



# WALTON

## RELATIONS & HISTORY

Volume 12, Issue 09

Walton County Heritage Association

August 2021







# 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

Walton County Heritage Association, Inc.  
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Back Issues: <http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/GenSoc/newsletters.htm>

Cover Design: Sam Carnley

## 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.]

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The **Walton County Heritage Association, Inc.** is a 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.

**Individual Membership Application; See attached.**

**[Click here](#) for the Corporate Membership Application**

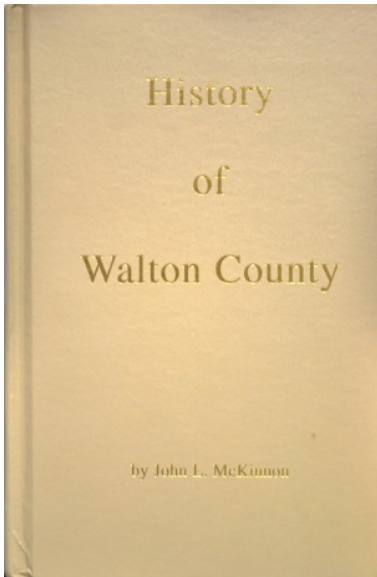
**Member Benefits:**

- 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.

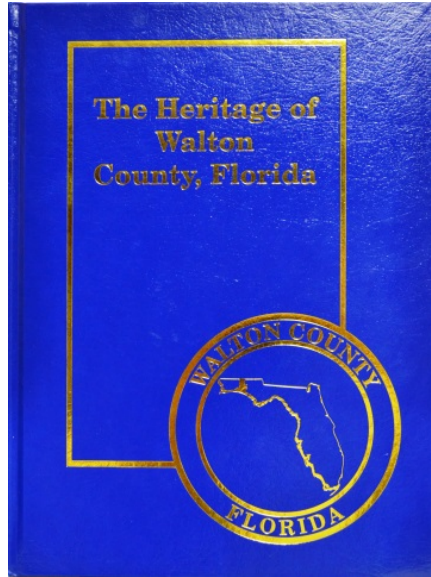
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# From the Museum Gift Shop

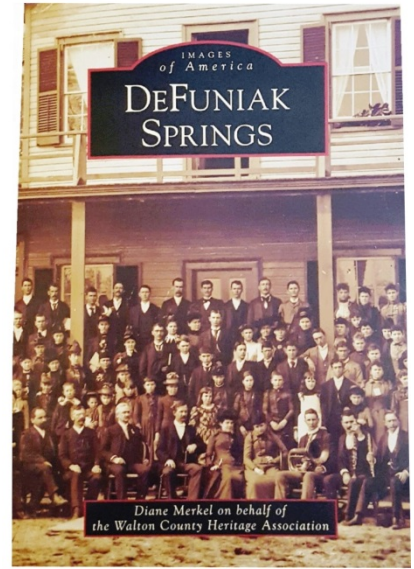
## Our most popular books



**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.  
**\$21.99** plus tax and shipping.

## BOOK MAIL ORDER FORM

Walton County Heritage Association  
1140 Circle Drive  
DeFuniak Springs, FL 32435

Customer Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Ph./Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Quantity	Description	Item Code	Price Each*	Amount
	The Heritage of Walton County, Florida	B13	71.13	
	Images of America, DeFuniak Springs.	B06	31.53	

\*Price includes tax at 7% and shipping of \$8.00 per item.

Total \_\_\_\_\_

Sorry, credit cards not accepted. Please send check or money orders only. Do not mail cash. Please allow two weeks for delivery.



# Walton County Heritage Association

Membership in the Walton County Heritage Association includes  
Membership in the Museum and Genealogy Society  
**2021**

**PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM as we are updating our records**

## **Membership Benefits:**

### **The Museum Research Center:**

Members get free copies of documents and use of the Genealogy Society computer when Museum is open to the public.

### **The Museum Gift Shop:**

Members receive 10% discounts on books, special publications, postcards, photographs, CDs, DVD's Videos and Gift items.

*Membership is on a calendar year basis. Those paying in November or December will be members during those months as well as the next calendar year.*

**Walton County Heritage Association annual dues:** Single - \$25.00 Family - \$40

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State** \_\_\_\_\_

**Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift to the Walton County Heritage Association:

		Individual, Family	
_____ \$ _____	Dues	\$25.00    \$40.00	
_____ \$ _____	Other Cash Donations		Total Enclosed \$ _____

- I would like to volunteer at the Walton County Heritage Museum
- I have genealogy information I would like to share with the Genealogy Society
- I would like to talk with someone about how to get started researching my family tree
- I have artifacts or photographs I wish to donate or loan to the Museum

**Please mail your check and this form to**  
**Walton County Heritage Association**  
**1140 Circle Drive**  
**De Funiak Springs, FL 32435**  
 Thank You!  
 All membership dues are tax deductible.

The Walton County Heritage Association, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization as defined by the Internal Revenue Code. Gifts may be tax deductible as defined by the Federal Income Tax Regulations. To request a receipt for your tax deductible membership in the WCHA please contact us.



# **Unearthing Walton County History; What Bruce Cosson does by Metal Detector**

**By  
Sam Carnley  
with  
Bruce Cosson**

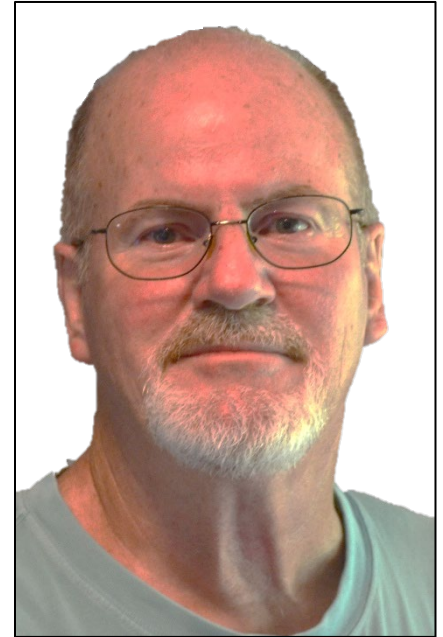
Bruce is a Walton County native. Except for a twenty some odd year stint in the U. S. Air Force, he has resided in Walton County on property he owns practically on the banks of Alaqua Creek. He has held a life-long interest in the history of his home county and has accumulated a treasure trove of information about it. There is nothing he loves more than to talk about that history and how it came to be among the things in life he most enjoys.

Bruce's parents, Richard Harry and Lucille Jeanette Belanger Cosson, welcomed him into the world on 17 June 1958 at Lake Side Hospital in DeFuniak Springs. He arrived after an older brother, Robert, and preceded his brother, Jim. He learned at an early age the importance of history to the large family of which he became a member. He could not avoid hearing about it if he had wanted to. It came not only from his parents and grandparents, but from his many uncles, aunts and cousins as well. He recalled sitting on the porch when growing up and listening to them all talk about old times.

The Cossons have owned land in Alaqua since their ancestor, William Turner Cosson, first settled there. No one knows when he arrived from Georgia, the place of his birth in 1811, but he came in time to fight in the 1837 Indian Wars as evidenced by his name on muster rolls of the militias raised against the Indians. The militias battled the Indians mostly along Alaqua Creek, sometimes possibly even on, or near, property now owned by members of the Cosson family.

The accidental bombing of members of the Cosson family by the U. S. Army Air Corps in 1944 is another historical event on which Bruce is well versed. Several of his relatives owned property bordering on the Eglin AFB bombing range. On the night of 11 August of that year, military aircraft practicing bombing runs with live ordinance overshot their target and rained death and destruction on the Cossons. When the fragmentation bombs exploded in their midst, four people died and one received injuries leaving him paralyzed below the waist for life. Seven others recovered from their injuries and one of them went on to a career in the U. S. Army. Today, a historical plaque stands on the site in Alaqua, telling of the tragedy befalling the Cossons that night.

Bruce's paternal grandmother, Crealous Henderson Cosson, served as a school teacher in the county longer than anyone else who ever taught there. She received recognition for that accomplishment when she retired at the end of her long career spanning the years 1917-1962. When he rode places with her as a child, Bruce recalled how she would point out along the way where people who had been her students lived and the schools where she taught. They included Alaqua (Pleasant Ridge), New Home and Valley View, among others.



**Figure 1. Bruce Cosson.**  
Photo by Sam Carnley, 2021

With that background, it is hardly surprising that history became one of Bruce's favorite subjects in school. He took every history and civics course available to him during the twelve years he spent receiving an education in Walton County. It would be logical to assume he would have wanted to go on to college and perhaps become a history teacher after high school graduation. That, however, was not the course he chose. During his senior year, he signed up for the Air Force. Within a few weeks of graduating from Walton High School in 1976 at age seventeen, he left home for what would become a more than twenty-year career in the military.

He began his tour at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas for several weeks of basic training. From there he went to Lowery A. F. B. in Denver Colorado for tech school training in Air Force aircraft logistics. That involved the procurement, warehousing and dispensing of military aircraft parts and supplies which became the work he would do during his entire Air Force career. Following that, he received orders to Barksdale A.F. B., Louisiana as his first permanent duty station, where he spent the remainder of the first three years of his tour. By the end of that time, he had risen in rank to E-4, known in military jargon as a "Buck Sergeant." With his first enlistment due to end about then, he had to decide whether to get out or re-enlist for a second tour. Most Air Force enlistees fail to make E-4 during their first tour, and do not re-enlist. The fact that Bruce made that rank his first time around suggests that his superiors found his attitude and performance highly agreeable. That is the recipe for rapid advancement in the military and is often the deciding factor in re-enlisting, which Bruce did.

After re-upping, he received orders for his first overseas deployment to the USAF unit attached to RAF Alconbury, near Huntingdon, England. By the time his first year there ended, he had met and married Lynell Brown, of equal parts British and American heritage. While in England, he had the opportunity to visit and learn about that country's historical places such as Stone Henge and the once residence of William Shakespeare at Stratford on River Avon. The official name of the place is actually Stratford-Upon-Avon, as we all heard our English teachers pronounce it in high school. In less high-toned language, it means the market town on the street (Strat – Roman for street) at the crossing (ford) of the river (Avon - Gaelic for river). Knowing Bruce as a stickler for historical accuracy, I have no doubt he looked that up.

He visited many castles and other tourist locations, but especially enjoyed filling his car tank with petrol and spending a day driving with Lynell just sight-seeing along country roads where few tourists ever ventured. That way he could see how the British people lived their every-day lives in the little villages they passed through. After a short stint in Alconbury, he returned to the U. S. for his next post of duty at Eglin in its 33<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Wing. While stationed there, he and Lynell celebrated the birth of their son, Neal Albert in 1982.

By 1986 and his third re-enlistment, he found himself back in England. That time at RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire, posted to the USAF 11<sup>th</sup> Strategic Group Stratotanker unit based there. Bruce joined a team of twenty-five aircraft maintenance guys who flew aboard the KC-135 Stratotankers which provided in-flight refueling of military aircraft on long non-stop, round-trip combat and training missions. Their destinations on some TDY (temporary duty) missions included Saudi Arabia and the Azores.

While at Fairford, Bruce and Lynell found themselves involved in a flight mission of another kind when the stork flew over and dropped a little bundle they named Heather Dawn into their laps on 9 September 1986. The event unfolded in a hospital at nearby RAF Upper Heyford, however, due to the absence of birthing facilities at RAF Fairford.

Heather had barely out grown diapers by the time Bruce's next re-enlistment deadline rolled around. It came as a shock when he learned where he would spend that enlistment, which would be his fourth. He could

hardly believe his eyes when orders landed on his desk sending him to Ft. Campbell, Kentucky. Why the heck, he wondered, would the Air Force send him to a U. S. Army base? But unlike the lady in Shakespeare's Hamlet, he did not protest too much, because he looked forward to being back in the good ole' USA.

His duties during the four and a half years he spent at Ft. Campbell involved transporting the Army's 101<sup>st</sup> Air Borne unit wherever their operations dictated. In addition to that, he and thirty-five other Air Force guys handled cargo coming in and going out on C-5s, C-141s, and C-130s. When the Desert Storm War broke out, they loaded the 101<sup>st</sup> troops and gear aboard cargo planes and flew them to the middle east to do their part in the fighting, what little there was of it.

After Ft. Campbell, Bruce's next post found him at Homestead AFB south of Miami. The base soon evacuated all personnel however, ahead of Hurricane Andrew, which made land fall there on 24 August, 1992. That terminated Bruce's assignment at Homestead and diverted him to Eglin. After staying there for three years, he departed for a brief seven-month tour at a USAF facility on Soto Cano joint Army-Air Force Base in Honduras. Going back to Eglin from there, he took over supervision of the logistics staff of the 46<sup>th</sup> Test Wing.

At that point he had advanced in rank to E-7, as a Master Sergeant. In military jargon, he had achieved "RHIP," meaning rank has its privileges, and he enjoyed every minute of it. He spent his entire fifth, four-year enlistment there and had gone more than half way through the sixth when he decided to retire in 1999 after a military career of twenty-two and a half years.

At the still young age of 39, he faced a turning point in his life. He had built a new house on his property in Alaqua in 1993 and lived there during his last years at Eglin, commuting between home and work. About six months after retiring, he landed a job as warehouse manager with Chelco, the local electric co-op. The position came as a slam-dunk when the Chelco HR person and management found Bruce the most qualified applicant for the job after reading his resume and interviewing him. They, no doubt, also viewed his being a retired USAF veteran as a plus in hiring him. Civilian life and a second career seemed off to a good start.

His son, Neal, had graduated from Walton High by then and joined the Navy. But in 2001, when Heather was fifteen, Bruce and Lynell divorced due to irreconcilable differences. She and Heather moved to Niceville, where Heather finished school and went on to college at the University of West Florida. While at the University, she interned with the Social Security Administration, and upon graduating, went to work with them full-time. She is now married, has a baby, and lives and works in Bloomington, Indiana.

Neal finished his tour in the Navy and then decided to join the US Marines for another multiyear enlistment. During the fourteen years he spent in the military, he managed to earn a college degree. As his time in the Marines neared expiration, he began searching for a job in civilian life before deciding to re-enlist or get out. The offer of a good paying job as a cyber security expert with Southern Company near Atlanta helped him decide. He took the job and now lives in the area with his wife and two daughters.

About the time Bruce and Lynell divorced, he decided to buy a metal detector. When he tried it out in his front yard, he turned up a brass War of 1812 military uniform button with cannon balls depicted on it. What was that doing in his front yard, he wondered. His granddaddy had told him a judge once lived on property now owned by a member of the Cosson family. Doing a little research, he came across articles referencing a Judge Brackenridge. Curious as to who the judge might be, he dug deeper and learned the University of Pittsburgh held the Brackenridge family papers.

That led to Jane Honeycutt who wrote her PHD dissertation on the letters of Henry Brackenridge and his father, Hugh. Bruce purchased a copy of the dissertation, consisting of 469 pages. It contained transcribed copies of all letters the Judge had written to his wife during the time he served as superior court judge in Territorial West Florida, to which Andrew Jackson appointed him from 1821 to 1832. As Bruce read through the documents, the word “Alaqua” jumped out at him on page after page. He counted the pages containing that word and found seventy of them.

In those Bruce found the most riveting, the judge described in detail the log house of three wings he built on a hill overlooking Alaqua Creek and the little trickle from the hillside over whose chilled stream he fashioned a spring house in which to keep his milk fresh. The images formed by those words seared themselves in Bruce’s brain and he knew they would hound him until he could point to their exact spots as the judge described in the letters. His granddaddy had shown him the general location of the house site but it took several years of searching before he finally found precisely where it stood.

But before that day arrived, he did a lot of metal detecting. One day at work when telling a coworker about it, she suggested he meet her father, a long-time metal detecting enthusiast who had recently found some interesting artifacts. His name is Don Perring, a Connecticut yankee come south to Crestview. After they made Don, they poured Bruce out of the same mold. That’s how much alike they are when it comes to their love of history and metal detecting. Bruce says that when it comes to metal detecting, nothing better ever happened to him than meeting Don Perring and after getting to know him, it is easy to see why.

An octagenarian of seemingly robust health and speech, he harbors underlying health issues that have taken some of the spring out of his step and rigorous metal detection outings now wear him down much sooner than when he was younger and healthier.

That’s the man Bruce found him to be when they first met some twenty years ago. An interesting artifact he had found at the time proved to be a bronze seal of the Walton County circuit court which he unearthed while metal detecting on the site of the Eucheeanna courthouse destroyed by fire in 1885. As of October 2008, when the Crestview News Bulletin featured him in an article about his metal detecting for historical artifacts, he had not found a document bearing the stamp of the seal, but felt confident he eventually would.

When he and Bruce subsequently teamed up, Bruce promised he would find such a document. Not long after that, Bruce learned that the John C. Pace library of the University of West Florida in Pensacola held a collection of Walton County official documents predating the Eucheeanna courthouse fire. He visited the library to examine the documents and found them stuffed in an envelope in no particular order. To his elation, and relief that he could indeed keep his promise to Don, he found not one, but several documents embossed with Don’s circuit court seal. He xeroxed every document in the package and took them home as evidence of what he had found.



**Figure 2. The Circuit Court seal of Walton County found by Don Perring with metal detector.**

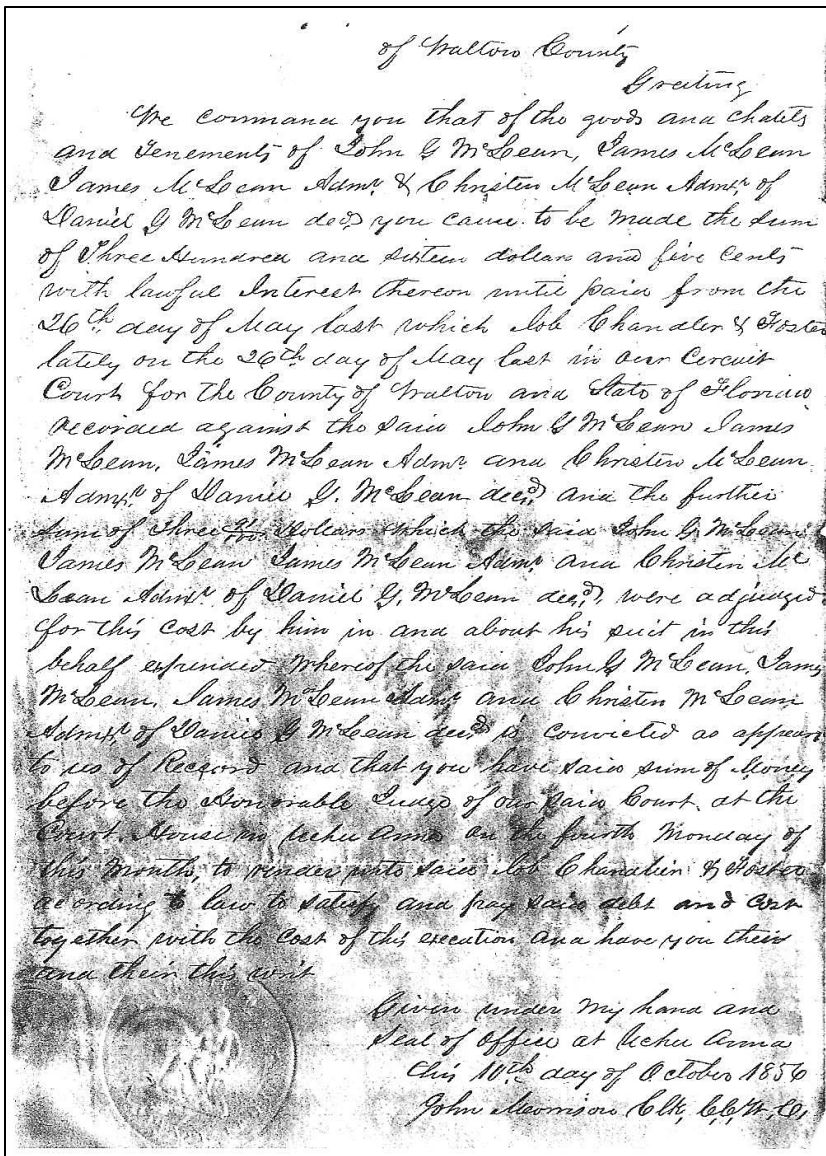


Figure 3. In the bottom left corner of the above 1856 Walton County document can be seen the embossed seal of the Circuit Court depicted in figure 2.

a few inches below the surface, he found it to be a small piece of copper. In the turned-up earth, he also found sherds of glazed pottery. Suspecting he had found the right place; he dug more and began bringing up hands full of broken pieces of glazed ware. He called Don over and within minutes they dug up enough sherds to fill a five-gallon bucket. At that point, they felt reasonably certain they had found the pottery.

They phoned Diane Merkel, then president of the Walton County Heritage Association and told her of the find. She, in turn, notified the Emerald Coast Archaeology Society located in Fort Walton Beach and invited them to conduct an archaeological investigation to confirm it as the pottery site. The dig took place in September 2012, and based on artifacts found and identified, the archaeology group concluded the site to be that of the lost Knox Hill Pottery. The DeFuniak Springs Herald Breeze published an article and photos of the dig in its edition of Thursday, 27 September, 2012.

The location of the Odom-Turnlee pottery, named after the two men who built and operated it at Knox Hill before the Civil War, had become lost to history. When it ceased operations after about a year, the bulk of

Another mystery, whose trail Don pursued before knowing Bruce, involved the whereabouts of Walton County's pre-Civil War, Knox Hill Pottery. Don first got wind of the pottery from rumors the Smithsonian had been trying to find it. After researching what little information he could find about the pottery, he went to Knox Hill and did a little metal detecting, but found nothing.

When Bruce joined him later, they did more research, and made another attempt at pin pointing the pottery site. According to directions Don had obtained, the site lay above a spring on a certain piece of property. When Bruce saw the slope above the spring they assumed to be the one described, he became skeptical that they had the right location. He thought that trekking up and down the steep slope to bring water from the spring to the kiln would make the potter's work much harder than it needed to be. That seemed impractical to him, so he looked for a site he thought would have made the potter's work easier.

That took him across a nearby road to a spot he thought more likely to yield results. Within minutes his metal detector alerted him to metal in the ground. Scratching it up from

the very small number of glazed stoneware vessels it produced ended up in the hands of the Gillis family on whose land the pottery resided.

Quite possibly, the Gillis family and Thompson Van Hyning of the Florida State Museum at Gainesville were the last individuals to share knowledge of the pottery's location. When they all passed on, they took that knowledge to their graves with them. Van Hyning, a native of Iowa, became director of the museum in 1914. He began a project to collect cultural information and artifacts on the early history of Florida to exhibit in the museum. That involved traveling to every county in the state to identify historically significant places and artifacts. His list of desired artifacts included those of the "early clay industry of the state," in other words, fired clay pottery made by anyone other than Native Americans.

When his survey took him to Walton County, his inquiries led him to the Gillises and the Odom-Turnlee pottery. The John Newton Gillis family descendants not only showed him the pottery site, but donated seventeen pieces of the glazed ware it produced to the museum. Available information suggests this occurred in the 1930s. The museum subsequently loaned seven of the pieces to the Okaloosa-Walton Historical Society Museum in Valparaiso, where they remain on exhibit. Some forty years later, another Gillis relative, Melville Jennings, donated the only piece of Knox Hill pottery bearing the name M. M. Odom to the Museum of Florida History, where it currently remains.

Although written directions and a hand-drawn map to the pottery site are available, they lack the precision necessary to determine its exact location. Ripley Bullen, the archaeologist, wrote about Knox Hill Glazed Pottery in 1970 based on his observation of the pieces in the Florida museum collection, but did not attempt to find the site. Alfred R. Frankel, M. D., searched for the pottery prior to publication in 1999 of his book, "Old Florida Pottery, Potters in Paradise, The Collector's Guide to History, Makers and Marks, 1859-1966." But his search ended in frustration with his leaving the site for "Floridians" to find. Bruce and Don answered that call when they succeeded in finding it in 2012.

Most of those familiar with the pottery, including the Gilleses, assumed the initials M. M. written on one of the pots represented the potter's initials. That however, proved not to be true. The initials of his first and second name, Thomas Bennet, appeared on only one of his pots. Stamped T. B. Odom, it is among those on exhibit at the Okaloosa-Walton Museum in Valparaiso. Bruce speculates M. M. stands for Mr. and Mrs. in reference to Odom and his wife who may have worked in the pottery alongside her husband.

Bruce seems to be the only person interested enough in Thomas Bennet Odom to find out anything about him. He managed to track down several of Odom's descendants, one of whom lives in Pensacola. According to the Odom family history he provided Bruce, Thomas, born about 1834 in Georgia, traveled about the state as an itinerate potter and salesman. At about age seventeen, he met Nancy Carolyn McGlown, a girl of not more than fourteen years old. Against her parents' wishes, she ran away with Thomas and married him about 1850-51. Thomas's line of work took him first to Mississippi and then to Florida. The only reference to Florida found in the history is that the third child of Thomas and his wife was born there. It says nothing about the Knox Hill Pottery. Possibly, later descendants had no knowledge of it.

Thomas Odom seems to have departed the area as of June 8, 1860, the date of the U. S. census enumerated for the Knox Hill post office. A search of the census documents on line for Knox Hill and surrounding locations failed to disclose any Odoms listed.

Family records indicate Thomas served in the Confederate Army, but applicable years are not shown. In 1865, after the war ended, Union soldiers scouting near Spanish Fort, Alabama and unaware the south had surrendered, surprised Thomas and his family traveling to Mobile in an ox drawn wagon. They took him prisoner and shipped him to a Confederate POW camp in Vicksburg, Mississippi, from which they later released him.

He did not return to his family until 1867 and during his absence his wife bore another child. Believing it not to be his, he left for Texas. "His family watched him leave on a logging train with another woman never to return to Alabama or his family again."

In 1878, he married Elizabeth J. Watson in Upshur, Texas. As of the 1880 U. S. census, he remained in Upshur under the name T. B. Odam and worked in pottery as his occupation. He acquired 34.80 acres of land in 1892, identified as in Harrison and Nacogdoches, of Upshur County.

About 1899, in poor health and impoverished, he wrote to several of his children of the mother he abandoned advising them of his circumstances and asking for financial assistance. Jeremiah, the youngest of the children had become embittered towards his father for abandoning them and refused his plea for assistance. Another lived in poverty himself and told his father he wanted to go live with him. In the end none of his children could either afford, or wanted to help him, presumably leaving him to die in destitution.

Odom's partner in the Knox Hill pottery, Robert Turnlee has not been found in the records, except for an individual of that name who served in the War of 1812, and for whom nothing else is known. Information from the Gillis family identified him as "Rev." Turnlee and they pointed out to Thompson Van Hyning his well and where his home once stood near the pottery on Knox Hill. A James A. Turnley, however, is listed on the 1860 U. S. census enumerated at Knox Hill post office, dated 8 June of that year. His age was 64, and his birth place was Tennessee. His occupation appears to be spelled as "toder," which may be the word, tutor, misspelled. Among the other five members of his household is a Mary Turnley, age 20; school teacher. She is followed by a Robert Glover age 9, no occupation shown.

John Newton of Knox Hill Academy is also listed on the census. Some students attending the Academy are known to have come from many places outside Walton County and boarded with local residents. At times the school enrolled a hundred pupils or more, many of which needed lodging while there. If a large number of them came from other places, the demand for lodging in Knox Hill could have been significant.

It is not difficult to imagine that boarding of students in need of tutoring became a cottage industry in the community during that time. People back then drew no distinction between education and religion, in view of which, ministers also served as teachers and vice versa. John Newton himself served in that dual role and so too might have James Turnley. Possibly, those identifying him misremembered his first name as Robert when it was actually James who partnered with Odom in the Knox Hill pottery.

Experts in the history of Florida pottery have determined Knox Hill as the first in the state except for those of Native Americans to produce glazed stone ware commercially. According to Alfred Frankel, its total production amounted to only about twenty or so vessels, making them extremely rare and highly valuable to collectors. Known collections include eleven at the Museum of Florida History in Gainesville, seven at the Okaloosa-Walton Museum in Valparaiso, two at the Walton County Heritage Museum in DeFuniak Springs, one owned by Dr. Frankel, and one owned by an acquaintance of Bruce Cosson, for a total of twenty-two pieces. Due to the historical significance of the pottery, it is among the most important finds in which Bruce played a major role.

In 2018 or 2019, Bruce finally got around to investigating the site that had always intrigued him the most. He and Don teamed up in an effort to find the exact location of the Henry M. Breckenridge log home and milk spring house. They relied heavily on their metal detectors to find household artifacts delineating the building foundation which told them where it sat. See the story in the January 2019 WCHA newsletter, “Walton Relations and History,” viewable at this link: <http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/GenSoc/NL2019Jan.pdf>. To mark the court house site, Bruce erected a historical marker along the road in Alaqua telling of its history.

The most recent historical project on which Bruce and Don are working is the Ghentsville Historical Park at Paxton. The owner of the ninety-acre tract donated it to Walton County for use as a park at Bruce’s behest after he had received permission to metal detect on the property several years ago. It is the site of the Florida Saw Mill Company which operated there from 1902 to 1920 and gave rise to Paxton as a mill town. See the WCHA July 2021 newsletter article on the history of the saw mill at the following link to read about the park and plans being made for it. <http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/GenSoc/NL2021Jul.pdf>. See also in that article a few of the many artifacts Bruce found in the park while metal detecting there.

He retired from Chelco in 2020 and hopes to continue unearthing Walton County history guided by his metal detector as long as he remains physically able to do so. He believes as did President Abraham Lincoln, “that history is not history unless it is true.” And metal detecting is a good way to find historical artifacts that validate that belief.

Pictured in Figure 4 at right, is a Knox Hill Pottery Jar on exhibit at the Museum of Florida History in Gainesville, Florida.

Shown on the following two pages is a copy of a document Don Perring obtained from Jeanette McDonald, a descendant of the Gillis family, giving a short history on the Odom-Turnlee pottery with a map of its location which he and Bruce used in finding the pottery.

But as previously noted, it lacks the precision to show the exact spot of the pottery, which required the searching Bruce and Don found necessary in finally pinpointing it. It should also be noted that the site is on private property whose owner authorized the search, but after the find, prohibited its public disclosure and posted the property against trespassing.



Figure 4. Source: <https://www.museumoffloridahistory.com/collections/19th-20th-century-artifacts/everyday-objects/knox-hill-pottery-jar/>. Downloaded by Sam Carnley, 9/5/2021



## ODOM-TURNLEE POTTERY

Knox Hill Florida

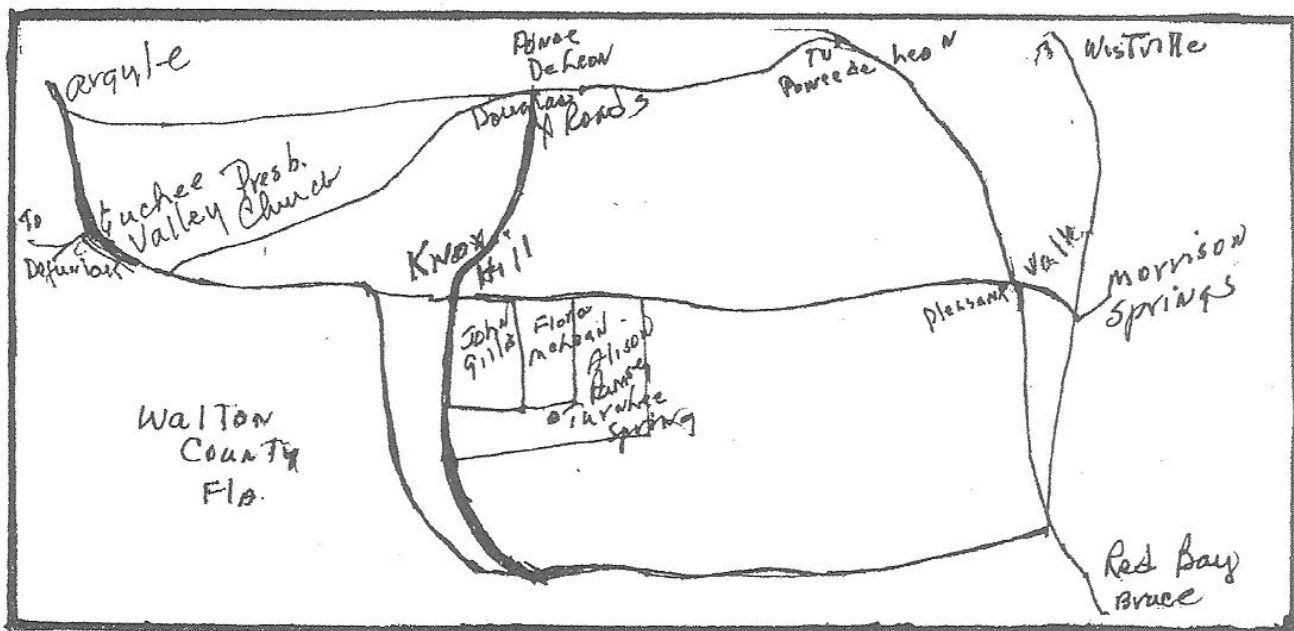
By

Clayton G. Metcalf

My grandfather, John Newton Gillis, was a member of the Gillis family who settled in Euchee Valley, Walton County, Florida, along with the Euchee Indians. He was a son of John Gillis and Christian McIntosh, made his home at the cross roads on top of Knox Hill. The elder John Gillis settled east of Knox Hill at Pleasant Valley.

John Newton Gillis married Amanda Ramsey, daughter of Capt. Alison Ramsey and Ann Bozeman. One plot of land joining the Gillis land was owned by his sister, Flora Gillis, wife of Willie McLean. Adjoining these plots was property of Alison Ramsey.

Just south of the McLean land, on the Ramsey land was a very beautiful spring from which some cool water oozed. This was known as the Turnlee Spring, and as a youngster I toted pails of this water to the Gillis home, when the well ran dry. See the sketch below for the location of the spring and property.



From available records, two gentlemen, Robert Turnlee and M.M. Odom established a pottery above the spring, and operated it during 1859-1860. They potted a number of jars or vases. Efforts have been made to locate some of this rare old pottery, and several pieces were exhibited in the Historical Society Museum in Valparaiso, Florida.

Seventeen pieces of this pottery were donated to the Florida State Museum in Gainesville, FL., by the John Newton Gillis family during the 1930s, because there was no other museum in the area. Included in this collection were churns, pitchers, jars, and jugs. Ten of these pieces were still on exhibit for a long time.

Other than the Indian Pottery, made in Florida, this is the oldest pottery known to have been made in the state. It is all vitrified stoneware, made from locally dug clay. Several pieces have a distinctive brownish-gray salt glaze; one churn has a matt brown glaze; and a large jug has a dark blackish-brown glaze, with an interesting drip effect, resulting from pouring the glaze over the pot. Only one piece, a churn, is unglazed terra cotta with a number "4" stamped on the side. On the shoulder of several of the pieces are a pair of ear-like handles which are distinguishing characteristics. Although a couple of the jugs and a pitcher are broken, the pieces are in good condition.

In 1973 Mr. Melville Jennings, kinsman of the Gillis family, gave another piece to the Historical Society. This pitcher has the characteristic gray glaze and is in perfect condition. It is the only piece of this pottery which bears the stamp of Mr. M.M. Odom.

According to an article by Mr. T. Van Hyning, former director of the Florida State Museum in Gainesville, this pottery came into the possession of the State of Florida by virtue of a law which established the Museum and authorized the director to conduct surveys of the state and to collect specimens, and data on the early history of the state, chart, and mark historical sites, etc. In conducting research on the early clay industry of the state on a tour of the Walton County area, the Knox Hill pottery was discovered.

Mr. Van Hyning told of meeting Grandpa Gillis, and his eagerness to assist in the research. He described his first visit to the Walton County Pottery thusly: "The site of the old pottery was on the edge of an old cleared field. Here we picked up several different pieces of pottery, showing the several kinds of ware produced. In the brush to one side was a sunken place, which was the site of the home of Rev. Turnlee, and nearby stood his old well. Just over the hill in a low place was a clay pit from which clay was procured. A small spring of water is running from the clay bank just as it did seventy-four years ago."

On this and subsequent trips, the Museum staff acquired the seventeen pieces. Mr. Van Hyning believed that the pottery was experimental, and this, coupled with the short duration of its activity, accounted for the great scarcity of pieces.

The Turnlee Spring has dried up after all these years, and the pottery site has been completely covered with thick undergrowth. Recent searches for broken pieces has proved fruitless.



ODOM PITCHER

The pottery on the left is that of the pitcher, donated to the Museum at Valparaiso, given by Melville Jennings of DeFuniak Springs. This is the only piece which has been found that bears the stamp of M.M. Odom. Anyone who has information about the Turnlee-Odom Pottery, are asked to contact the Museum at Valparaiso, or my Uncle Harold W. Gillis of DeFuniak Springs.

Several other historical items were also donated to the University of Florida Museum at Gainesville by my Gillis family, one of which I remember is the old spinning wheel, which I saw many years stored in Grandpa's old country store.

Another of my uncles, Bryan Gillis, while a student at Florida came ill with Diabetes and had to quit college. He had become acquainted with Mr. Van Hyning during the Turnlee Pottery search, so after returning home to Knox Hill, he had contracted with the Florida Museum to collect mussels from the area.

They were the subject of a study to identify all of the different species in the fresh waters of the area.

I recall one summer while visiting at Knox Hill with my Gillis family, after Grandpa died, that Bryan let me go with him to the Choctawhatchee Bay gathering mussels. We spent the night at a small fish camp called "Neal's Landing" which was on the property of my Gillis grandparents. This site is now on the Reservation of Eglin Field, south of Portland, FL. We had a good time gathering mussels there and over at Piney Point across the Bay. Mussels are fresh water clams, which the Indians ate in large quantities. I never ate any of them, but I suspect that they tasted much like clams or oysters.



**Figure 5.** Shown above are items Bruce and Don found while metal detecting near the old Eucheeanna courthouse site.

1. A replica of the Circuit Court seal made from the original Don Perring found.
2. This column includes a thimble, banjo pick, brass barrel key, silver ornamental jewelry, and a bird whistle.
3. This column includes two skirt weights ladies relied on to safe-guard their modesty in windy weather, and two shoe heel taps.
4. A column of various buckles, possibly for garters, suspenders, belts, etc.
5. A column of jewelry items, including three rings, one of which is gold, and three brooches.



**Figure 6.** More artifacts Bruce and Don found near Eucheeanna Courthouse site:

1. A .44 caliber brass cartridge case for a Henry repeating rifle of the type used by some Union troops under the command of Union General Asboth on his raid against Marianna in September 1864. Lt. Col. Spurling, in command of Asboth's four hundred cavalymen, routed Confederate soldiers encamped at Eucheeanna near the courthouse when Asboth passed through Walton County. Based on a documented report of Spurling's skirmish with the Confederates, Bruce believes this cartridge case probably came from a Henry rifle carried by one of Spurling's cavalymen in the fray.
2. Separate components of a Burnside cartridge for breach-loading rifles used by Union soldiers in the Civil War. Most Union soldiers, including Spurling, carried this rifle instead of the Henry.
3. An intact Burnside cartridge of the type in 2 above.
4. A "Minié ball," bullet used in rifled Enfield muskets by soldiers of both sides.
5. Round rifle balls for smooth-bore muskets used by both sides during the Civil War.

Bruce believes that the skirmish between the Union and Confederates took place at the spot near the courthouse where he found these artifacts and they validate the place of the event as described in Asboth's report.