



WALTON RELATIONS & HISTORY

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Walton County Heritage Association

November 2016

WCHA Membership

By Sam Carnley

The Walton County Heritage Association is now accepting 2017 membership dues for returning members as well as those that are new. Our mission is to promote and encourage interest in many aspects of the County's history and its families. Benefits of membership include free enrollment in the Walton County Genealogy Society and access to resource materials in our genealogy section when the museum is open; discounts in our gift shop on a variety of books, special publications and other items of historical interest; invitations to regularly scheduled member meetings and discounts on special events; the opportunity to serve on the Board of Directors and various committees; participation in museum operations by serving as docent; free issues of this newsletter and the opportunity to mix and mingle with like-minded history and genealogy enthusiasts.

Annual dues are \$25.00 for single, \$40.00 for family and \$100.00 for corporate memberships. We are a 501(c)(3) Federally recognized not-for-profit Florida corporation and donations are tax deductible. Applications are available on line by clicking the Walton County Heritage dot Org link in the box at right.

Membership is on a calendar year basis. Members paying in November and December are covered for those months as well the next calendar year, and dues received by December 31 will be entered into a drawing for two tickets to the 2017 Grits & Grace performance.

Genealogy Meeting

No genealogy meeting is planned for November unless the members feel the need for one.

Upcoming Reunions

Reunions traditionally held in December are rare and we have none listed for that month. For a complete listing of other months see the Reunions page at the following link:

<http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/genealogy.htm>

This Month's Newsletter Article

By Sam Carnley

This month's newsletter presents the conclusion of the article "Who Was George Walton Jr." the first part of which appeared in last month's newsletter. I hope you find it enjoyable as well as informative.

Walton County Heritage Museum

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

www.WaltonCountyHeritage.org

WaltonCountyHeritage@cox.net

Who Was George Walton Jr,
The man whose name the Florida County of Walton Shares?
Or

“Worth makes the man, and want of it, the fellow.”

By Sam Carnley

(Cont'd from the October Newsletter)

George committed a second grievous affront to his long suffering mother a little less than a year after causing the loss of her land. In February 1829, the Territory of Florida won still another judgement against him for \$500.00. Again lacking the money to pay it, the responsibility of bailing him out fell to his mother. To satisfy the claim, he signed over to the Territorial Government all rights to most if his mother's family heirloom household furnishings.

That was not the end of his troubles, but the next crisis he faced was not one from which he could depend upon his mother to extricate him. In May 1829, he challenged a detractor of his character to a pistol duel. Taking place on Santa Rosa Island, both opponents missed on their first shot, but scored hits on their second. Although nonlethal, Walton's wound disabled him from continuing the duel, thereby bringing it to an end with no one dying.

Relieved that he survived, Walton's wife and daughter nursed him back to health in time to run in June for election to one of two open Escambia County seats on the Legislative Council. A list of candidates running for the seats appeared twice in the Pensacola Gazette prior to the election, neither of which included George Walton's name. But when elections results were subsequently published, Walton had won election to one seat, and his nemesis, W. Hassel Hunt, the other. How someone who had not declared himself a candidate could have won the election puzzled the editor of the Pensacola Gazette. who protested in an article on Tuesday, June 9th, 1829, that something about the election seemed not quite right.

The present day adage that voters have short memories apparently proved equally true then as now, particularly as it related to Walton's miraculously resuscitated political career. Walton and Hunt traveled to Tallahassee, whether or not in each other's company being unknown, to attend the Legislative Council session commencing on 12 October 1829. They were seated and given committee assignments: Hunt on the Judiciary Committee, and Walton on that of the Militia.

Governor Duval's opening address to the Legislative Council began, "It becomes my duty to call your attention to the frequent violation of the laws of this territory by dueling . . ." He continued, expounding at length on the subject, saying that other states had passed laws barring duelists from election to public office and that if necessary to end the practice he was prepared to follow their example by proposing similar laws for Florida. George Walton, as well as every other member of the Legislative Council, knew precisely to whom the Governor addressed his speech. It is not difficult to imagine W. Hassel Hunt sitting with a look of smug satisfaction watching Walton's reaction as Duval spoke.

A month into the session on 12 November, the council received a communication from Territorial Treasurer Davis Floyd on account of the sales of the 800 acres of Dorothy Walton land. He advised that five lots of 40 acres each remained available for sale to anyone willing to pay the purchase price in full.

Whether in Walton's day there was a saying the equivalent of Yogi Berra's "*It's deja vu all over again,*" is unknown, but if there was he surely must have been thinking it. If he had hoped that becoming a member of the Legislative Council would give him the opportunity to possibly restore in their eyes the honor he had lost, and put certain unpleasant memories behind him, he was wrong, because he suddenly found himself bombarded by reminders of them. It would be understandable if he began to despair of ever proving to them that he " . . . was not the villain the world was so ready and willing to believe that he was, . . ." as he had written in his letter to Brackenridge. Whatever the outcome of his relationship with the Territorial government, it eventually became history, and he moved on with his life.

For his mother though, her life of more than seven decades was coming to an end. On Wednesday, 12 September 1832, the following invitation went out, "The Friends and Acquaintances of Col. George Walton are respectfully requested to attend the Funeral of his deceased mother, Mrs. Dorothy Walton, This Afternoon at 4

o'clock. . ." She was laid to rest in Pensacola's Old St. Michael's Cemetery.

The inheritance Dorothy left her grandchildren being apparently quite substantial in terms of liquid assets, soon after receiving it following her death, they and Sally went on an extended tour of the United States from which they did not return until 1835. Shortly afterward the family moved to Mobile where Octavia married Dr. Henry S. Levert in 1836 and George served as mayor from 1837 to 1839. In March 1849, George and Sally's son, Robert, died of encephalitis at age 36.

After more than forty years together, George and Sally's marriage had become severely strained and within a few years of Robert's death, they separated. George eventually moved to Washington and Sally remained in Mobile. Octavia, then known as "Madame Le Vert," a southern socialite of considerable fame, and her daughter occasionally traveled within the United States and abroad. In June 1853 George accompanied them on a trip to Europe. His application for the passport he obtained in New York preparatory to the trip, to which he swore in writing, gives his birth date as 19 January 1789 and states that he is a citizen of Mobile, Alabama, indicating that as of the date of the application, he had not yet relocated to Washington. The document also describes him physically. He was 5 ft. 11 in. tall. His hair color of black was lined through and rewritten as "grey mixed." His eyes were blue and his complexion of florid was lined through and rewritten as dark. His mouth and nose of "Usual size" was lined through with nothing else added. At age 64 he had a full forehead and face, a medium mouth and rather large (large?) nose.

Being a well-educated man and accomplished writer as evidenced by his many written communications generated during his career as Secretary and Acting Governor of Territorial Florida, there should be little question of the accuracy of the above information. As a primary source the application is probably the most authoritative documentation of his personal data on record.

No similar description is known to exist for Sally. In late 1860, she became ill with congestive heart failure. The condition worsened, leading to her death on 14 January 1861 at age 69. She was interred in Mobile's Magnolia Cemetery. Dying intestate, her estate according to Octavia's estimate amounted to twenty thousand dollars. Heirs were her husband, George Walton of Petersburg, Virginia and Octavia Walton Le Vert of Mobile.

Octavia wrote her father to inform him of Sally's death. His letter in response contained neither a reference to her death nor any expression of grief or sympathy. His own death came on 3 January 1863 at age 74 in Petersburg. His final resting place is Petersburg's Blanford Cemetery in an unmarked grave, the location of which has been lost.

Something Walton took to the grave with him was what he did with the Key West money. The answer will probably never be known for certain, but telltale clues gleaned from the records may point to a possible explanation. Before revealing them though, it seems appropriate to put into perspective the magnitude of that amount of money at the time. In comparison, Duval's annual salary as Governor was \$4,000.00. As of 1855, a U. S. Congressman's annual salary was \$3,000.00. The Key West money was more than twice Duval's salary and more than three times that of a Congressman twenty-nine years later. In today's dollars, it amounts to approximately \$228,000.00, just short of a quarter of a million. It was a fortune in 1826, just as it would be today. How could Walton have spent that much money in a year? Perhaps the clues hold the answer. The first one comes from Henry Brackenridge's criticism of him early in their relationship that he ". . . passes almost every night over the gaming table . . ." The second comes from Sally Walton. After George had resigned as Territorial Secretary and his private practice was barely limping along Sally complained that he "seemed content . . . with his friends at the billiard parlor." Those observations indicative of gambling tendencies and the fact that he never seemed to have any money fit the profile of a compulsive gambler, as does "stealing or committing fraud to gamble," item number 9 on a list of the "10 signs of problem gambling."

Pensacola was not a place where a problem gambler would find it easy to swear off his addiction even if he wanted to. In their pre-territorial days even, both St. Augustine and Pensacola were notorious for gambling, and little changed after they became American cities. Gambling in many forms including card playing and



Sarah (Sally) Minge Walker
Walton
(1792-1861)
(Courtesy Historic Mobile Preservation
Society, Mobile, Alabama.)

betting on horses enjoyed great popularity in Pensacola. At one point, “shuffle boards, nine-pin alleys, and billiard tables” were so common that the city levied a tax on them, ignoring the betting they engendered. Gambling laws were so seldom enforced that few people took them seriously, to the frustration of W. Hassel Hunt and others who condemned the “evils of gambling.” Washington, where Walton went after leaving Key West was no different. It was known for its many gaming tables “where it was not unusual for some members of Congress to lose as much or more than their yearly salary of \$3,500 in a night.” (Satterfield) Walton may well have shared the affliction of those Congressmen that led to their self-destructive behavior as it did his.

The best that can be said of his legacy is that he was the son of a renowned Revolutionary War Patriot and signer of the Declaration of Independence, and father of arguably the most famous socialite of the Antebellum South. The home of his residence during the entire time he lived in Pensacola is remembered not as his but as that of his mother. The memorial plaque on her grave recognizes her as the wife of George Walton, signer of the Declaration of Independence, but not as the mother of Florida's first Territorial Secretary, and almost no one with roots in the Florida County of his name knows who George Walton Jr. was.

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