



WEST GADSDEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

NEWSLETTER

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West Gadsden Historical Society, a small, volunteer, local non-profit with a 501(c)(3) designation, depends solely on the generosity of our members, local businesses and all others interested in the preservation of Gadsden County's history to help us remain financially strong. As always, your donations and membership dues are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law. Your consideration and help will truly be appreciated!

Vol. 10, No. 2

June 2015

PAST EVENTS

SATURDAY, MAY 9 MEETING NATIONAL TRAIN DAY CELEBRATION

What a wonderful day WGHS and our visitors enjoyed as we celebrated all things trains! Our featured guest was the Big Bend Model Railroad Association (BBMRA) of Tallahassee. Several model trains were on display in the Patricia Fletcher Vice Meeting Facility with one that allowed kids to run a train within a switching station. Each child received a certificate as an official Train Engineer! It was a beautiful day for outdoor activities! Games were played, hotdogs eaten, cakes sold and of course lots of visiting was shared with old and new friends. WGHS will make this an annual event as over 100 people attended. What's better than a day about trains! BBMRA has agreed to partner with us for future events and will be with us again at our Annual Open House, Saturday, July 4, 2015.



Learning to drive a train definitely takes a lot of concentration and coaching by others! We may see these folk riding on an ANRR engine any day now!



Kids enjoying WGHS "Kid's Room", a continual interactive display housed at the Depot Museum.

UPCOMING EVENTS

SATURDAY, JUNE 27 24th Annual Tallahassee Model Railroad Show and Sale

Join WGHS Saturday, June 27, 9 am to 4 pm at the North Florida Fairgrounds in Tallahassee. The 24th Annual Tallahassee Model Railroad Show and Sale is sponsored by the BBMRA and is certain to be an outstanding event. Model train layouts from large "G" scale to the tiny "Z" scale will be on display, along with experts on hand to answer your model train design, layout, equipment and construction questions. A variety of vendors will be on-site offering various model railroad items. WGHS will be represented by several of our members. Our booth will provide information on the

Greensboro Railroad Depot Museum, as well as offer for sale our T-Shirts, notecards, and books. Admission: Adults & Children 13 and over \$6, Scouts in Uniform as well as Children 12 and under are free. Be sure to get on board and join us at this wonderful and fun event!

Saturday, JULY 4 WGHS Annual Open House

The West Gadsden Historical Society will celebrate its 11th Annual OPEN HOUSE on July 4 from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. at the historic Dezell House and the Greensboro Railroad Depot Museum. Various historical displays will be on exhibit. Our annual bake sale will be a delicious feature as well. We look forward to the return of the ever popular Coastal Seafood Restaurant of Panacea. Our new outside kids games will be located at the Depot Museum for enjoyment. Please plan to spend your day with us!

CORRECTIONS

In last quarter's WGHS Newsletter, we incorrectly acknowledged a recent donation to WGHS. Used in their Grandfather's store, Thompson's Store in Gretna, the Thompson family recent donated two beautiful antique oak store display cabinets for use within the museum. Complete with the original beveled glass, they currently house part of the Greensboro Depot Railroad Museum's

collection of railroad memorabilia. Please plan to come by soon to view these wonderful additions to the Depot presented by the grandchildren of John W. and Birdie Strom Thompson. Thank you Thompson family for your generous contribution. These authentic period cases add such charm to the museum.



IN REMEMBRANCE

We are always saddened by the loss of our loved ones. Recently, we lost three of our lifetime members. Each were active members of WGHS and thrilled to be part of preserving the history of our part of Gadsden County. They will be missed.

Margaret Edwards Cooksey
Spurgeon S. Cowen
Mary Barber Cox



FEATURE
ARTICLE

The following is Part I of a II part series entitled The HISTORY OF JOHN "VIRGINIA" SMITH & HIS DESCENDANTS IN CONNECTION WITH THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY IN GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA AND DECATUR COUNTY, GEORGIA.

Written in mid-1920s by: D. D. Smith, with help from James Love and W. E. Smith.

NOTE:

Remember, this article was written in the 1920s. All the people mentioned have long been gone. Mr. Smith noted at that time that over 500 descendants of "Virginia" and Martha Smith were living. It's now about 90 years since then --- just think how many thousands of Smith descendants there must now be in 2015. Mr. Drane Smith of Bainbridge, GA very graciously gave permission to the West Gadsden Historical Society to print this tobacco history written by his grandfather.



Tobacco of some kind has apparently been grown in Florida by the Indians from its earliest history. Sir John Hawkins in 1565 called on the French Huguenots Colony on the mouth of the St. Johns and observed Indians smoking tobacco. In the account of his voyage, he states that through smoking, Indians were able to go four or five days without food. As W. T. Cash says however, "Writers of the 16th Century were guilty of many harmless little exaggerations". Possibly this was the foundation for the much worked "Reach for Lucky instead of a sweet." The first commercial mention of tobacco in West Florida was during the second Spanish rule, about 1785. Bill Cash says, "Four hundred dollars was offered for every hundred weight of tobacco delivered to New Orleans."

Our tobacco history in Gadsden County, Florida and Decatur County, Georgia, began in 1829, immediately after Florida was ceded to the United States, when a man named John Smith came to Florida as a settler from Lunenburg County, Virginia. Since there was already a man by that name living there, he was called "Virginia" Smith. John "Virginia" Smith was born in Brunswick County, Virginia, May 8, 1789; as a young man he moved to Lunenburg County, Virginia. There he started in business and married Martha Wyatt, who was a direct descendant of the Rev. Hawte Wyatt (1594 to 1638), who was a brother of Sir Frances Wyatt (1644), Colonial Governor of Virginia. From this union there were born five sons and three daughters: Mary Ann Paulina Ogilvie, Thomas R. Smith, John H. Smith, Sallie Snellings, Benjamin O. Smith, William B. Smith, Lucy A. E. Snellings, and Andrew J. Smith.

In 1829, he and his family, together with a family of Wyatt, a family of Rice, and a family of Hagood, migrated to Florida in covered wagons. Florida at that time was a territory having been purchased from Spain in 1819. He had planned to go as far south as Marion

County, Florida, but as his money gave out and his teams were tired by the time he reached Quincy, he stopped there and rented a small farm from Major Gee, two miles southeast of Quincy.

Later he bought this land with considerable other acreage and started farming. He lived there the remainder of his life and was buried near the spot where the first tobacco grew.

He brought from Virginia the seed of a type of tobacco used for chewing and pipe smoking. This tobacco was grown in Virginia at that time. He planted these seed and found that the plants grew vigorously, but as there was no market for tobacco in small quantities, it was twisted together and pressed down in small boxes or barrels and used for chewing purposes by his friends and slaves. From local sources he obtained some Spanish tobacco seed and planted them in the same field. This tobacco was very different in appearance and taste to that grown from the Virginia seed. The product of this seed was a short, narrow leaf, but it possessed a delightful aroma that many thought was as fine as the best Havana cigar. It was afterwards called the "Little Duvall" or "Spanish Tobacco", being named for one of the early Governors of Florida territory, because he was so interested in the experiment of tobacco.

John "Virginia" Smith continued to plant these two varieties in the same field in close proximity for several years, so that he might have both chewing and smoking tobacco for his own use and for the use of his Negro slaves.

He soon discovered that these two different types were blending and that even the Virginia type of chewing tobacco when planted on sandy hammock land grew much thinner and of lighter color. He began to save seed from the stalks which seemed to have hybridized and in this way developed

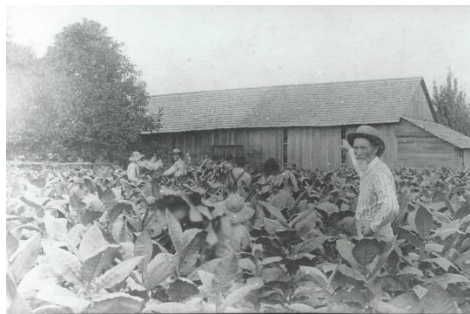
the "Florida Wrapper", which was planted so extensively in this section prior to the Civil War. This tobacco was marketed largely in Europe, especially in Germany, and was relatively high in price. John "Virginia" Smith was successful in growing the small type of "Spanish Tobacco", but since he had no market for it he conceived the idea of having it manufactured into cigars on his own plantation. Through the assistance of friends, like Governor Duvall, who was interested in this tobacco experiment, he procured several Spaniards who put the tobacco through the proper fermentation and rolled it into cigars. After the tobacco was rolled into cigars there was very little market for them. St. Marks was the nearest shipping point and they were bought locally by only a few stores in Bainbridge, Tallahassee, Quincy or Thomasville.

I have heard my Grandfather, William B. Smith, tell of a trip he made to Eatonton, Georgia, in 1839 to carry a wagon load of cigars which were manufactured on his father's farm. He took with him a trusty Negro boy to be company and to help him over the rough roads with a five mule team and a covered wagon, which was the most expeditious way of transportation at that time.

By 1844, the culture of tobacco had grown considerably in this section. It was at that time that Major Ben Chaires of Tallahassee became interested to the extent that he procured the services of my Grandfather, who was at that time only 21 years of age, to grow tobacco for him in Leon County, Florida. While the tobacco grew vigorously, and to all appearances was very fine, it lacked the qualities of a good wrapper that tobacco grown in Gadsden County, Florida and Decatur County, Georgia possessed. In 1845, T. R. Smith, the oldest son of the original John "Virginia" Smith, and W. B. Smith, my Grandfather, moved to Decatur County and bought the tract of land on which

Amsterdam now stands, the tract reached to within one mile of Attapulugus. At that time, the Griffins, McGriffs, Donalsons, Lasseters, and J. H. Gibson were living near Attapulugus. They had been experimenting in tobacco culture and found that the Attapulugus tobacco lands were as well adopted to the growth of wrapper tobacco as any land near Quincy. The wrapper they produced was equal in quality to that sold from lands in Gadsden County, Florida. From that time, Attapulugus has been noted for its fine quality of tobacco. The growth of tobacco has proved to be a very profitable industry.

Various local citizens served as buyers for European accounts and bought on orders. There were times when a crop would be kept a year or two before a satisfactory sales outlet was located. In an old buying record which is in possession of Horace Curry, the buying activities of the late P. W. White are shown for the decade of 1850-1860. There are lists of purchases from many familiar names of today and from such present day tobacco farms as the Shaw Farm, Love Farm, Davis Farm, etc. Prices ranged from about twenty-five to thirty-five cents per pound, according to this old buying record. However, the Reverend Simon Peter Richardson, Methodist Pastor at Quincy during the late 40's has the following to say: "Tobacco culture was at its best and the product sometimes sold as high as seventy cents per pound."



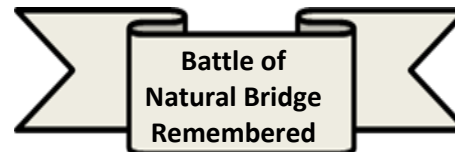
Joseph Sunday in his sun tobacco patch c. 1902

When it is realized that this was sun grown tobacco, it can readily be seen what prices like these meant. We are told that in the period before the Civil War, beginning about 1840, when the South as a whole was suffering from low priced cotton, Gadsden County with its tobacco business was the outstanding prosperous County in this section. This tobacco was exported from St. Marks, then a large port, and some from Apalachicola. The tobacco was air cured in barns more or less as it is today. It was then packed in large cases and held pending the arrival of a buyer, who ordinarily came in October or November. Old people have told me in my childhood that tobacco was the only money crop of the pre-war Gadsden County farmer. It took all of the cotton, feed, hogs, etc. to clothe and feed the owner's family and his slaves. The proceeds from the sale of the tobacco, when all went well, was saved or used for the purchase of more land. John "Virginia" Smith died in 1851. By that time, his sons had started in the tobacco business. Decatur County records show that Thomas R. Smith and W. B. Smith bought several thousand acres of land in 1846-47-49-50, which is now in the Amsterdam division of the American Sumatra Tobacco Corporation. W. B. Smith sold his interest to Thomas R. Smith in 1856 and bought considerable holdings between Attapulugus and the Florida line. Benjamin O. Smith also bought some land in this section while Andrew J. Smith bought along the Florida line and in Florida. Thomas R. and W. B. Smith both built homes in Attapulugus; both were living there during the Civil War.

The merchants in Quincy, some of whom were large slave owners, became interested in the growing of tobacco, and began to hunt a market for their product. They would take samples with them on their annual trips to New York, and in this way they succeeded in interesting some of the leaf dealers in New York. The names of two my Father remembered were Vetterlein and Bergman,

the successors of these companies are still in the leaf tobacco business under the same name. These buyers would come to Quincy every year after the tobacco was harvested and buy direct from the farmer. They put the tobacco in large pine boxes which were hooped with white oak straps, and hauled to the port at St. Marks, Florida for shipment to New York. The farmers, who planted tobacco at that time, made a profit out of the business because they regarded tobacco as a surplus crop, and thirty cents per pound was considered an extremely high price. Thus, the tobacco industry grew steadily until the Civil War began in 1861. The market was then cut off and the tobacco had to be held over during that period while the farmers were making provisions to carry on the War.

Please be sure to check out the September edition of WGHS Newsletter for Part II of the History of Tobacco in Gadsden County, Florida and Decatur County, Georgia.



The Southern victory at the Battle of Natural Bridge preserved Tallahassee's status as the only Southern capital east of the Mississippi not conquered by Union forces during the Civil War. Additionally, the victory protected a significant area of North Florida and South Georgia from the severe economic losses suffered by many other regions of the South.

News that Federal troops were coming ashore at the St. Marks Lighthouse riveted the capital city and telegrams went out calling in troops from across North Florida. Gadsden County was no exception as many soldiers headed to Tallahassee. The entire day of March 5, 1865, troops from all around the area flooded into the depot in

Tallahassee. Once assembled under the command of Confederate Generals Samuel Jones and William Miller they left by train headed south. The train was said to be about a ¼ mile in length and after a 4 hour trip arrived just west of what is now Woodville. There, the troops marched toward Natural Bridge, stopping occasionally in the brush and wire grass to rest. Many of the men had gone without sleep for 48 hours. All the while the Union troops under the leadership of General Newton were marching north from the St. Marks area.

With men from the 2nd and 99th U.S. Colored Troops, 2nd Florida U.S. Cavalry and a battery of two howitzers manned by U.S. sailors, General Newton drove back Confederate defenders at East River Bridge but failed to overpower guards at the Newport Bridge over the St. Marks River. Informed by his scouts that a second crossing point was available upstream at Natural Bridge, General Newton turned his command up the east bank of the St. Marks intending to force the crossing before the Confederates could react.

Jones and Miller deduced his plans and both forces began a critical race to seize the bridge before their enemy could do so. The Confederates won. By the time Newton reached Natural Bridge on the morning of March 6, 1865, Southern troops were in position on the west bank and waiting.

John Bunyan Fletcher (January 18, 1848 – April 7, 1926) was a Gadsden County Civil War veteran. John Bunyan was the son of Joseph "Little Joe" Fletcher and Ann Tomberlin. He married Elizabeth Ann Shepard, daughter of Joshua and Sarah Shepard. Their children: Spurgeon J., Oliver Mayo, Annie Susan, Bettie and Dewitt Talmadge. As a proud citizen of Gadsden County, John Banyan Fletcher wanted to recognize and remember those who fought in the Civil War Battle of Natural Bridge in

Leon County. In 1919, he erected monuments on the road on the western side of the bridge.



John Bunyan Fletcher

From the Florida Public Archeology Site it is noted, "Early in the park's history, two pillars stood on either side of Natural Bridge Road at the point where the Confederate earthworks crossed. Archaeological work in 2010 identified the probable remains of the base of one of these monuments, but otherwise they are no longer a part of the Natural Bridge landscape. Historic photos, however, record their former presence."



The present monument was dedicated on "the Memorial Day of the South", April 26, 1922. The monument was initially planned to have been dedicated on March 6, 1922, the

anniversary of the battle, but apparently construction delay pushed the date back to April.



The "Daily Democrat" of April 27, 1922, reported that the largest crowd ever assembled in the area, estimates "ran from 2,000 to 3,000, attended the unveiling. Mayor John W. Martin, of Jacksonville, who was described as the grandson of two Confederate Congressmen, was the "orator of the day." Although J. B. Fletcher was the only member of the monument construction commission not to attend the unveiling, he was cited as saying that "he hopes his life will be spared to see a splendid equestrian statue erected there in honor of General William Miller who commanded the forces at Natural Bridge."

Inscriptions on the monument read: This monument erected under authority of an act of the legislature of Florida of 1921 as a just tribute of the people of Florida to commemorate the victory of the Battle of Natural Bridge, March 6, 1865, and to keep in cherished memory those brave men and boys who, in the hour of sudden danger, rushed from home, desk, and field and from the West Florida Seminary and joining a few disciplined troops by their united valor and patriotism saved their capital from the

invaders. Tallahassee being the only capital of the south not captured by the enemy during the War Between the States.

Committee Members:

Mrs. J. Stuart Lewis, Chairman, Miss Sallie E. Blake, J.B. Fletcher, G.W. Rhodes and A.H. Williams

Commands taking part in the Battle of Natural Bridge:

Gen. Wm. Miller in Command
Col. Geo. W. Scott's Cavalry, Col. Samuel Love's Militia, Col. C.W. Dupont, The Gadsden Grays, Col. J.J. Daniel's Reserves, Col. Caraway Smith's Battalion, 2nd Fla. Cavalry, Major Wm. H. Milton's Troops, Capt. Pat Houston's Artillery, Capt. Jos. L. Dunham's Artillery, Capt. V.M. Johnson, The West Fla. Cadets, The Baby Corps (the youngest who wore the gray), and Capt. D.W. Gwynn.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

First, I would like to thank Lynne Layton Poucher for her many long hours of dedication in preparing our past WGHS Newsletters. Recently, she requested a respite and you may have noticed a "new look" to the WGHS Newsletter. Still under Lynne's watchful eye, Linda Clark Smith and I will try to produce a newsletter of equal quality. We are always looking for articles of interest to you, our members, so please forward any comments or historical events that you would like to see included.

Jane W. Clark, Editor
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jane.clark57@gmail.com

**MEMORIALS & HONORARIUMS
3/26/15 – 6/20/15**

Memorials:

Charlie & Jean Macon
in memory of
Jean Fletcher

Harold & Jean Dean
in memory of
Spurgeon Cowen

Lamar & Jane Clark
in memory of
Spurgeon Cowen

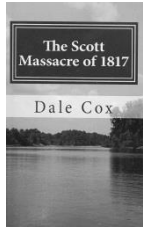
Gary & Ann Bryant
in memory of
Ann McGlaun
Jean Fletcher

James & Linda Smith
in memory of
Wendell Larkin

Joyce V. Roach
in memory of
Mary Barber Cox
Gertrude Lewis

Charles & Lynne Poucher
in memory of
Mary Barber Cox
Margaret Cooksey
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Laura Smith
Spurgeon Cowen

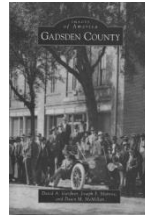
BOOKS & MERCHANDISE
All prices include 7.5% FL Sales Tax



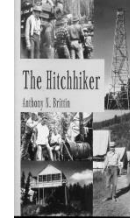
Scott Massacre
\$22.00



Gadsden Co. Early History
\$27.00



Images of Gadsden Co.
\$23.00



The Hitchhiker
\$23.00



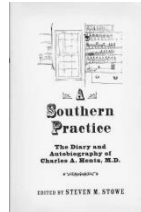
Note Cards



Greensboro Depot, Barns, Dezell House or Greensboro School. Sold in sets of 8 - \$10.00



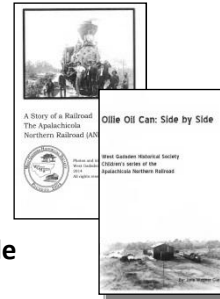
James Stewart Autobiography
\$27.00



Dr. Hentz Diaries
\$50.00

CHILDRENS BOOKS

A Story of a Railroad – The Apalachicola Northern Railroad



Ollie Oil Can: Side by Side
Sold As a Set \$5.00



Gadsden: Florida County In Word And Picture – 1976, Miles Kenan Womack Jr. This book sells for \$150-\$185 on the internet; we have 3 copies available for \$100 each. Purchase yours today!

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