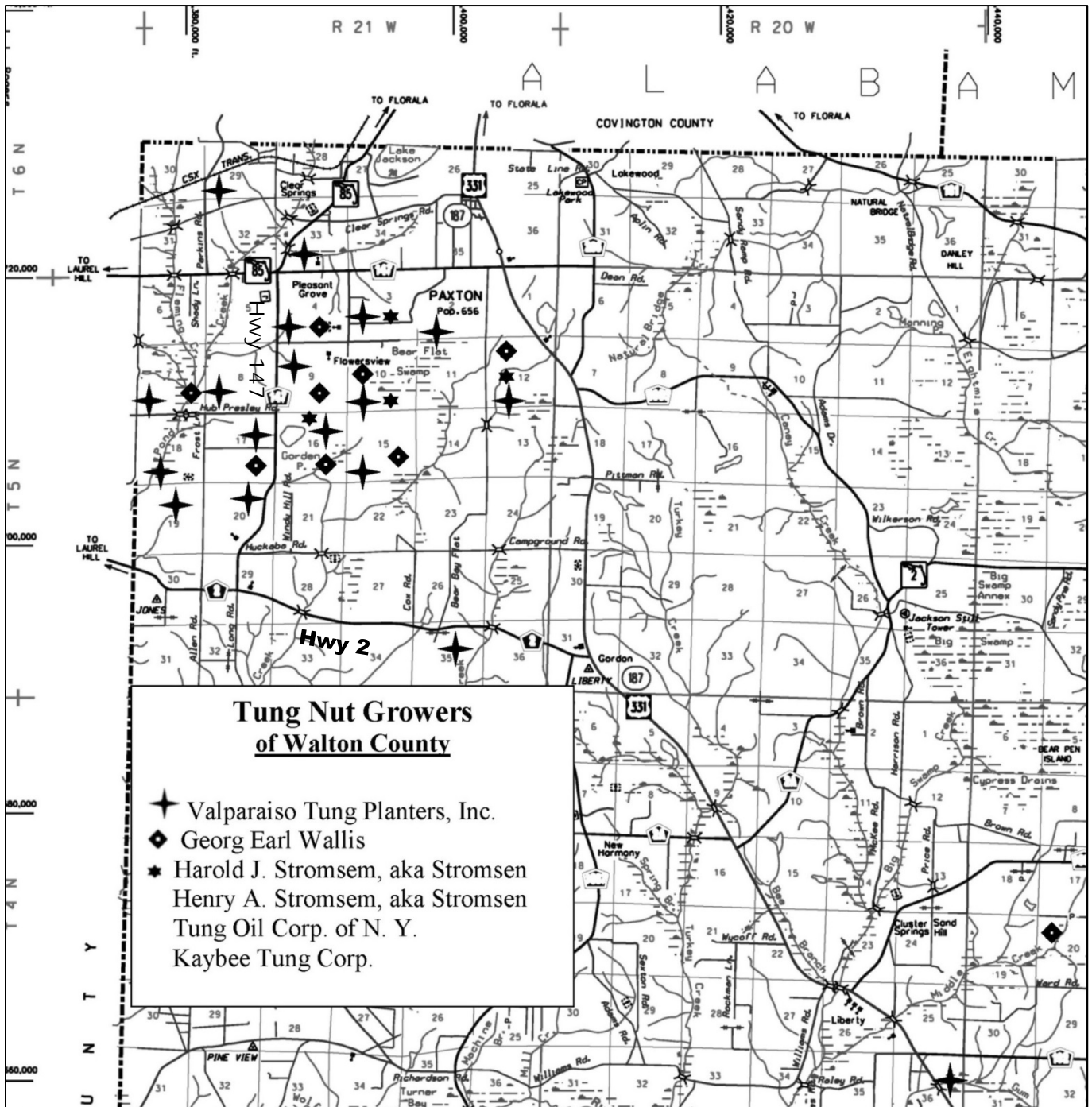


Figure 2. Map edited by Sam Carnley