



# WALTON RELATIONS

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Walton County Genealogy Society

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## History Detectives

Below are some requests for help we have received recently. The full question, including whatever background information we received, can be viewed by clicking the link. Please let us know if you can provide answers—or if you need help with your own research—by writing to [WaltonCountyHeritage@cox.net](mailto:WaltonCountyHeritage@cox.net).

74. [Alice May Campbell Catts](#) was the First Lady of Florida from January 2, 1917, until January 4, 1921. A photograph of her with her family during that time is available at [www.floridamemory.com/items/show/128201](http://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/128201). If you know of others, please let us know. Please also contact us if you can identify the other people (besides Gov. Catts) in that photo.

75. [John Edgar West \(1874-1937\)](#) and his first wife, Josephine Lavonia Commander, once owned the West Hotel in Ponce de Leon. John West was a pastor who owned a turpentine still. His descendants were told that he also owned a general store in DeFuniak Springs and a home on Circle Drive. If you know anything about the life of John Edgar West, please let us know.

Previous “mysteries” can be viewed from the [History Detectives pages](#) of our website.

## WCGS News

The Walton County Genealogy Society will next meet on Saturday, April 18, at 10:00 a.m. at the Walton County Heritage Museum.

## Walton County Reunions

We would appreciate your help with updating our reunion information. According to our best information (see the [Reunions](#) web page) the following families will have reunions this spring:

- Alice Creek, New Home — the “Gone But Not Forgotten” Group
- McHenry Family
- Spence Family
- Ward Family

Send updates to [WaltonCountyHeritage@cox.net](mailto:WaltonCountyHeritage@cox.net).

### **Walton County Heritage Museum**

Open Tuesday - Saturday: 1:00 - 4:00 PM  
1140 Circle Drive, DeFuniak Springs, FL 32435  
850-951-2127

[www.WaltonCountyHeritage.org](http://www.WaltonCountyHeritage.org)  
[HeritageMuseum@centurylink.net](mailto:HeritageMuseum@centurylink.net)

# The W.H. Wesley Family of Point Washington

By Diane Merkel

Photographs Courtesy of James Wesley

Simeon Strickland (1844-1910) enlisted in the Confederate Army when he was just 16. He quickly rose through the ranks and was a Captain by the age of 19, serving in Company F of the 42nd Tennessee Infantry. He was injured in the Battle of Mobile Bay in August 1864 and, as a result, walked with a limp for the rest of his life. He settled in Point Washington in 1871 and married Louisa Florence Wise (1851-1891). He donated the land, building materials, and books for the first school there, but the children had to provide their own desks. Strickland hired the most educated man he knew, Gen. William Miller, as the teacher. Another teacher at the school was Rev. John Wesley's son, William Henry "W. H." Wesley (1865-1947). One of Strickland's daughters, Katie Maria Strickland (1875-1953), was a student in W.H.'s math class and became his wife.



William Henry Wesley and Katie Maria Strickland were married in Point Washington on March 30, 1893. Katie's mother died in 1891, so she was not there to see Rev. J. A. Daly sign the marriage certificate. W. H. and Katie had nine children born between 1894 and 1912. In addition to their first five children, the 1900 census listed Hal and Ellen Cowart and Edward McCracken as boarders in the home and Minnie Strickland as living with them. Minnie was about the same age as Katie and was her cousin, the daughter of her uncle James Strickland.



The house now known as Eden in Eden Gardens State Park was built with native yellow pine by W. H. Wesley for his wife Katie between 1895 and 1897. It was nearly identical to the home of Katie's parents, Simeon and Louisa Wise Strickland, the daughter of William Floyd Wise (1820-1900) and Martha Emmaline Bledsole Wise (1828-1862). The first two children of W. H. and Katie Wesley were Mabel, who was born in Point Washington, and Rupert Cyril, who was born at the Wesley's property on Eastern Lake.



Mabel Wesley (1894-1959) attended a music conservatory in Mississippi. She received a piano as a graduation gift from her parents and used it to teach piano at her home. In 1922, Mabel married Royal Albert "Roy" Burlison (1896-1997), the son of James and Irene Watson Burlison, who was born across the Choctawhatchee Bay in Portland. On his World War I Draft Registration Card, Burlison listed himself as a self-employed fisherman, living in Niceville in neighboring Okaloosa County. In the late 1930s, Mabel and Roy lived in a cottage on the Wesley grounds that had once been a sawmill worker's cabin. They had two children, Jack and Royce. Both were adopted, and Jack took the surname of his birth parents in adulthood. Mabel had two vocations in common with some of the Wesley men: she taught school and she served as postmaster of Point Washington. Mabel died in January 1959, and Roy married Mabel's best friend, Edith Bullard Butler, later the same year. Roy and Mabel Burlison are buried in the Wesley Cemetery in Point Washington.



On his World War I Draft Registration Card, Rupert Cyril Wesley (1895-1963) indicated he was the superintendent of the W. H. Wesley and Company sawmill in Point Washington. According to the 1920 Census, Rupert, his wife Laura, who was born about 1899, and their infant daughter were living with his parents, and he was a foreman in the lumber industry. At the time of the 1930 Census, he was married with three children and living in Century, Escambia County, Florida, which was a mill town. By the 1940 Census, he was back in Point Washington, working as the superintendent of the mill and renting a home.



W. H. and Katie's third child, William Henry "Willie" Wesley Jr. (1896-1936) was born at Point Washington. In his adult years, Willie owned and ran the ferry, *The Lark*, between Point Washington and Jolly Bay across the Choctawhatchee Bay. Their fourth child, Charles Howard Wesley, was born at Eastern Lake on August 20, 1898, and died at the Point Washington house on January 16, 1902. He was gored by a cow and died in his mother's arms from his injuries. Guy Harold Wesley (1900-1977) was born in Point Washington. In the photograph at the left, Guy is seated with Herman Wesley, a cousin who was a minister, standing on the left and his brother Willie on the right. Guy worked for the Florida Forest Service for many years and became the chief forester with the National Turpentine and Pulpwood Corporation in Jacksonville, Florida.



W. H. moved his family to Mississippi for several years and continued in the timber business. During that time, twin boys, Edgar Poe Wesley and Arthur Allen Wesley (left), were born to them on May 13, 1908. By 1927, Arthur Allen Wesley was teaching at the school across the Choctawhatchee Bay in Freeport, and he became the postmaster of Point Washington in March 1936. On June 3, 1936, a *Panama City Herald* headline proclaimed terrible news: "Four are dead, no hope is held for fifth life." The article explained there had been an automobile accident two miles from Freeport around 1:00 a.m. that day. DeFuniak Springs postmaster Cecil Stinson and Hayes Crawford were in one car and Willie Wesley, Arthur Wesley, and Ed Ward of Freeport were in the other. Crawford survived, but the others were killed instantly. Those in Wesley's car were likely returning from DeFuniak Springs after submitting election ballots.



The twins at four months and three years of age.





The surviving twin, Edgar Poe Wesley, married Sara Rachels in 1936 and replaced his twin as the postmaster for Point Washington on July 1, 1936, until their father took the position in April 1941. Edgar enlisted as a private in the Army on June 1, 1942, at Camp Blanding, Florida. He indicated he had a four-year college education and worked as a bookkeeper. He was later commissioned as a First Lieutenant, his rank when the photograph at left was taken in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, in 1943. After the war, he worked at the State Treasurer's Office in Tallahassee and died in Leon County in August 1958.



Marie Louise "Mickey" Wesley was born on July 13, 1910. In December 1938, she married Kenneth Robert "Bob" Swinford at her parents' home. Those attending were (first row) Caroline Marie "Carol" Wesley, the flower girl and daughter of the late Willie Wesley; left to right (second row) Mickey's father W. H., Mickey, her husband Bob, her mother Katie; (third row) Rev. Charles Wesley and Jewell Rachels Wesley (1917-2011); (fourth row) Lucious "Billy" Wesley, Jewell's sister Sara, and Edgar Wesley, Sara's husband and brother of Mickey; (fifth row) Bridesmaid Kate Galbraith, Best Man Les Jacobsen, and pianist Ingorie Mikell. The others are unidentified except for Royce Burlison, the blonde girl near the porch post.



W. H. and Katie's youngest child had the longest name, Lucious Clarence Branscombe Wesley, known as Billy. He was born on March 27, 1912, and married Jewell Rachels on August 18, 1940, in DeFuniak Springs. They had three sons but, sadly, two of them died at birth or shortly thereafter. James William "Jimmy" Wesley, who provided the photographs from his mother's collection for this article, was the only son to survive childhood. Billy died on June 12, 1991, in Pensacola, and Jewell died in DeFuniak Springs on August 11, 2011.

When Katie Wesley died in 1953, none of her children wanted her house. The property was sold in 1955 to a man who had no desire to renovate the house. The house sat dormant until it was sold again for \$12,500 in 1963 to Lois Maxon, an heiress and home furnishings writer. It is said she spent a million dollars over the next five years renovating the house, furnishing it with antiques, and designing the gardens. She renamed the house "Eden." Her failing health necessitated a move to Pensacola, so she gave the house and grounds to the State of Florida in 1968 as a gift in memory of her parents.

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Diane Merkel, at [WaltonCountyHeritage@cox.net](mailto:WaltonCountyHeritage@cox.net) or call 850-897-4505.