



# WALTON

## RELATIONS & HISTORY

Volume 12, Issue 10

Walton County Heritage Association

September 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.  
1140 Circle Drive, DeFuniak Springs, Florida 32435  
Phone: 850-951-2127

Website: <http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/#>

Email: [heritagemuseum@brighthouse.com](mailto:heritagemuseum@brighthouse.com)

## DEPARTMENTS

### Administration

**President:** Marie Hinson, [hinsonharmony@yahoo.com](mailto:hinsonharmony@yahoo.com)

**Vice President:** Carolyn Brown

**Treasurer:** Sam Carnley

**Secretary:** Susan Horaist

### Public Relations

Vacant

### Museum Docent Coordinator

Caroline Brown

### Genealogy Society

**President:** Wayne Sconiers, [waynesconiers@embarqmail.com](mailto:waynesconiers@embarqmail.com)

### Newsletter

**Editor:** Sam Carnley, [wsamuelcarnley@gmail.com](mailto:wsamuelcarnley@gmail.com)

**Assistant Editor and Lead Researcher:** Bruce Cosson, [bac2work1958@yahoo.com](mailto:bac2work1958@yahoo.com)

**Editorial Advisor:** Diane Merkel, [ddmerkel@cox.net](mailto:ddmerkel@cox.net)

**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. *Floralta 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 Floralta 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

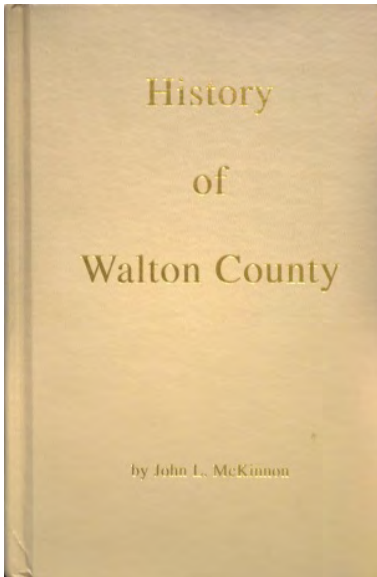
**Member Benefits:**

- 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

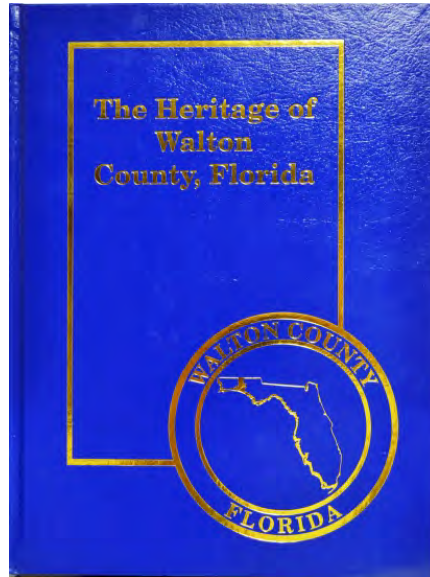
## Our most popular books



### 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 at these links;

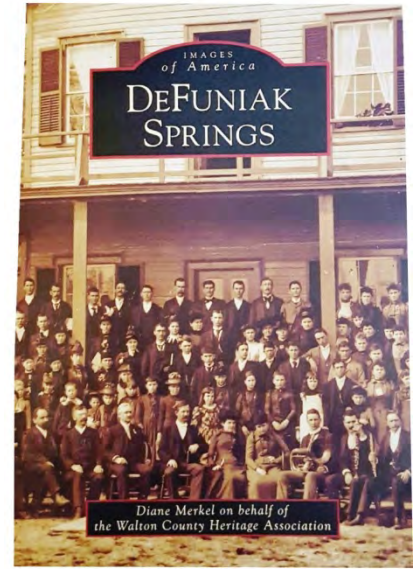
<https://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/georgiabooks/pdfs/gb0503.pdf>, and <https://www.alibris.com/booksearch?mtype=B&keyword=history+of+walton+county&hs.x=0&hs.y=0>



### The Heritage of Walton County, Florida. Item code

**B13.** Price, including tax,

**\$63.13.**



### Images of America, DeFuniak Springs. Item code

**B06.** By Diane Merkel. Price, including tax,

**\$23.53.**

## MAIL ORDER FORM

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

Customer Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Ph./Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Quanty	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:

\_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Dues Individual, Family \$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.



# Walton County One Hundred Years Ago

By  
Sam Carnley

It is always interesting to take a look back at years gone by to see what the headlines were in a particular place and time. A hundred years ago in 1921 people of Walton County had gotten past the dreaded Spanish Flu epidemic and the carnage of World War I, "the war to end all wars," both of which took away so many of their loved ones, and looked forward to happier and more prosperous times. Hopeful signs of those prospects held promise for Walton County folks in the early months of that year.

As to happiness and prosperity, the headlines of the Pensacola News Journal seemed to predict great things to come. "OIL, OIL, OIL, Walton County, Fla., OIL," the headline boldly exclaimed in an ad of the Pensacola \$ Bill Oil Syndicate appearing in the Paper's edition of Thursday, 7 April, 1921, as shown in figure 1 below.<sup>1</sup>

Just send them a one-dollar bill and you can make thousands in investments. They were confident of that claim based on an oil well at Bruce in southeast Walton County from which they were bailing oil by the barrels full for weeks.

The \$ Bill Oil folks (aka Gorman & Gilligan, Trustees) planned to drill their wells near the one at Bruce because the subject:

... block of acreage have a tendency to follow those surface formations, which to the geological profession, are very attractive in search for oil and gas. We note especially the market dropping earthen structures at different intervals and great supplies of underneath vacuum or heavy gas pressure movements. We also paid special attention to the numerous general structure formations and their alignment and relations as to the existence of anticlines which were also proofs of the possible fact that there are no evidence of

THE PENSACOLA JOURNAL THURSDAY MORNING, APRIL 7, 1921

## OIL, OIL, OIL, Walton County, Fla., OIL

Read Thoroughly and Carefully

### A \$1.00 Bill May Make You a Thousand if Invested TODAY in THE PENSACOLA \$1.00 BILL OIL SYNDICATE

The Pensacola \$ Bill Oil Syndicate, operating in Walton County Florida, to drill oil well near the Bruce well. We want your common sense and business judgment alone to direct you to mail us a \$1 bill.

This well has already substantiated our Geologist's opinion, who made the location for the Bruce well and have also designated the location for the Pensacola \$ Bill Oil Syndicate New well.

The Bruce well has bailed oil for several weeks and proves without a doubt that there is oil in Walton County, Florida. It is now simply a matter of setting casing to test out and determine the number of barrels it will produce a day. The Bruce well has made such a strong showing of both oil and heavy gas pressure that it warrants the drilling of several wells in this vicinity. The confidence of the oil men drilling and operating in Walton county is very encouraging; as they have already three wells operating there. If they win, this Syndicate will win also, and thousands of dollars will be made by the Pensacola \$ Bill Oil Syndicate. We have blocked one hundred acres around each of their wells—one hundred acres at Bruce, one hundred acres at Rathed, one hundred acres at Rock Hill, and one hundred acres around the Pensacola \$ Bill Oil Syndicate location. These four hundred acres are the properties owned and controlled by your company. This protects your Syndicate in the event that oil comes in at any of these four wells. Think of it, four shots in one something that has never been offered before in a new field. It is usually a case of drilling one well and making or losing all on that one chance.

**Messrs. Brooks and Barnett Give Geological Opinion of Our Holdings**

After spending some time prospecting and making geological survey and carefully examining the different sections of Walton County, we wish to state that the manner in which they are grouped is in evidence of a careful study of the section by an experienced operator, particularly on account of the fact that the block of acreage have a tendency to follow those surface formations, which to the geological profession, are very attractive in search for oil and gas. We note especially the market dropping earthen structures at different intervals and great supplies of underneath vacuum or heavy gas pressure movements. We also paid special attention to the numerous general structure formations and their alignment and relations as to the existence of anticlines which were also proofs of the possible fact that there are no evidences of faulting whatever thereby allowing migration. The innumerable evidences supporting the opinion THAT OIL REALLY DOES BEAR IN LARGER QUANTITIES ARE SO PROMINENT THAT WE FEEL JUSTIFIED IN RECOMMENDING THAT IT BE SERIOUSLY TESTED OUT AND IN OUR OPINION, AGAINST FINDING OIL, WOULD ONLY BE A LOST, TWO OR THREE OUT OF A POSSIBLE ONE HUNDRED. In other words, we are positive that a thorough test of the above mentioned property will reveal the presence of BOTH OIL AND GAS IN PAYING QUANTITIES. Attached hereto we give you a list of buildings, made during our geological survey, limited and descriptive as to possible depth, estimated thickness and richness of the oil sand, also test pressure and pressure of gas.

Respectfully submitted,  
**BROOKS AND BARNETT**  
217 Kemp Oil Bldg.,  
Wichita Falls, Texas.

**Here's Our Proposition**

We, Gorman and Gilligan, have taken all our savings near and around the Bruce well of twelve dollars and fifty cents per acre and there is not a single acre to be had near the well for less than twenty-five dollars. We advised the citizens of Pensacola to buy before the well is tested.

We are going to drill an oil well adjacent to the Bruce well to the depth of the oil sand found at the Bruce well unless oil is found at a lesser depth. Bruce will prove up the shallow field of West Florida. We are going to furnish half of the expense of drilling this well which will amount to five thousand dollars. The other half of the cost, which will amount to five thousand dollars, we are offering to the citizens of Pensacola and Escambia County. The four hundred acres which we are putting into the PENSACOLA \$ BILL OIL SYNDICATE at twenty-five dollars per acre, is today worth double the amount we are asking you to subscribe. In the event that we bring in oil on any of these four wells, this acreage will be worth at least from five hundred dollars an acre up, according to the capacity of the producing wells, and with a producing well on the Pensacola Syndicate's holding the dollar bill invested in this proposition will net you large dividends. Every purchaser owns his pro rata part or undivided interest in this proposition. We, Gorman and Gilligan, are merely trustees to act as supervisors of the operation, without salary, but will attend to the Syndicate's interest as conscientiously as we know how.

**THIS IS NO STOCK PROPOSITION NOR IS ANY STOCK OFFERED.** You own your pro rata part of the well and holdings. It will be our well and every unit holder's well in Pensacola and Escambia County.

Your interests are the same as our interests. We are merely giving you an opportunity to help with your dollar the same as ours to drill the well which will make every one of us a thousand per cent if we succeed, and in the event that any one of the three other wells come in we will share in the profits the same as they do, as the Pensacola \$ Bill Oil Syndicate are holding a hundred acre around each of their wells, and we can then drill the same as they. This is a straight, clean legitimate gamble, with the advantage all in favor of your company, as we now know there is oil in Walton County, and a drill show can tell how much. Our geologists have not misled any of their predictions by twenty-five feet on the wells now being drilled in Walton County. Upon the showings we have already seen they have convinced us to the extent that we are willing to furnish half of the cost as well as the hundred acres around each well. You can come in for smaller amounts and the expectancy of large profits. Brooks and Barnett, the geologists, who made our location, are the men who located the great Amarillo Gas Field, and the famous Kemp-Mcner Allen Fields of Texas.

We hope every working man and woman in Pensacola comes in with us as it means so much to them should we win, and we cannot or will not knowingly hurt them financially, for that is our reason for letting you in for so small amount as a one dollar bill. You can invest more if you are financially able, and of course your returns will be greater, and we suggest if you are able to get several dollars in this venture as its chances are for big returns. A dollar is lost and everything to win and the odds are with you. If you have children send a dollar bill for them, also mother & father.

Money can work for you and earn a profit just the same as men can work for you and earn a profit. Unless you get your money to work for you you can't get on the road to riches. Would you bet on a hundred to one shot if you knew it was in your favor? The Holly Hill Oil Syndicate is offering you a much better proposition, and I'd like to win as high as a thousand to one.

Money can work for you and earn a profit just the same as men can work for you and earn a profit. Unless you get your money to work for you you can't get on the road to riches. Would you bet on a hundred to one shot if you knew it was in your favor? The Holly Hill Oil Syndicate is offering you a much better proposition, and I'd like to win as high as a thousand to one.

**GROSS EARNINGS OF ONE 1,000 BARREL WELL PER DAY AT PRESENT SALE PRICE OF \$2.00 PER BARREL**

1,000 Barrel Well per day	\$ 2.00
30 Days	\$ 60.00
12 Months	\$ 720.00

If one well will earn seven hundred and twenty thousand dollars a year, figure what your one dollar investment will amount to.

**PIN A \$1.00 BILL TO THIS COUPON. DO IT NOW—MAIL TODAY.**

Write, wire or phone for Particulars. We will have a Representative call upon you.

I hereby subscribe \$..... for an undivided interest in The Pensacola \$ Bill Oil Syndicate.

Name.....  
Address.....  
City.....

Make checks payable to The Pensacola \$ Bill Oil Syndicate.

**Pensacola \$ Bill Oil Syndicate**  
Gorman & Gilligan, Trustees 711 Blount Bldg. Phone 527

Figure 1.

<sup>1</sup> Pensacola News Journal, 7 April 1921, Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/85195692/pensacola-news-journal/#> Downloaded by Sam Carnley, 9/12/2021.

faulting whatever, thereby by allowing migration. The innumerable evidence supporting the opinion that oil really does exist in large quantities are so pronounced that we feel justified in recommending that it be really tested out and, in our opinion, against finding oil would only be, say, two or three out of a possible one hundred. In other words, we are positive that a thorough test of the above-mentioned property will reveal the presence of both oil and gas in paying quantities . . . Brooks and Barnett, geologists

While the blaring headline sought to awaken readers and get their attention, reading the inscrutable geology gobbledygook had the opposite effect of taxing their brains and putting them back to sleep.

The ad states they blocked one hundred acres around each of the three wells at Bruce, Rathead and Rock Hill. In other words, they obtained oil and gas leases on those blocks of land which they hoped to sell to all those lucky people sending in their one-dollar bills, which they felt confident their “common sense and business judgment alone would direct them to do.”



**Figure 2.**

Bruce and Rock Hill are names with which most Walton Countians are familiar, but Rathead may be less well known. According to one source queried regarding its location, it may be in the northeast of the county in the vicinity of Glendale. Regardless of its location, it is in the county’s historical record in the form of a photograph of the derrick erected for it in 1920 or 21, probably about the time of the above ad. The photo, from the Florida Memory website, is shown in figure 2.<sup>2</sup>

The \$ Bill Oil outfit identified itself to Pensacola, at the office of Gorman & Gilligan in the Blount Bldg. No. 711. It also had an office in DeFuniak Springs in the McCaskill Bldg. Gorman & Gilligan began their ad campaign in the Pensacola paper on 18 March, 1921. A fairly low-key ad, its headline read, “Bailing Oil in Walton Co. Well,” in bold type. It offered leases at twelve dollars and fifty cents per acre, payable half in cash and the balance in thirty days.

Their next ad, dated 30 March, 1921, lead with the headline, “Your Last Opportunity (large type), followed by a second line reading, in smaller type, “To Purchase Oil Leases at Present Price.” The sentence following in still smaller print read:

Due to the positive showing of the oil at the Bruce Well. We shall increase the price of this acreage to Twenty-Five Dollars per acre, Saturday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The Florida Oil Company, financed by Wichita Falls, Texas, capitol, are drilling these oil wells and control 260,000 acres around these wells and ARE NOT OFFERING ONE ACRE FOR SALE.

The ad further stated that if the people of Pensacola wanted to get in before the wells were drilled and the price went up, they needed to act soon. A change in the tone of the ads can be sensed between the first and second

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<sup>2</sup> Oil rig of Baker Drilling Company – at Rathead, Walton County. Gunter, Herman, 1885-1972. *Oil rig of Baker Drilling Company - at Rathead, Walton County*. 1920. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory. <<https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/125081>>, accessed 12 September 2021. <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/125081#.UAMbDU7nvGI.pinterest>

one. Whereas the first one conveyed a matter-of-fact, sort of ho-hum tone, the second one takes on a greater sense of urgency. The number of sales generated by the first ad may have proved disappointing, leading to increasing pressure on Gorman & Gilligan by their backers wanting to see results. They, in turn, felt the need to infuse more urgency in the minds of potential buyers against procrastination. If they hoped to avoid missing out on the chance of a life-time to strike it rich at half the price, they needed to buy before April 2<sup>nd</sup>. Thus, the words, “Your last Opportunity,” before the threatened price increase.

But the threat of a price increase apparently failed to stampede a great number of buyers into eagerly mailing twelve dollars and fifty cent checks to G. & G. As a result, the hyperbole of the next ad, as illustrated in figure 1 above, rose to a fever pitch. The headline practically screamed off the page at readers; “**OIL, OIL, OIL, Walton County, Fla., OIL,**” as a paper boy would shout it on the street. But it said more about the state of those behind the ad than its readers. As later events proved, the ad campaign floundered. Along with the hyperbole came the \$ Bill Oil scheme that, instead of doubling prices, reduced them in a desperate effort to stave off looming financial ruin.

The final \$ Bill Oil ad, published on 19 April, 1921, came with a whimper, a fabrication and a plea. It whimpered in that the headline read the same as the oil, oil, etc. headline in figure 1, but in type half the size of that ad, suggesting a subdued, more resigned, tone. As a fabrication, it claimed “\$ Bills Are Coming in by the Hundreds,” which they were not. Following that falsehood, came the plea, “You Must Mail Your’s at Once,” which virtually no one did. That ended the Pensacola News Journal ads for oil well investments in Walton County, and Gorman & Gilligan faded into obscurity.

Ironically, the ads addressed themselves only to the people of Pensacola and Escambia County. Although Gorman and Gilligan maintained an office in DeFuniak Springs, they never mentioned the people of Walton County as investors.

In epilogue, Walton county’s oil wells of a hundred years ago failed to meet financial feasibility and the hoped-for boom fizzled into a bust, as did the dreams of those beguiled by promises of fabulous oil wealth.

Other events happening a hundred years ago involved former Florida governor, Sidney Johnson Catts, who launched his successful 1916 campaign for the office while a resident of Walton County. He served from January 1917 to January 1921, but instead of running for a second term as governor, decided to try for state senator, and lost decisively.

Catts relocated to Walton County from his former home in Alabama in 1911 to serve as pastor of the DeFuniak Springs First Baptist Church. Soon becoming unhappy in that post, he went into the insurance business which took him in his Model T Ford to many small towns, villages and rural communities throughout the state. As an ordained minister, he felt unrestrained in mixing religion with his business. In fact, the customers to whom he catered would have expected it because they equated religion to morality in the same way he did.

Peppering his insurance sales pitches with a few Bible quotes very likely improved his sales record. In addition to his minister’s ordination, he held a license to practice law. Although intelligent and highly educated, he felt comfortable in the company of people of much lower social, economic and educational status than himself. What’s more, he possessed a disarming charm and charisma that put those people at ease with him.



**Figure 3. Sidney Johnston Catts (1862–1936)** Photo courtesy of Florida Dept. of State <https://dos.myflorida.com/florida-facts/florida-history/florida-governors/sidney-johnston-catts/> Accessed 9/14/2021

When calling on families to sell insurance, he presented himself as a neighborly, folksy, down-to-earth, “good-ole-boy.” He epitomized the “talk-the-talk and walk-the-walk” image. Not only could he talk at their level, but he also matched their behavior appropriate to the conversation and mood. Probably a majority of the people he met in the insurance business were white farmers, day laborers and the like, who had no formal education beyond elementary school, and called themselves Christian fundamentalists. Most of them embraced racism, hated Catholics and Jews, mistrusted rich people and viewed as sinful; painted women in skimpy clothes, smoking, drinking, dancing and a host of other things, depending on their particular denomination.

Ironically, despite Catts’ more privileged cultural stature, he held many of those same views and easily found rapport among others having them in common. From among those people came the majority of voters who put him in the governor’s office.

To his misfortune, when his administration attempted to make policy based on his biased views, he earned the ire of virtually every newspaper in the state of Florida, and many outside the state as well. He sparred with the media his entire term as governor. If he thought he would once again have peace after his term ended and no longer remained a target of the newspapers, he would find himself sorely mistaken. Newspaper editors held such visceral hatred for him that they had no intention of letting up on him, even after he left office.

As a prime example, the Tampa Tribune, in an article on 7 April 1921, mocked the business venture he had begun at the time. “CATTS WILL PEDDLE PATENT MEDICINES AGAIN,” it read:

Many times since his retirement from the high office of the chief executive of the state we have wondered and have heard others express curiosity as to what had become of Catts. He appeared to have gone into hiding immediately after delivering the helm of the ship of state to Governor Hardee.

The mystery is solved at last. He has gone back to his first love – the business in which he was engaged when the ambition to become governor seized him – the manufacture and peddling of patent nostrums.

The curious and mystified people are indebted to the DeFuniak Breeze for blowing aside the veil. The Breeze reports that Catts was in DeFuniak last Thursday, and while there placed an order with the breeze printery for a large amount of printing for the “Catts Pep Company,” of which he is president, R. A. Catts is secretary, and A. M. Catts treasurer. The company is operated under an agreement of trust and is capitalized at \$100,000. The home office is located at Atlanta.

The character of the business is thus described by the Breeze:

“Catts Pep company will manufacture and place on sale a large number of different kinds of medicine for both man and beast. The list as carried so far consists of Catts Pep Man’s Restorative, Catts Hog Tonic, Catts Cow Tonic, Catts Chicken Tonic, and Catts Horse and Mule Tonic. These articles will be extensively advertised and the new company will be in a position in a very short time to receive and fill orders for their great medical discoveries.

“It will be remembered a number of years ago Mr. Catts manufactured what was then known as an animal remedy for different diseases of horses, cows and pigs and the firm name was termed “The Alice Animal Remedy Co.” It was during the life of this company that Mr. Catts used to go on the road and sell large quantities of this remedy and all orders were filled from here. He was more than successful with the undertaking but this time has increased the output into several different kinds and will conduct the new business on a much larger plan.

“Mr. Catts leaves for Atlanta in the near future to finish business matters connected with the new company.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Tampa Tribune, 7 April, 1921, Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/85201054/the-tampa-times/#> Downloaded 9/12/2021 by Sam Carnley.

Desirous of keeping the negative Catts publicity going, the headline of another article in the Tampa Tribune published 15 April read as follows:

**RUMORS OF SALE OF JOBS, PARDONS AND FAVORS [TO] BE TRACED.**

Well's Resolution Gives Committee Power to Get Facts

**MUST EXONERATE FORMER GOVERNOR OR PROSECUTE.**

Hardee's Report Shows 156 Murderers Granted Pardon, including Nullification of  
140 Life Sentences

TALLAHASSEE, April 14. – A concurrent resolution ordering a legislative investigation of “persistent rumors being circulated throughout Florida, which appeared to be based upon some degree of fact,” that Sidney J. Catts, while governor, had accepted money to influence his official action in matters, was adopted today by the state senate almost unanimously and certified immediately to the house. The four-year term of Governor Catts expired January 3, last.

The resolution puts teeth into the hands of the investigating committee, which is empowered to call any witness desired, to swear witnesses and to call for any records needed.

Critics of the ex-governor pointed tonight to the recent report from Governor Hardee, which showed 156 murderers pardoned during Catts term. Among those pardoned were 140 serving life terms.

The rumors which a joint senate and house committee would inquire into, as stated in the resolution, follow:

**“That Sidney J. Catts, while governor of the state of Florida, received money to influence his official action in granting pardons to state convicts.”**

**That “he received money to influence the official actions in removing parties from county or official positions.”**

**That “he received money to influence his official actions in appointing persons to office,” and**

**That Sidney J. Catts, while he was governor was guilty of many other acts in violation of the law and tending to bring shame upon the fair name of the state of Florida.”**

The object of the investigation, the resolution declared, would be to ascertain whether the rumors were true, or false, and that if such rumors prove to be without foundation in fact, that the said ex-Gov. Sidney J. Catts, be exonerated by the legislature.

Should the rumors be found to be true, the resolution directs that the former governor be prosecuted. The investigation committee would consist of two senators and three representatives.

The former governor, who was at his home in DeFuniak Springs today, refused to comment on the senate action . . .

The article went on to describe the details of the proposed resolution, which the senate and house made official by a large majority of votes in both houses of the legislature.<sup>4</sup> The resolution as enacted into law appeared in a later article published by the Tallahassee Democrat on 21 April, 1921 as shown on the following page.:

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<sup>4</sup>The Tampa Tribune, 15 April, 1921, Newspapers.com, page 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/326118401/?terms=Rumors&match=1>. Accessed 12 September, 2021, by Sam Carnley.

## RESOLUTION TO INVESTIGATE CATTS IS NOW LAW

The senate, Wednesday afternoon, passed the Catts investigation resolution, and Senator Wells, of Chipley, its author, and Senator Calkins, of Nassau, were appointed as the senate committee on investigation. The three house committeemen are likely to be named today.

The action of the senate makes a probe into the official acts of former Governor Catts a certainty, the measure having passed both houses. An exhaustive investigation into the pardoning of convicts, the appointment and removal of state and county officials and other acts of the ex-governor will be deeply probed by the inquisitors under the resolution.

The purpose of the investigation, as set forth in the resolution, is to discover whether or not governor Catts received money for certain official acts, to clear the name of the state if he did not and to prosecute him criminally if it should be found that he did. The joint committee is given full power to summon witnesses and to employ stenographers to conduct the investigation and keep official records.

### Speaker Names His Committee.

Speaker Jennings this morning named Messrs. Edge, Sams and Harvell as the Catts resolution committee of the house.<sup>5</sup>

The Opp Messenger, of Opp, Alabama, got in its licks in an article dated 22 April, 1922, writing that “**EX-GOV. CATTS TO FACE GRAVE CHARGE.**” Much of the article however, simply quoted The Tampa Tribune in its 15 April article on “Rumors,” etc.<sup>6</sup>

On 6 May, 1921, came a report from The Tampa Times that “**Catts Indicted; Took \$700 Bribe to pardon Murderer, Stark Grand Jury Claims:**”

Stark, Fla., May 6 – A capias for the arrest of Sidney J. Catts, former Governor of Florida, indicted by the Bradford County grand jury for the alleged acceptance of \$700 for his vote in favor of granting a conditional pardon to J. J. Coleman, convicted in Bay County in 1918 for the murder of Deputy Sheriff Charles Scott and sentenced to life imprisonment, was in the hands of the sheriff today, having been issued late yesterday by Circuit Judge Long.

Bond was fixed at \$5,000. Catts, while still maintaining his home in DeFuniak Springs, is engaged in business in Atlanta and was understood today to be somewhere in Alabama . . .

The article continued, saying that J. J. Coleman and another convict named J. J. Mendenhall were the prime witnesses against Catts in the grand jury investigation. Senator Wells, chairman of the special committee investigating Governor Catts, went to Stark while the grand jury was in session and met with prisoners, Coleman and Mendenhall. The article further revealed that Federal authorities were investigating allegations of peonage against Catts.<sup>7</sup>

On 19 May 1921 comes the Tampa Times headline that “**FEDERAL AND STATE SLEUTHS SEEKING CATTS.**” Former Governor is Fugitive: Charged with Peonage:

Pensacola, Fla., May 19, -- As a result of the indictment of Sidney J. Catts, former governor of Florida, by a federal grand jury here yesterday on two counts which charged Catts with having held two

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<sup>5</sup> Tallahassee Democrat, 21 April 1921, page 2, Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/85199964/tallahassee-democrat/#> Accessed 12 September 2021, by Sam Carnley.

<sup>6</sup> The Opp Messenger, 22 April, 1921, page 4, Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/85380595/the-opp-messenger/#> Accessed 12 September, 2021 by Sam Carnley.

<sup>7</sup> The Tampa Times, 6 May 1921, page 1, Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/85384063/the-tampa-times/#>, Accessed 12 September 2021 by Sam Carnley.

negroes in peonage, the former chief executive is being sought by both federal authorities and the authorities of Bradford County.

He recently was indicted by the Bradford Grand Jury for the alleged acceptance of \$700 from a life term convict for his influence in obtaining a pardon for the convict. The authorities do not know the whereabouts of Catts and the last time he was seen in Florida, so far as is known here, was several weeks ago when he visited his former home in Walton County.

### **Specific Charge**

The specific charge against the former governor in the peonage case is that he held in an involuntary state of servitude Ed Brown and John Henry Rodgers and forced them to work on his plantation in Walton County for a period of several months. The negroes, both former convicts, were pardoned while Catts was governor and chairman of the state board of pardons.

It is alleged that when they were released from the state prison, the negroes were taken into custody by agents of Catts and transported to his plantation where they were put to work. There they remained until a few weeks ago. Both appeared before the grand jury and Rodgers had previously testified before the special legislative committee investigating the conduct of Catts while in office. Catts term as governor ended January 3, last.

### **Where is Catts?**

Catts, it is stated, has been reported in South Carolina and Georgia, but his exact whereabouts are unknown, with federal officers on his trail it is thought, his arrest is a matter of a few days.

Recently the records of the clerk of the circuit court of Walton County, of which DeFuniak Springs is the county seat, show that the former governor and his wife transferred much property there to Miss Ruth Catts, their daughter, who was Catts' secretary during most of his incumbency as governor.

The Tampa Tribune, on 22 May 1921 reported that Catts had been arrested in Albany, Georgia, on a federal warrant charging him with peonage. The Tampa Times had previously published details of those charges in its edition of 19 May. Distraught almost to the point of weeping, Catts claimed ignorance of being a fugitive until arrested.

The sheriff in Albany released him several hours later after he paid a \$2,500 bond. He then departed for Jacksonville, Florida by train where his daughter, Mrs. K. R. Pederick met him and immediately escorted him to her nearby home. After arriving there, he stated to reporters that political enemies were behind his arrest in Albany. He declined to comment on his future plans.

He also had a state warrant out for his arrest pursuant to his indictment by the Bradford County, Florida grand jury, but the sheriff declined to hold him on that charge absent instructions from Florida Governor Hardee.<sup>8</sup>

Florida authorities later served the warrant on Catts and took him into custody on the indictment of accepting bribes for pardoning convicts. He subsequently gained his release from that arrest after paying the \$5,000 bond.

The state set his trial for that charge on 21 November, 1921. During opening statements on the day of the trial, however, the prosecution asked for a continuance to the 24. When that date arrived, the prosecution, being unable to produce witnesses, asked the judge to postpone the trial until 15 May, 1922 and the judge concurred.

On the date of that trial in May of the following year, Catts' prosecution on charges of bribery ended because due to a technicality involving changes in jurisdiction, the judge granted the defense attorney's motion to dismiss and quashed the indictment. Catts confidently predicted the federal charge of peonage would go the same way because all the charges against him amounted to nothing but political persecution.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Tampa Tribune, 5-22-1921, Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/85198999/the-tampa-tribune/#> Accessed 12 September, 2021

<sup>9</sup> Tampa Bay Times, 16 May 1922, Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/85491809/tampa-bay-times/#> Accessed 17 September.

Catts' prediction for the outcome of his federal trial proved correct. During his trial in Pensacola on 21 November 1922, the jury deliberated only nine minutes before finding him not guilty. The prosecutor's evidence rested on the testimony of John Henry Rogers, a negro whom Catts had pardoned while governor. Rogers at age 18, had been sentenced to life for murder, and had served 18 years of the sentence when Catts pardoned him in 1920. On being released from prison, Catts took him to his farm near DeFuniak Springs and put him to work.

Rogers testified that Catts told him that when he made a year, he would be free. Going on to clarify that, he told the Assistant District Attorney questioning him that Catts said he meant a year working on his farm. He further stated he understood he had to work the year to pay for the pardon, and if he did not agree to work, "they might come to the farm and take him back." Presumably to prison.

Rogers testified that they, meaning he and Ed Brown, another man whom Catts allegedly held under peonage, had comfortable lodging equipped with a wood heater to keep them warm in winter. They were not "held under lock and key," he went on to say.

The defense called other witnesses to prove Rogers and Brown were not made to work without pay, or against their will. A cab driver testified that the two men rode in his car a number of times for which they paid him. A local jeweler testified that he sold Rogers a watch which he had money to pay for. Catts' son, Douglas, testified that his father told him to take care of the two men while they worked on the farm and give them whatever they needed. He said he had given them about five dollars a month. A local farmer testified that he offered Rogers a job cutting wood, but he turned it down, saying that "he was being paid 10 a month and board and that he would get some easy money in court if he talked right." That testimony alone almost singlehandedly sunk the federal government's case against Catts.<sup>10</sup>

Prejudicial language such as overseer, as in slaves, and plantation, regularly appeared in articles in reference to Catts' farm in connection with the bribery and peonage charges against him. The mocking of Catts for his "patent medicine," business, using language intended to cast him in a negative light, and belittling him at every opportunity when writing about him, could indeed leave the impression that the media and others were out to persecute him as he claimed. The media's hatred of this man a century ago is eerily reminiscent of similar treatment of a prominent politician in more recent times.

The epilogue of the Sidney Johnston Catts story of a hundred years past is that although he ultimately survived all the legal challenges thrown at him, he ended up bankrupt and his reputation in shambles. He spent the last years of his life in DeFuniak Springs where he died in 1936. His burial followed at Magnolia Cemetery as his final resting place.



**Figure 4.** Sun Bright, home of Sidney J. Catts in DeFuniak Springs.

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<sup>10</sup> Tampa Bay Times, St. Petersburg, FL, 21 Nov. 1922, p. 1 & 2, Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/85495779/tampa-bay-times/#> Accessed 17 Sept. 2021.