

EARLY HISTORICAL TIMES
BY
W. P. SUTTON
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My Sutton forbears were from Scotland, coming to America in the early Seventeen Hundreds. They landed in Wilmington, North Carolina. In the party were seven Sutton brothers, all single men, with my great-grandfather being one of them. Grandfather Shadrock Sutton was born in Beaufort County, North Carolina, in 1736. Grandmother Susannah Whitehurst was also born in Beaufort County, North Carolina, in 1786. The families moved from Carolina to Georgia and later into Hamilton County, Florida. Grandmother married Captain Perry Wall. To that union was born Perry Green Wall. Captain Wall died and grandmother then married grandfather Shadrock Sutton in 1811. To that union came Anna, Elizabeth, John Alexander (my father), Susan, Mary and Emily. My "Law" grandparents were born in North Carolina. Peter W. Law was born July 1, 1802. Grandmother Martha O. Baisden, born March 23, 1813, was daughter of Joseph and Mary Baisden. Peter W. Law and Martha C. Baisden were married in 1831. There came to that union Mary Caroline (my mother), Thomas Badwell, Joseph Baisden, Sarah Louisa, Martha Evelyn, Ann Judson, Jane Virginia, Isabelle B., Peter William and John C. Law. The Law grandparents moved from Hamilton County (Jasper), and travelled down the Suwannee River on a loaded barge to Cedar Key; from there to Bay Port and then by ox team to Spring Hill. Their first home was built of logs. The roof boards were pegged instead of nailed on. This was in 1840.

My Sutton grandparents moved from Hamilton County to a location three miles southeast of Fort Harrison (now Clearwater). They were living there in the "forty-eight gale" - the hurricane of 1848. It was on that date that "Little Pass" was cut across the island. John's Pass was cut then, too. The next hurricane to do much damage was in 1918, seventy years later.

John Alexander Sutton and Mary C. Law were married in 1849. To them were born Philip A., Lemuel L., John J., and William P. They lived in Spring Hill until 1868. At that time they moved to this vicinity taking a homestead, a part of which I own and am living on at this time.

On February 8, 1868, Father and Mother rode through the woods to Captain Phillippi grove on Old Tampa Bay and got oranges and grapefruit, the seeds of which made the first grove they planted. These trees are bearing at the present time, eighty-two years later. I only remember my father on three occasions: (1) he and Mother went for a walk on Sunday afternoon, he taking me astride his neck; (2) he took me behind him on horseback to Yellow Bluff (now Ozona) to get my first school books and slate (I have them yet); and (3) when on his sick bed, the doctor tapped his legs with "thorny cactus" limbs (now crucifixion plant) to let out the water. His body was nothing but water scarcely. He died from dropsy of the heart. I remember Grandmother Sutton only one time. She was on her last sick bed and Mother was giving her some medicine, a brown tablet called "troaches." To me they seemed awfully big.

When I was five months old I had double pneumonia. The nearest doctor had to come from Tampa on horseback. At ten years, I had the last croup. The doctor had to come from Anona. He, at last, told Mother there was only one more chance; that was to open the house wide and put cool, wet towels on my chest. In a short time I could breath clearer. The "last chance" did the work.

The first Negroes I ever saw surprised me before I saw them. I ran like a bear was after me. The first time I saw Doctor Bethel McMullen, he came to our place to make a set of teeth for brother Jack. I watched him take the impression for the "plate" and "boiled" it. The next morning, when cooled, he took them out of the "boiler" finished. (The time of boiling was three hours.)

In July of 1881 I went with Mother and Philip to Spring Hill to see "Grandma" Law. We traveled the first road built from Brooksville to "Fort Harrison" (now Clearwater). Going to Spring Hill we camped on "Rials Branch." There I heard the wolves howling, the only wolves I ever heard. Rials Branch was on the S.E. end of "Big Prairie" (now Saginaw Lake). On the return home Uncle Johnny Law brought us to the Anclote River. We camped there and next morning came home with Bro. Jack in the ox wagon. This road we traveled came from Brooksville down east of "Big Prairie" and on east of the "Cootie River", crossing the "Anclote" just west of, now "Seven Springs", on a "tool bridge." Then down across "Brooker Creek" at "Sandy Ford", across "Poley (?) Creek", south of the present ford. On east of "Doolittle Branch", then east side of "Holland Scrub" and across "Booth" scrub just north of Foresters Tower. Then south to "Seb Smith's" place and southwest from there past "Joe Brownlow" home and across "Stevenson Creek" at the Country Club Golf Course. From there, west around the lake on the north end to "Ft. Harrison." In the late 70's I went with Bro. Lenny to Sea Side (now Crystal Beach) and saw my first saw mill, grist mill, and cotton gin, operated from one stationary engine. Also, a general merchandise store, all operated and owned by Dr. Mayo and his son-in-law, C.F. Wall. Uncle Tommy Law was the first settler in "Eagle Nest", afterwards "Sea Side", and now Crystal Beach.

The first family in Wall Springs was Reuben Gause. I saw the first "rope works" there at his home. We used to dress and wash mullet in Wall Springs when it was running out of a hole in the side of the bank. The first settler in Sutherland was a fisherman on the bayou, Robert Cavassee, for whom the bayou was named. The first settler in Yellow Bluff (named by Key West Spongers) was Walton Whitehurst. This was the trading port for the "Spongers." On their return trip to Key West they would buy farm produce to take home.

Aunt Susan married Joe Daniels and lived in now Dunedin. She sold that home and bought from Doolittle Fillman on the east side of Susan's lake (now Pasco Packing Company). When living there, one night the hogs began to "rally." she got up and "set" the dogs out and followed until the dogs "treed." She built a fire so they would stay at the tree until she could walk to our place and get my brothers to go and kill the panther. That was two or three o'clock in the morning and about three miles from our place.

Aunt Mary married Joseph Garrison, living first in Hernando County, southeast of Brooksville. They moved from there to the homestead near Aunt Susan's before they got the door "shutters" built. A bear walked in one door and out the other one night. No one knew it until next morning. Molly was a young baby at the time. (She later married C.B. Lungren.) After that

happened, Uncle Joe slept across the doorway until he could get his "door shutters" built. The shutter boards had to be "riven" out with a "fro" and mallet.

Uncle Joe's next "mix up" was with a "buck." The deer was eating his sweet potatoes at night and had to be killed by moonlight or a "fire pan" light. He shot the buck down and when he took hold of him to cut his throat, the deer kicked his knife away. It was then man and buck, buck and man, until he could call Aunt Susan's dog, and fight for his life until the dog could come about half a mile. Finally, together, they killed the deer.

Aunt Emily married Dick Garrison. Their homestead was on the Cootie River in Hernando County (now Pasco County). Aunt "Em" had to go to the river to wash clothes. One evening after finishing her washing and starting to the house, she had an "intuition" that something was wrong and, looking back, she faced a panther. She didn't lose her head, but faced him and walked backwards nearly a quarter of a mile to the house. The panther followed her nearly to the house. Her next misfortune was when her husband (Uncle Dick Garrison) was taken prisoner by the yankees in the war between the "States." The yankees burned her house at that time. After the war Uncle Dick was liberated near Atlanta and started home, walking. He was taken sick and died enroute.

In 1882 brother Lenny, John Whitehurst, Budley Andersen and some extra drivers drove a bunch of beef cattle from north Florida here for shipment to Cuba. There were five hundred head in that drive. I can still mentally hear the "crack" of the whips the "drivers" used. The sound was almost the same as a rifle shot. They drove across "The Natural Bridge" over the Santa Fe River. Brother Lenny taught me to "crack" a whip when I was quite young.

When a youngster, I went to a district meeting with Mother and brother Lenny in Clearwater. We camped near where Doctor Shahan's office now is located. The lake water was about one hundred feet from out tent. Where the City Hall now is located would then have been in the lake.

My first social event without the guidance of Mother was at a "candy pulling" at Mrs. Henry Curry's. I was fourteen years old. After then I could go to any party but dances. Mother was much opposed to dancing. And how I loved Hillbilly music, and do yet. If we youngsters went through the "Virginia Reel", "Twistification", and "Stealing Pardners", that was a different sport and OK.

In the early 1870's the only family in Tarpon Springs was Mr. Ormond. He worked for my father and would walk the round trip from his place and back. He appreciated the chance to work for a bushel of sweet potatoes or a gallon of syrup and would carry either home on his back seven miles.

In the 1870's cotton came down to five cents per pound. The farmers then quit growing it. Oranges began taking its place as a commercial crop. The fruit was hauled to the coast, loaded on sail boats, and taken to Cedar Keys, there shipped in bulk to the northern markets. At that time oranges were the only citrus fruit sold. They were picked and sold by the thousand. Fifty cents for picking and Ten Dollars for fruit per thousand.

Beginning Sunday morning of January 13th, 1886 we had a very destructive freeze. A lot of citrus trees were killed to the ground. The fruit was all frozen. My brothers and I hauled frozen fish from the bay south of Yellow Bluff for three days to make compost, on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday the ice did not melt in days or nights. The fish were frozen by multiplied thousands. On the first day of the freeze on the way back from Sunday School I saw the first snow of my life. For several days the family all thought I had seen ashes fro, the "fire place." After the freeze I went to Ozona and bought the first thermometer and barometer combined I ever saw. This I bought from L.H. Eavey's general merchandise store for seventy-five cents.

About this period and earlier, the Pink Curlews were plentiful. Also, there were plenty of "Salt Water Blue Jays." They were a big Blue Jay and the Jack Daw, a big black bird, a bit smaller than a crow.

About this period I made my first orange boxes. They had solid sides, made of bangor wood, so-called. The first day making was fifty at two cents each. Day labor then was fifty cents. After the "nail stripper" was invented and in use, I was making a box a minute. The "nail stripper" would turn all the nails point first, ready for driving. I was about thirty-five years old at that time. The next advance in handling the fruit was to wrap and pack them in the groves where they were grown. They were shipped by boat until the Orange Belt Railroad was built in 1888.

Along then I was too small to deer hunt but enjoyed going with my brothers hunting. One morning I took our hounds for exercise and a little hunt. After about a five mile stroll, the dogs "struck trail" and soon had a "bob cat" on the go. After a short spell of hound music, they said "treed." I was soon in the swamp at the tree. When I located the cat, he was over me and looking down with an awful grin. Just then it took a very short time for me to shoot him out. That was the maddest wild animal I have ever seen.

When I was sixteen I rode horseback to Tampa to the first circus there. I spent the night at the home of W.J. Frierson. Next morning I came down to the "ferry." The scow was high up on the bank from a very low tide. After dinner I came to the ferry again and just before sunset I crossed for home. About bedtime I was riding along in a doze when a "monkey face" owl squalled just over my head and I was sure a panther was ready to eat me. I didn't doze anymore until I got home.

When the Orange Belt R.R. Co. had finished the grade from Sea Side through Ozona, the Sutherland Company told them if they would detour around the bayou they would pay all extra expenses, which they did. The Sutherland Co. then wanted a water franchise from Charley Wall at "Blue Sink." Wall told them the water was salty, but they insisted, so he told them they would sink a corked jug two hundred feet down and sample the water. The first man to taste it almost choked from salt. It was as salty as the Gulf. On the east side of Booths Point I saw the "Salt works" used in the war between the states.

At Yellow Bluff in the 1870's, a brother and cousin were salting fish and hauling to Sumter County by ox team. On less than a quarter mile of beach on one tide, they caught seven hundred and fifty mullet with two cast nets.

The first yankee in Pinellas Co. was C.C. Barber from Connecticut. His homestead was on the south side of "Cedar Creek" (now Dunedin Isles). The second man here was J.C. Craver, from Illinois. His physician told him Florida was his only chance to live. He had only one lung from T.B. He homesteaded near the now Ozona four corners. He built a shack but lived out doors by a fat pine knot fire. After that date he lived here forty-five years. In a short time he was my first school teacher. The term was for three months. He had to wait until taxes were paid to get his money. When he was notified to come to Tampa for his pay it was in the summer and rainy season. At that time of year he couldn't find anybody going to Tampa so he decided to "hoof it." His pay was all silver (ninety dollars). The silver had to be brought home on his back in the rain. Through the rainy season the farmers seldom ever hauled produce to Tampa. The branches and "Rocky Creek" were swimming quite often. Heavy hauling was by ox team. In 1884 I was in Tampa and saw the first R.R. rails being unloaded from steamer, the Geo. W. Dill for the South Florida R.R. then being built from Sanford, Fla. At this time Pete Hayden offered Uncle Wash Hagan the forty acres of land north of the ferry for a yoke of oxen. Hagan told him he could use the oxen but couldn't use the land. This is the site where the Tampa Bay Hotel was built shortly after. About that time I went from Tom Jackson's store across Jackson St., to Miller and Henderson's store across a gully on a board. Teams forded it. Miller and Henderson's store was on Washington St.

Along this period of time there was a small steamer running from cedar Keys to ports south. Mary Disston was the steamer's name. She could come to Ozona only on Spring tides. About this period I owned a small sailboat and later on, a cabin "cat boat." Each year after our crops were "laid by", we would go for a few days outing on the boat, usually down the coast. Once, on a freight running trip from Tampa, we got caught in a "Northeaster" storm and had to lay at anchor for thirty-six hours off Mullet Key. A sloop not far from us, after waiting about eighteen hours, her mast was blown away and she was almost destroyed. On the fourth day we made port at Ozona. We lost almost half our cargo of freight from water. The schooner sprang a leak and the pumps could only keep her afloat.

The first bird *** collected in this locality was on a pier head between Ozona and Hog Island. It was built by L.H. Eavey for the Mary Disston to unload freight on from Cedar Keys. Eavey at that time operated a general merchandise store at Yellow Bluff. There was at that period a star mail route from Brooksville to "Port Pinellas."

In the summer of 1889 I visited my Frierson cousins in Alafia, Fla. That was a fine trip and a "gala" event for me.

On Nov. 8, 1890 a crew of orange workers went to old Port Richey (at that date New Port Richey wasn't in existence). We were packing and shipping fruit for G.I. Loucks of Dunedin. We had to load it on a scow, or lighter pole it out in the Gulf about three miles to "Sophie Behrmen" for Mobile, Ala. She was a sail vessel.

On Feb. 6, 1891 I was employed by Uncle "Jim" Craver in his general merchandise store. I was with him until after the depression of the world's Fair in Chicago. In 1894 I went to Wauchula to work fruit. In 1895, after the freeze, I cut cross ties for the A.C.L. Railroad. In 1896 I was working in St. Petersburg. While there, I helped handle the brick of the first brick

building erected in town. This was a brick veneer on the southwest corner of 3rd Street and Central Ave. (the Parry Bldg.).

I wasn't in the service in the Spanish-American War. Because I had a partial dental plate I wasn't physically qualified. In 1900 I was employed in Bay View in a general store. One morning we were waiting for the mail from Clearwater, a star route, when a school of mullet came along. Uncle Jim McMullen poled the boat and I caught fifty of them at three casts with a cast net.

In 1903 I was a charter member of the first carpenters union in Tarpon Springs. In 1917 I was working in Camp Jackson, South Carolina, and Anniston, Alabama (Camp McClelland) .

My mother's ambition and purpose in life was to earn her bread by the "sweat of her brow" and to be helpful to others. Her instructions and advice to me were always of that nature.

In 1861 there were one hundred and sixty-two taxpayers in Hillsboro County (now Pinellas and Hillsboro Counties).