



PINELLAS

Solomon Smith Coachman - A Pinellas Pioneer

Compiled by Bette Coachman Hochman for The Pinellas Genealogist

According to the family Bible, Solomon Smith Coachman was born 20 minutes before 7 o'clock a.m. on the 4th of April 1862, in Echols County, Georgia, to Hugh McCauley Coachman and Frances Moselle Lane. Solomon Smith was first called Smith, then simply S.S.

Smith grew up in Echols County and attended Valdosta Institute in 1870. In 1886, Solomon Smith, then 24 and three of his brothers, Benjamin Green 27, Hugh McCauley 2, and Edward Horace 17, left Georgia for Florida. The Coachmen boys first settled around Lakeland. S.S. taught school for a short time in Richland, a small village north of Lakeland. There he met Ella Tucker and they were married on 6 Jan 1887. Ella gave birth to two children before she died three years later. She is buried in the Tucker Cemetery in Richland, Florida.

- i. Harriet Lane Coachman b. abt 1888 Florida d.
- ii. Joseph Herbert Coachman b. 13 May 1889 Clearwater, Florida
d. 30 Oct 1905, buried Clearwater Cemetery, Clearwater

The brothers were then given land in Hillsborough County from a cousin, Sarah Coachman Munnerlyn. There the boys used the land and started a sawmill. Lumber for several of the early buildings in Clearwater came from this mill including the Verona Inn later called the Gray Moss Inn. S.S. also opened a general store that stood on the corner of Cleveland Street and Fort Harrison Avenue. The store sold everything from a reaping machine to a paper of pins. Edward Horace was active with his brother in the mill and mercantile business, then became a banker and a charter member of the First National Bank of Clearwater, which he helped organize. Edward married Mary Moase in 1894. They had no children.

S.S. met his second wife while she was staying at Seora Lodge owned by Solomon Smith's sister Hattie, and found they had much in common including the fact that they were fourth cousins. She was Jessie Candler, twenty-three year old daughter of Samuel "Charles" Candler and Jamie Bevil. Charles's brother was Asa Griggs Candler, founder of Coca-Cola. Jessie was a schoolteacher at the West End Institute in Cartersville, Georgia.

Jessie and Solomon Smith were married on the 27 June 1901. The ceremony was conducted by her uncle, Bishop Warren Candler, Bishop of the Methodist Church and later president of Emory University.

In 1902 S.S. bought the McMullen grove, 240 acres surrounding what is now the intersection of NE Coachman Road and Old Coachman Road. On the grove property was an old log cabin built

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by Col. James McMullen in 1849. When the family moved in Jessie said, "It had chinks wide enough to throw a cat through." In 1910 they moved to the grove permanently, Jessie saying she was afraid that the newfangled automobile would be harmful to their children.

Jessie began making and selling jellies and marmalade. The president of the Seaboard Railroad, while visiting the Coachman home, was so impressed with the quality that he ordered it to be used in the railroad's dining cars, calling it the "world's finest".

Solomon Smith became the leader in the campaign to divide Hillsborough County into Pinellas. At issue was the inconvenience for those living in West Hillsborough County having to travel to Tampa to conduct business, a day long and thirty-five mile trek around Tampa Bay. On May 23, 1911, the bill to divide the counties was passed. In December of that year Governor Albert Gilchrist appointed S.S., the first chairman of the Pinellas County Commission. There was a major disagreement between Clearwater and St. Petersburg, which was larger and also included in the newly formed county. Both wanted the prestige of having the county seat. The legislation that created the new county had named Clearwater, but St. Petersburg did not want to give it up that easily. They wanted an election to determine the permanent location of the county seat. The Clearwater county commissioners discovered a way of getting around that by taking advantage of a state law prohibiting the holding of a county seat election within 20 years of building a courthouse. So the race was on to quickly build the courthouse in Clearwater.

Ralph Reed, an historian, wrote, "Torches blazed around the building as work went on through the night, and armed guards with shotguns patrolled the building night and day since rumors had been spread that St. Petersburg people planned to come and burn it down." The courthouse was built "almost over Sunday" assuring the county seat in Clearwater. The two-story frame courthouse was on the present site of Peace Memorial Presbyterian Church in downtown Clearwater.

In 1916 Solomon Smith built the Coachman Building, the tallest building in town, a five-story brick structure, replacing the old S.S. Coachman and Sons General Merchandise Store.

In 1920 he convinced the Seaboard Railroad to run its tracks through his groves and began what may have been the first fruit-packing and shipping house in Florida. In 1921 he moved his family across the tracks from the log cabin to a large two-story home situated on the northeast corner of the intersection of NE Coachman and Old Coachman. The house stood for sixty-two years until it was razed in the fall of 1982. Through the efforts of Jessie Coachman the old McMullen-Coachman log cabin has been preserved and moved to Heritage Park, a fine example of a typical "cracker house" in early Pinellas County.

Solomon Smith Coachman died 9 March 1931, his wife Jessie on 9 July 1959. Both are buried in the Clearwater Cemetery. The assets of Coachman Property, Inc. was sold in 1980 to Blackburn Land Development. That included the five-story building, together with the McCroy

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Department Store building, six lots in Coachman Hill Estates, a 140 acre grove in east Clearwater, plus 44 acres of frontage on U.S. 19.¹

Children of Solomon Smith and Jessie Candler Coachman:

- i. Solomon Smith Coachman b. 19 August 1902
d. 30 April 1913, buried Clearwater Cemetery
- ii. Samuel Candler Coachman b. 6 Dec 1904
d. 1 July 1946 buried Clearwater Cemetery
- iii. Hugh McCauley Coachman b. 6 January 1907
d. 3 August 1984 buried Clearwater Cemetery
- iv. Anne Coachman b. 20 July 1909
d. 9 June 1910 buried Clearwater Cemetery
- v. James Warren Coachman, b. 14 March 1911
- vi. Francis Land Coachman b. 12 Dec 1912 d. 23 June 1984
- vii. Jessie Candler Coachman b. 20 April 1916
- viii. Bonnell Ponteaux Coachman b. 6 August 1920

¹ Bible records; newspaper articles; *Tampa Tribune* March 7, 1952, by Josephine Alexander; Sept 19, 1980, by Paul Wilborn; *Clearwater Sun* by Shirley Coachman Broad. Magazine article, *Southern Homes*, Spring 1985. *Clearwater's Beginnings The Role of Solomon Smith Coachman* by Marge Costa. The Story of Florida Vol. IV, Pub. The American Historical Society, New York 1938.

Early Pinellas Families - The PGS Millenium Project

The PGS Millenium Project are the words used by PGS President Charlie Grandmaison to describe this important project in an article published in P.G.S. News, May 1999, Vol. 4, Issue 5. The Early Pinellas Families project was started more than 15 years ago to collect and document the histories and genealogies of Pinellas County's pioneer families. Dorothy Boyer has headed the project most of these years and has been assisted by Marion Foskett and Marjorie Hazel. Chuck Tyrie has worked on establishing a computer data base of the records. This data base may be used to set up microfilm page numbers and other vital statistics. Marjorie Hazel has donated a copy of Personal Ancestral File (PAF) 3.0 for use in the project. Lesleigh and Jerry Butts have donated an external 100 Meg ZIP drive which will assist in interfacing the PGS computer with PGS project members' home computers. Bob Raup is donating a copy of Ancestral Quest, a Windows program using the PAF 3.0 data base to also assist project members work. In the future, it is hoped that the data can be converted to CD-ROM or DVD disk for use by all PGS members and the general public.

The City of Largo will microfilm all of the records created by the project. After microfilming, PGS Program Director Lewellyn Ippolitto will guide a team of volunteers in creating an every-name index, including vital records. HELP is needed. PLEASE VOLUNTEER.