



WALTON

RELATIONS & HISTORY

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Walton County Heritage Association

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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.
1140 Circle Drive, DeFuniak Springs, Florida 32435
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Back Issues: <http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/GenSoc/newsletters.htm>

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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 Florala 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 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 <http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/Membership2020.pdf>
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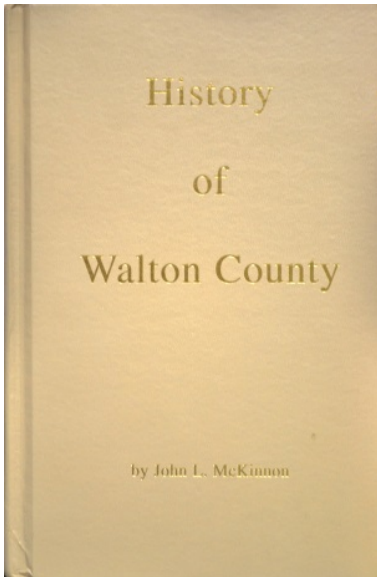
Member Benefits:

- 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.

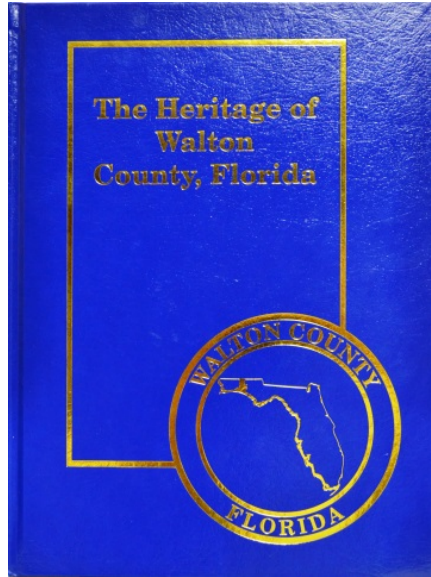
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From the Museum Gift Shop

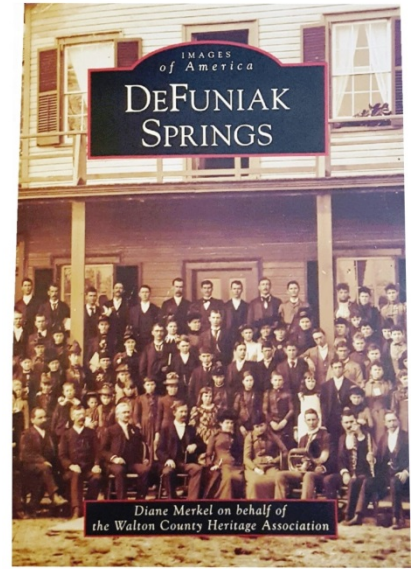
Our most popular books



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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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.

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- I would like to volunteer at the Walton County Heritage Museum
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- I have artifacts or photographs I wish to donate or loan to the Museum

Please mail your check and this form to
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 Thank You!
 All membership dues are tax deductible.

GHENTSVILLE PARK New Recreational Site Comes to Paxton.

By Sam Carnley and Bruce Cosson

Walton County and the City of Paxton are in the process of transforming 90 acres of woodland within the City's limits into a park dedicated to the preservation of local history and outdoor recreational activities for residents of the town and public in general.

The land for the park, once the site of the Florala Saw Mill Company, which gave rise to the Town of Paxton, came to the county under no-cost terms required to remain confidential. The name, Ghentsville, harkens back to the pre-Civil War postmaster, John Ghent, whose home, stage coach station and post office stood a mile or so west of the park. He married a daughter of William Cawthon, who settled in the vicinity about 1833. Cawthon owned and operated a grist mill in the area of the park, on the grounds of which can still be found bricks from the mill's foundation. Cawthon did not approve of Ghent's marriage to his daughter and disliked him intensely.

Ghent ran afoul of the law when he began pilfering money and other valuables from the mail coming to his post office. That led to his arrest for mail robbery, and landed him in custody of a U. S. marshal who held him on the top floor of a three-story hotel in Pensacola awaiting trial. The trial had barely begun when in the early morning of Thursday, July 15, 1858, Ghent leapt through a window when his guards, momentarily distracted, took their eyes off him. In the three-story fall, he suffered injuries on striking the ground, in spite of landing on his feet, that led to his death two or three hours later. Following the demise of its namesake, Ghentsville would linger on a few more years before it too disappeared from history.

References to the area as Ghentsville continued through the Civil War, during which a large force of some four thousand Confederate soldiers camped in the vicinity of present-day Clear Springs Road between Staggers (Paxton) creek and Lake Drive. Those references appeared in a newspaper article and Confederate Army communications in 1864.¹

The park property consisted of part of a homestead original entry by Benjamin F. Cockcroft dated January 27, 1894. Described as the south ½ of the southeast ¼, section 26, township 6, north and range 21, west, Cockcroft conveyed the property by warranty deed to J. T. Hughes of Covington County, Alabama on 27 December, 1902 for the sum of five hundred dollars.² The previous day, Hughes and wife, Annie, conveyed to Cockcroft by warranty deed a parcel described as the east ½ of the northeast ¼ of section thirty-five, township 6, north and range 21 west, for five hundred dollars.³ In effect, they swapped 80 acre parcels with each other for a net amount of zero dollars.

The following January 10th, 1903, Hughes and wife conveyed by warranty deed to The Florala Saw Mill Company, a corporation of the State of Pennsylvania, the section 26 tract, and others, for one thousand and eighty dollars. That deed set in motion the establishment of a major saw mill that would serve as the source of employment for most of the residents of what became known as Paxton for many years to come. Hughes even gave it that name, after John Paxton, a well-to-do Chicago investor in the company.⁴ Within six months or a year of acquiring the property, the saw mill became operational.



¹ Carnley, Sam, *Ghentsville*, (Walton County Heritage Association, Inc. newsletter; "Walton Relations and History," February 2018), <http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/GenSoc/NL2018Feb.pdf>

² Cockcroft to Hughes, Warranty Deed, Walton County Deed book 15, p. 261, 27 December, 1902.

³ Hughes to Cockcroft, Warranty Deed, Walton County Deed book 15, p. 262, 26 December, 1902

⁴ Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce – Florala – Paxton, <http://tricitychamberofcommerce.com/>, downloaded by Sam Carnley, 7/27/2017.

W. D. Johnston of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, became president of the company, but had little to do with its operation and rarely ever ventured south from his northern home to set foot on the saw mill premises. Hughes, a Florala native and life-long resident, served as vice-president, secretary and general manager, and singlehandedly, ran the day-to-day operations of the business. An article in praise of him appeared in the 13 August 1914 edition of the Florala News:

. . . And it would not be amiss to say that Mr. Hughes is the soul of the company. It would be equally appropriate to say that Mr. Hughes is the spur and life of the town, or, more properly speaking, city of Paxton. Pursuant to the paternal interest, the company, through Mr. Hughes, takes in the welfare of Paxton and its people, almost wholly company employees, it fathered and fostered the recent movement that culminated in incorporation and the securing already of about a mile of good streets or roads and many other material benefits. The treatment accorded its employees generally is evidenced by the tennis court provided for the office force on the company's grounds which is but an exemplification of the just and liberal treatment extended all employees, from the highest to the lowest, and between whom and the company the most pleasant harmonious relations have existed during the entire period of its nearly a dozen years of life.⁵

The fact that after a dozen years in operation, Hughes continued running the mill as an efficient and profitable venture validated the extraordinary intelligence and forethought he demonstrated in conceiving it before it came to fruition. Even before he acquired the mill property from B. F. Cockcroft, he had already secured twelve thousand and two hundred acres of Walton County pine timber land through timber leases with a term of 15 years to complete the harvesting. He obtained the leases through a timber deed from the Florala Naval Stores Company, a corporation of the state of Alabama, at the rate of four dollars and fifty cents per acre, which for the acreage acquired, aggregated to Fifty-four thousand, nine hundred dollars. The parties to the deed signed and dated it on the 1st day of October, 1902.⁶

In a deed dated the 3rd day of November, 1902, he conveyed the timber leases to the Florala Saw Mill Company for the amount of fifty-five thousand dollars.⁷ That gave the mill the resources it would need in producing lumber over the life of the fifteen years of the timber lease. Although Hughes netted less than a thousand dollars on the deal, he set himself up to earn tremendously larger amounts in salary and benefits as long as he ran the business.

But after securing the raw material needed for the mill and getting it established, he still had more to do in making it operational. There was the matter of transportation needed in bringing logs to the mill and getting the finished product to market. The most efficient way of doing that was by train, which required running tracks from the nearest existing tracks to the mill. Railroads serving Florala were three; the Yellow River from Crestview, the Georgia Central from Albany, Georgia and the L & N from Opp, Alabama.

Yellow River became the first of the three to connect to Florala in 1898. The Georgia Central followed in 1903 and the L & N about the same year. Stories from the local paper, The Florala News, indicated however that trains moved about the Florala area as early as 7 November 1902, predating by a couple of years the beginning of operations at the Paxton mill site, and a year before the arrival of the Georgia Central and L & N railroads to the town. According to an article in the paper published on that date, for example, "John Howell in charge of the Florala Saw Mill engine, took to the big mill last Monday the first load of material that has ever went to that



Figure 1. J. T. Hughes, (1871-1923). Source: The Florala News, 13 Aug. 1914, Thursday, p. 6, Newspapers.com, downloaded 7/11/21

⁵ Florala Saw Mill Company, The Florala News (Florala, Alabama), 13 August 1914, Thursday, p. 1, Newspapers.com, downloaded July 5, 2021 by Sam Carnley.

⁶ The Florala Naval Stores Company to J. T. Hughes, timber deed, Walton County deed book 13, p. 395.

⁷ J.T. Hughes and wife to Florala Saw Mill Company, timber deed, Walton County deed book 13, p. 399.

place. This was the first train to visit our sister city, Lockhart.” If the history of railroads in Florala is accurate, this train could only have moved over the Yellow River tracks as it predated the coming of the other two railroads.

The article proves more baffling than informative, due to information it omitted. A second article, dated 4 August 1904, reads as follows: “The old mill shed of the Florala Saw Mill Company, which has long been an eye-sore to those living in the western part of town, is being torn down.” On 8 September, 1904, appeared this article: “Engineer Johnnie Howell, on the log train of the Florala Saw Mill Company, was slightly injured and received a severe shaking up last Monday by the explosion of a small box of powder which is usually carried in the box under the seat in the cab. In some manner, a spark ignited the powder and the force of the explosion carried Mr. Howell up against the top of the cab and he received several bruises about the head and a severe cut on the lip.” Following that, on 10 November 1904, came the article below:

A Wreck on the Central.

Wednesday afternoon a Central of Georgia freight ran into a log train of the Florala Saw Mill Company, near McRae. It was a head on collision and both engines were badly smashed up. Engineer Johnnie Howell and fireman Billie Cockcroft were in charge of the log train engine which was on the main line and backing very slowly, when the Central freight coming down a rather steep grade struck it while running something like twenty miles an hour. The force of the impact was so great that the log train was backed about ten car lengths down the track.

It was stated that a flagman was out in front of the oncoming train, but the air brakes refused to work which was found out too late to set the brakes by hand.

Both crews escaped injury, the crew of the log train singly [simply] stepping off and watching the crew of the fast freight roll up in the sand. Officials came over later to investigate the matter.⁸

McRae, referenced as near the place of the wreck, lay about ten or fifteen miles northeast of Florala. Possibly, the logging train had begun operating out of the saw mill at Paxton by 1904 on tracks of the Yellow River and Georgia Central railroads. There is considerable confusion regarding when L & N ran its tracks to the Paxton mill. A photo of an L & N locomotive sitting on a site alleged to be the Florala Saw Mill Company at Paxton is dated 24 April, 1904 (Figure 2). That predated records showing L & N ran tracks to the mill in 1905. One conclusion to be drawn from the dates of the foregoing news articles is that a business known as the Florala Saw Mill Company with railroad access existed in the town predating the establishment of the saw mill of that name at Paxton, and already owned a logging train.

A Florala News article of 1 December, 1904 shocked the populace into temporarily diverting its attention away from all things Florala Saw Mill Company when it announced that “There are six cases of small pox at Paxton, but Dr. Godard, of the Florida State Board of Health, has been working there the greater part of this week stamping it out.”

After that scare passed, the news cycle soon returned to the Hughes venture. In the process of establishing the new mill in Paxton, he apparently foresaw the need to expand his railroad rolling stock with the purchase of an additional locomotive. A Florala News article on 4 May 1905 addressed that very subject:

Engineer Johnnie J. Howell arrived from Atlanta Tuesday afternoon with a fine, big new locomotive for the Florala Saw Mill Company. He made the trip alright the only thing that kept him from breaking the speed record over the Central [of Georgia railroad] was, the officials refused him the right of way, and laid him out, two days waiting for slow trains. The engine left Atlanta last Friday. A relative of Mr. Howell’s, Dr. Hall, from the Gate City, accompanied him and fired the locomotive. They left yesterday morning for Blackman, Florida.⁹

⁸ The Florala News (Florala, Alabama), 10 November, 1904, Thursday, p. 1, Newspapers.com, downloaded by Sam Carnley, 7/7/2021.

⁹ The Florala News (Florala, Alabama), 4 May 1905, Thu. Page 1, Newspapers.com, downloaded by Sam Carnley, 7-9-2021.

The article gave no explanation for the trip to Blackman, then located in Santa Rosa County, but on creation of Okaloosa County in 1915, becoming a part of that county. Neither did the article mention any rolling stock arriving with the locomotive from Atlanta. Without such stock consisting of box cars and flat cars, the locomotive would be of little use in transporting materials to and from the mill. The trip to Blackman may therefore have been to secure the cars needed to complete a functioning train. Could this locomotive be the one in figure 3?

Taking the next step necessary in bringing his trains to the new mill, Hughes contracted with the Louisville & Nashville Railroad company to lay tracks to it in an agreement signed and dated the 3rd day of August, 1905.¹⁰ The spur connected with the L & N track running east from the depot in Florala across Highway 85 and along the north shore of Lake Jackson. It then curved around the northeast corner of the lake and headed south a mile or



Figure 2. Florala Saw Mill Company engine number 3 - Paxton, Florida. 1907. *State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory*. <<https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/146970>>, accessed 11 July 2021

so to the mill site. The Central of Georgia also laid a track paralleling that of the L & N to the mill, giving it access to both railroads. As the article on the wreck with the Central of Georgia indicated, Hughes already had rail access to his timber leases in Covington County to the north.

He needed similar access to his newly acquired timber leases in Walton County to the south. He busied himself with accomplishing that through additional contracts with L & N to lay logging tracks connecting the mill to the timber lands. But he probably did not complete that objective until late 1905 or early 1906.

The mill had begun operations by the latter year however, and during that time, it added a new and unique enhancement to its production capabilities. In its edition of 19 April, 1906, *The Florala News* announced the addition as a “New Process that Extracts Turpentine from Saw Dust and Slabs. Only Three Plants of The Kind in Existence:”

The Hughes—Snell Turpentine Company is just beginning to operate a turpentine plant in our thriving suburb of Paxton, Fla., of entirely new design, which promises the saving of untold hundreds of thousands of gallons of spirits of turpentine, that but for some improved method like this would be a total loss.

These people are using the slabs and sawdust from the Florala Saw Mill Company that have heretofore gone into the furnace and the slab-pit.

The slabs are run through a “hog” that cuts them into small bits which are dumped with the dust into a chain-way which conveys this combination to the third story of the plant where it is fed into large drums or retorts holding about 3,000 pounds.

These retorts are honeycombed with small perforated steam pipes which quickly raises the temperature to a sufficient height to cause the oil to exude from the whole mass, at this point the steam is shut off these small pipes and a steam pressure is applied from the top of the retort only. This lasts from 70 to 100 minutes, owing to varying conditions, by which time the oil of turpentine has been conveyed through a cooling coil to the still where it is converted into pure spirits by a still much the same as those in common use.

¹⁰ Florala Saw Mill Company to L & N RR, right-of-way lease, Walton County deed book 18, p. 486.

It is estimated that a ton of “green” dust will yield from 8 to 10 gallons of spirits. This plant has five retorts of 1½ tons each.

As there are many “dead” logs which yield little spirits there is no absolute rule as to gauging the output of this plant, but 250 to 400 gallons per day is a fair average at present. The saw dust is returned to the mill and burns even more readily than before as it is largely dried in the process.

This plant is the second of three that have been put into operation so far. Mr. Snell is the patentee and has the reputation of a thorough going business man. Mr. Hughes is a “native” and is known as an enterprising citizen that has helped to develop this section. He is vice-president of the Florala Saw Mill Company.

It is worth a long trip to see this process, and we do not doubt that inside of a few years that fortunes will be made of what has been heretofore considered absolute waste.¹¹

The Pensacola News Journal followed with an article in February, 1908, providing more information on the saw mill and turpentine plant. It stated that equipment of the mill included a combination circular and gang saw, edgers and trimmers, automatic stacker, hog, three dry kilns, a planing mill with five planers and matchers, a resaw, moulder, and five trimmers. Not mentioned were one or more steam engines that powered the milling machinery and electric generator. Also not mentioned were the number and purposes of buildings on the site.

The saw mill employed fifty men, and the planing mill, thirty-two. A “large number” of workers were also employed in other parts of the plant. Adding descriptive information about the plant lay-out, the article stated that between the woods and the mill, ran a logging railroad used by three locomotives and other logging equipment. Draft animals including horses, mules and oxen put additional muscle behind the men laboring on the yard. The L & N and Georgia Central railroads provided rail service into and out of the plant.

Plant production consisted primarily of gang sawed rough and dressed long leaf yellow pine lumber. It also milled a specialty grade lumber known as rift flooring. Rift refers to the angle boards are cut from the log, which is perpendicular to the tree’s growth rings. The method produces the best quality lumber and at the same time, the most waste. The saw mill produced 100,000 feet of lumber and the planing mill 50,000 feet per day. Its payroll ran \$10,000 a month.

The Pensacola Journal article’s description of the turpentine plant differed somewhat from that of the earlier Florala News article in 1906. Whereas that article identified the turpentine operation as the Hughes-Snell Turpentine Company, the Pensacola Journal called it the Lake Jackson Turpentine Company. Otherwise, the description of the turpentine plant operations substantially agreed between the two articles.¹²

In March of 1908, the Florala News reported: “Mr. J. T. Hughes, Vice-President and General Manager of the Florala Saw Mill Company, of Paxton, stated to a News man that the large and costly turpentine plant recently destroyed by fire, would be rebuilt, and that work on same would be started within the next six weeks.”

Also in 1908, an article dated 15 October came out reporting that, “Last Week the Florala Saw Mill Company gave Mr. Harris Pickens, of Florala, [a] contract to build for them four large dry kilns for use in connection with their saw mill business at Paxton. These dry kilns which are each to be thirty feet high, 125 feet long and twenty-five feet wide, are to be build [built] as rapidly as possible. Concrete blocks, like those being used around here are to be used as constructing material. Mr. Pickens has done considerable work in the building line in Florala. Recently he built the large warehouse for W. F. Hughes, of building blocks. We are glad to note he has the contract.

The saw mill also ran a commissary for the “benefit” of its employees. An article of 12 May 1910, reported that “Mr. and Mrs. F. A. Florence have sold their beautiful residence in North Florala to Mr. T. A. Goodwin and moved over to Paxton, Fla. Mr. Florence has accepted a position as manager of the Florala Saw Mill Company’s commissary.”

¹¹ New Process Extracts, Florala News (Florala, Alabama), 19 April, 1906, Thu., p. 1, Newspapers.com, downloaded by Sam Carnley, 7-9-2021.

¹² Florala Saw Mill Company, Pensacola News Journal, 9 Feb., 1908, Sun., page 15, Newspapers.com, downloaded by Sam Carnley 7/9/2021.

As of 1913, the Company's investment in land, buildings and equipment totaled \$200,000.00. The mill's annual capacity amounted to 30,000,000 feet of lumber sawed. Its daily saw mill and planing mill production averaged 115,000 and 85,000 feet, respectively. In addition to the saw and planing mills, the operation included a turpentine plant, dry kilns, several open storage sheds, office facilities and a commissary. It sat on an 80-acre site connected by its own logging railroads to some of the largest stands of premium quality southern yellow pine in Walton County. It transported its output to market over a self-owned rail spur that connected to the L & N tracks in Florala and points beyond. It had no need to export products out of country because it successfully marketed all it produced domestically. Over shadowing that glowing report was the fact that sufficient timber remained to keep the mill running for only about another eight years.

The primary breadwinners of most of the 1,200 to 1,500 residents of Paxton depended for their livelihoods on employment at the mill. Their children attended a school provided and funded by the mill, and they worshipped at a "union," non-denominational church, also gratis of the mill. The town lay out segregated homes by race into separate residential sections, "and a more satisfied or better ordered town than Paxton would be hard to find." Further, they enjoyed the conveniences afforded them by a company owned electric and water works plant, which made Paxton an "intensely self-sufficient little community," in the words of a Pensacola news article hyping all the benefits of the Florala Saw Mill Company to Paxton residents.

"Paxton, to sum the whole matter up, very briefly and to the point," continued the article, "is one of the most model, prosperous and well-ordered milling towns to be found anywhere in the Wiregrass region, and the Florala Saw Mill Company is to be congratulated upon its production. As resident manager of one of the busiest mills in the section, as a progressive citizen in every respect, and as somewhat of a 'city builder' on his own accord, Mr. Hughes, indeed, shows a record that is unusual."¹³

Although the news reporting sometimes made it seem that way, the Florala Saw Mill Company was not the only game in the town of Paxton. Other entrepreneurs located their businesses there also. Z. S. Adams, for example, owned and operated a large commissary in the environs. Early one morning in September, 1914, residents awoke to the incessant blaring of the saw mill whistle signaling an emergency. At the sight of a huge fire lighting up the predawn sky, they first thought the mill to be the source of the blaze, but later learned it was the Z. S. Adams establishment instead. The fire totally consumed the structure, as well as the post office and the office of Dr. R. L. Miller, both of which adjoined it.¹⁴ Dr. Miller, coincidentally, served as physician of the Florala Saw Mill Company.

Steve Adams, speaking on behalf of his business, later reported to the Florala News that how the fire started had not been determined. He said, however, it originated in Frank Turner's barbershop which stood next to the commissary. Turner had closed the shop for two days while away on a visit out of town. Adams further stated the company had their building insured, but too little to cover the loss.

The structure itself accounted for only part of the loss. The day before the fire, the owners had brought in large quantities of goods, including flour, meat, lard, potatoes and many other staples. Their destruction in the fire left the company with nothing to sell its customers, a severe inconvenience to them because the commissary was the only store in town. The company went to Florala and bought supplies to replace those lost and set up shop in a small building in Paxton, later rebuilding its large store there.¹⁵

In August 1915, a serious misfortune befell the men of Paxton when 250 of them were laid off due to a fire at the mill which did an estimated fifty thousand dollars in damages. The loss included the planing mill, stock sheds, engines, boilers and tanks. Two million feet of lumber stored in the sheds also went up in smoke. Rebuilding of the mill began in a few days in the hope of having it back in full production in six or eight weeks.¹⁶

¹³ Pensacola News Journal (Pensacola, Florida), 8 Jun 1913, Sun., page 23, Newspapers.com, downloaded 7/11/2021 by Sam carnley.

¹⁴ The Florala News, (Florala, Alabama), 24 September, 1914, Thursday, page 2, Newspapers.com, downloaded 7/11/2021 by Sam Carnley.

¹⁵ Ibid, 1 Oct. 1914, Thursday, page 1, Newspapers.com, downloaded by Sam Carnley, 7/11/2021.

¹⁶ Pensacola News Journal (Pensacola, Florida), 21 August 1915, Sat. Page 1, Newspapers.com, downloaded 7/11*/2021.

In March 1916, the mill received still another set back when fire destroyed the dry kilns containing twenty-five to thirty thousand dollars' worth of lumber. Close by sheds also burned down. Plans were to rebuild all the destroyed facilities at once.¹⁷

Evidence that the saw mill had run through substantially all the timber it owned in Walton County and the end neared, came with a notice in the Pensacola News Journal in July 1917 that the commissioners of Walton County had ordered Harbeson Lumber Company and Florala Saw Mill Company to remove the rails and cross ties and level the roadway at all crossings where their logging roads have been discontinued.¹⁸

The Florala Saw Mill Company made changes in the arrangements for its commissary once managed by Mr. F. A. Florence as previously noted. The 1st day of April, 1918 found it occupied by Lee Mathis. The company entered into an agreement leasing the facility to him on that date for five years with the privilege of renewal, and to furnish the building with electric lights, when possible to do so from the mill. The terms obligated Mathis to accept in trade at the commissary "merchandise checks" issued to mill employees in payment of wages. He would accept the checks in payment for "goods, wares and merchandise, and pay in cash, or its equivalent, on or about the mill's monthly pay-day, the balance of the checks to employees."

The company agreed to collect on all deficit accounts of employees and give precedence to those accounts over claims of any other kind. It further promised not to engage in competition with the commissary during the term of the lease. Obligations of the lessee included paying the lessor a percentage of the sales per month on all business done by the commissary, payable monthly; carrying a stock of goods suitable for the trade at Paxton and giving good service to employees of the mill.¹⁹

The company claimed to want good services given its employees, but its use of merchandise checks in payment of their wages proved otherwise. Saw mills in general at the time used merchandise checks to deceive and exploit employees to keep them dependent on the mill for every aspect of their lives. Rather than paying them in cash or drafts payable to bearer, they paid them in merchandise checks acceptable at face value only in the company commissary for over priced merchandise. This empowered the company to recoup much of the wages paid out when the workers patronized the company store.

Most did, because absent the cash needed to shop elsewhere, they found themselves dependent for food and other necessities on the commissary, giving it a monopoly over their trade. As often happened, the commissary extended credit to workers unable to live within their means. As the practice continued with no significant gains in wages, the workers found themselves hopelessly in debt to the company and obligated to continue working there until they could pay it off.²⁰

This system did not develop by accident. Hughes and others like him designed it as a means of enriching themselves by millions of dollars while leaving the workers they claimed to care about wallowing in poverty. It represented a form of economic peonage similar to, but less severe than debt slavery or debt servitude. The federal government charged Jackson Lumber Company of Lockhart with debt peonage on learning the company forced men against their will to work as timber cutters in their pine forest holdings. W. S. Harlan, manager of the company, was prosecuted for violating laws against the illegal practice and convicted in 1906.²¹

A Pensacola Journal ad on 7 April 1918 advertised for sale "21 head of good logging mules, 30 head of oxen together with dollies and carts all in good condition, by Florala Saw Mill Company.

In 1920 the company underwent a change in corporate ownership. On the 13th day of May, 1920, Florala Saw Mill Company, a Pennsylvania Corporation, executed a deed to Florala Saw Mill Company, a Delaware Corporation, conveying to it all real estate in Walton County owned by the Pennsylvania Corporation, as well as all capital assets located thereon and all railroad related assets attached thereto.²²

¹⁷ Ibid, 25 March, 1916, Sat., Page 1, Newspapers.com, downloaded 7/11/2021.

¹⁸ Ibid, 6 July, 1917.

¹⁹ Agreement, 1 April, 1918, Walton County deed book 53, p. 417-418.

²⁰ Merchandise Checks, Florida Historical Quarterly, Fall 1996, p. 138, <https://ucf.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/ucf%3A25522/datastream/OBJ/view>, downloaded by Sam Carnley, 7/12/2021

²¹ Turpentine Industry in Alabama, Encyclopedia of Alabama, Published: September 8, 2011, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3137>, downloaded by Sam Carnley, 7/12/2021.

²² Deed, 13 May 1920, Walton County deed book 57, p. 485.

Finally, in its last transaction as Florala Saw Mill Company, the Delaware Corporation sold all capital assets of the mill to the W. B. Harbeson Lumber Company, a Florida Corporation, on the 31st day of December, 1920.²³ Harbeson operated the mill to about 1925, after which it shut down permanently.

Three years after selling Florala Saw Mill Company to Harbeson, James Thomas (Tom) Hughes died at the age of 51 on Tuesday, 28 August 1923 at Lakeview Hospital in Florala following an operation for appendicitis. The operation took place the previous Sunday evening after which his prognosis worsened. Doctors performing the surgery included Dr. F. Young of Florala, Dr. Frasier of Dothan and Dr. Payne of Pensacola. Prior to the appendicitis attack, he seemed to enjoy good health. His family laid him to rest in Florala's Green Wood Memorial Cemetery on 30 August, 1923. His Find A Grave memorial is 5264339.

Fast forwarding to 2018, the property on which Florala Saw Mill Company sat came into the possession Walton County in a warranty deed dated the 11th day of December, 2018 under the terms previously mentioned. An agreement pursuant to the deed provides, in part, as follows:

3. Project. The County agrees to utilize the [property] as a nature park open to the public known as "Ghentsville Park." The Park would contain historical descriptions of the site and have walking trails. [Grantor] requests that the County include assistance with the historical background and descriptions from the Walton County Heritage Association, specifically, Bruce Cosson. It is requested that The Walton County Heritage Association, under the guidance of Bruce Cosson and his associates, be given the opportunity to further their past, preliminary searches of the site for the purpose of identifying and confirming historical locations and artifacts (i.e. including but not limited to the pillars from old sawmill, locomotive smokestack and railroad tracks, site of the old commissary, etc.) with the intent of preserving and including one or more of these areas and items as points of interest on walking trails or at picnic sites. The County could utilize the property for mitigating credit for benefiting the northern section of the County. (The "Project") . . .

This article, in collaboration with Bruce Cosson, begins the process of developing the local history of the park as provided in the above agreement. In addition to the written historical narrative included herein, photos of several items Bruce Cosson found on the site while metal detecting, and photos he took of building foundation structures on the site, appear on the following pages.

Also included are photos from the Florala News and Pensacola News Journal which reported on the saw mill from time to time during its existence. The poor quality of those photos however, may be of little benefit in depicting scenery of the mill. Hopefully, better photos will become available in the future.

²³ Deed, 31 December 1920, Walton County deed book 63, p. 115.

Depicted on this page are some of the items Bruce Cosson found on the Ghentsville Park site with a metal detector



1897 Indian Head penny, copper.
Photo by Sam Carnley



1917 Mercury Head dime, silver. Photo
by Sam Carnley



Railroad brakeman's cap badge, non-ferrous metal. 1904-1920 time period.
Photo by Sam Carnley



Armand Cold Cream Powder
Compact, Lid, non-ferrous metal.
1916-1925 time period. Photo by Sam
Carnley



Railroad lock, non-ferrous metal. 1904-1920 time
period. Photo by Sam
Carnley

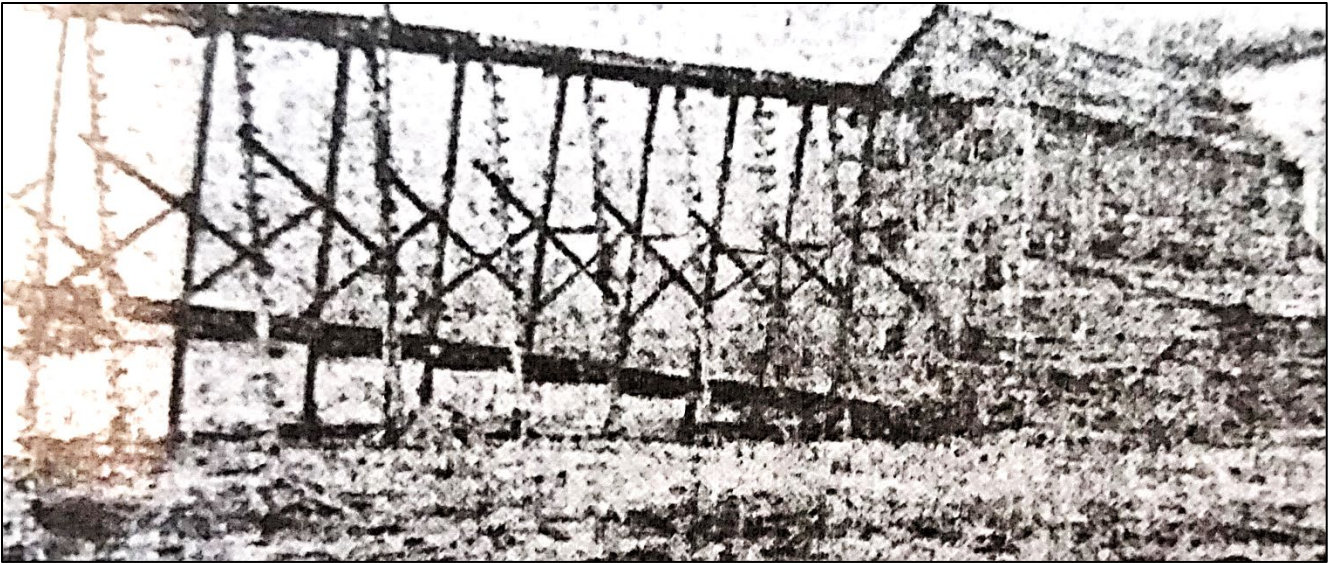
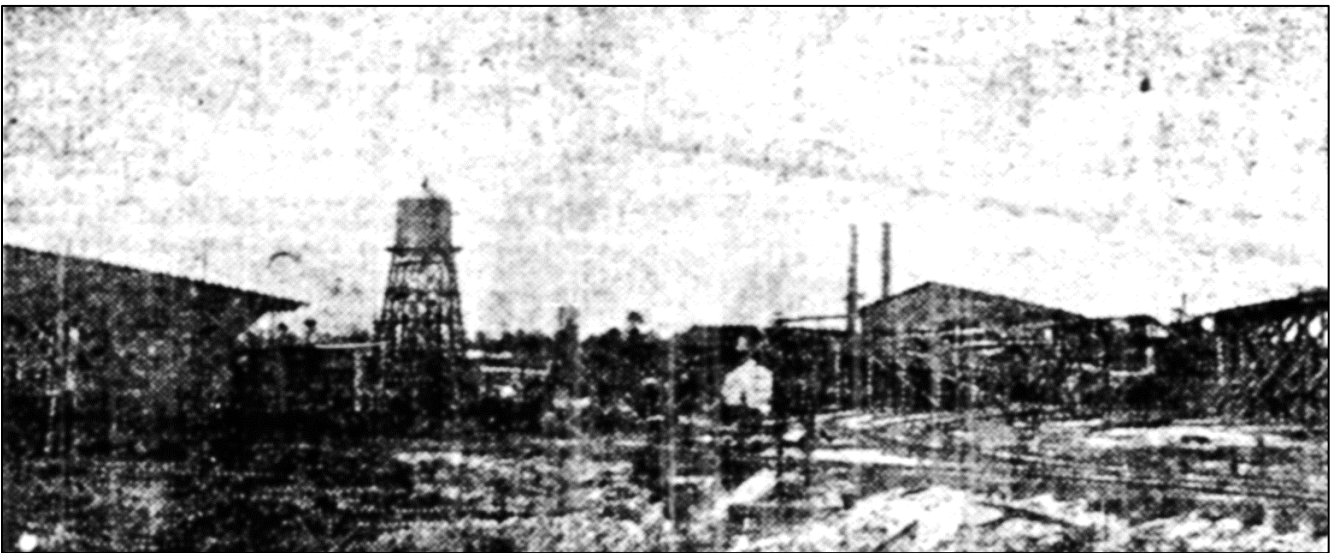


Figure 3. This image of the conveyor from the Paxton saw mill to the turpentine still illustrates the poor quality of a few vintage photos from the Pensacola News Journal.



View of Florala Saw Mill Company in Paxton showing RR tracks in foreground and leading into saw mill. Note conveyor from saw mill to turpentine still on right side of photo. Turpentine still not shown. Source: Pensacola News Journal, 8 June 1913, p. 23.



The steam engine pictured in the two photos above is on display at the L & N depot in Florala. It came from the Jaxkson veneer mill once located in Laurel Hill, Florida. The Florala Saw Mill Company and other saw mills in the area used steam engines of this type to power their machinery. Photos by Sam Carnley, 7/22/2021.



Floralia Saw Mill Company Engine No. 100. Delivered to the saw mill about 1919. FSMC sold out to Harbeson Lumber Co. in 1920. About 1923, engine sold to Alger-Sullivan lumber Company, Century, Florida. Locomotive restored and now on display in Century.

Locomotive Details

Engine #100 was built by the Baldwin Locomotive Works in September of 1919. It is a 2-6-2 type locomotive with a weight of 48 tons. Because it was to be used in the lumber industry it was originally designed to burn wood. The engine was ordered by the Floralia Saw Mill Company in Floralia, Alabama (Actually located in Paxton, Florida). In 1923 it went to the Alger-Sullivan Lumber Company in Century, Florida for use on its subsidiary common carrier railroad Escambia Railway until 1954. It remained on display in Century until 1974 when it was purchased by three railfans who restored the engine to operation in Alabama. The engine was purchased by the Whitewater Valley Railroad in August of 1977 with its first run on the WVRR in September of that year.

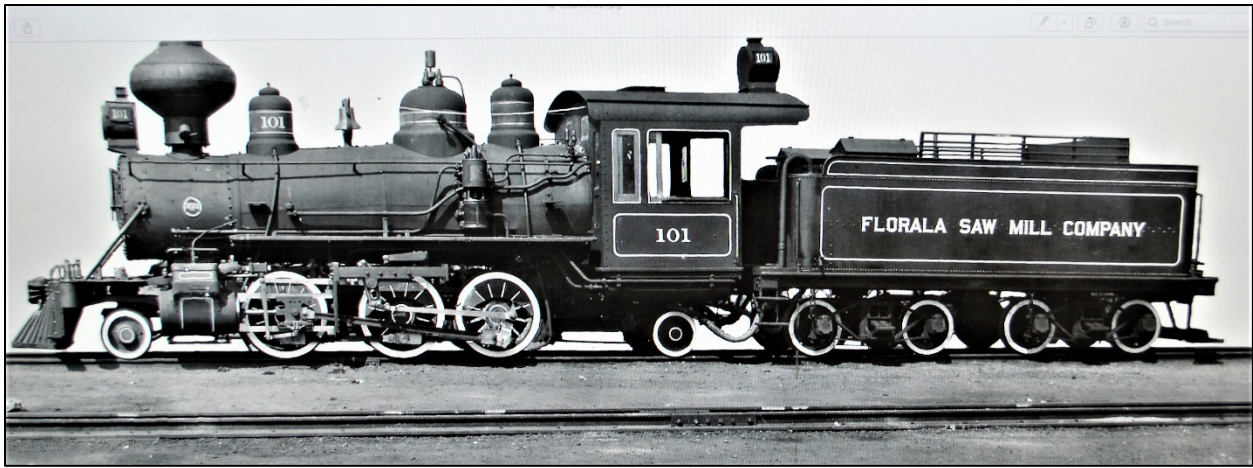
Source: Rail Way Preservation News, <http://www.rypn.org/briefs/single.php?filename=070530220344.txt>
Accessed 7/23/2021. See also http://algersullivan.org/bb_100/bringback_3.html



Concrete foundation piers of an unidentified building once standing on Florala Saw Mill Company site at Ghentsville Park in Paxton. Photo by Bruce Cosson, July 2021.



More unidentified building foundations on Florala Saw Mill Company site at Ghentsville Park. Photo by Bruce Cosson, July 2021.



Florala Saw Mill Company engine no. 101. See list below. Photo courtesy of Charles and Linda Russell, Florala, Alabama.

Std	<u>FLORALA SAW MILL COMPANY</u>					
						Paxton, Fla (Walton Co, Fla)
100	2-6-2	Baldwin	52261	8/19	15x24-44	10-24 $\frac{1}{2}$ D, 124 * Britton Lbr Co New Florala Saw Mill Co #100; Alger-Sullivan #100; Burton A. Fields, Century, Fla
101	2-6-2	Baldwin	52293	8/19	15x24-44	10-24 $\frac{1}{2}$ D, 125 new Florala Saw Mill Co #101;
3	2-6-0	Baldwin	3082	1/73	17x24-54	37T oNew York, Ontario & Western Ry #60 "Unadilla"; SI&E #568 1/07; Florala Sawmill #3 3/07; SI&E #925 1913; Louisiana Saw Mill Company Ltd #50, Alexandria, La (Koch p 364)
1	4-4-0	Rogers		/70	11x22-56	160 75100-48800 Orig. Nashville, Chattanooga & St Louis #1 (3rd) named "101C" (Tennessee), rebuilt in 1886, new Crown Bar boiler by Baldwin in 1908; traded to GO&L #375 on April 10, 1918 to apply on purchase of NO&StL #50 (GO&L #292). Shipped under steam on August 26, 1918 to Paxton, Florida lettered "Floralal Saw Mill Co #1". A straight stack coal burner. Cost \$5500.

Floralal Saw Mill Company Locomotive data sheet courtesy of Charles and Linda Russell, Florala, Alabama.