

Pinellas County

Wallace came to Clearwater by land and sea

By: William Wallace

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In 1873, the Robert Wallace family decided to relocate from Mobile, Al. To the Clear Water Harbor area of Florida. Albert Pierce, a son-in-law of Robert Wallace, had visited Clear Water earlier and bought 10 acres of property there. He persuaded Robert Wallace to resign his position on the Mobile police force and accompany him and John W. Drew, another son-in-law to Clear Water.

The families made the trip to Clear Water in two groups. One group with John Drew and Robert Wallace Jr. left Mobile in January 1873 and traveled overland. After fording and ferrying many streams in their Jersey Spring Wagon, the group arrived in Clear Water 21 days later. They stayed with John W. Jeffords until the arrival of the rest of the family.

On March 10, 1873, a small schooner named the Mary Gleason carried the second group comprised of Robert Wallace Sr., his wife, Mary Eliza, a son, William (who much later in life related these events to his son and family to provide the basis for this article), Cpt. Albert Pierce and wife Elizabeth, Hannah Drew (wife of J.W. Drew) several of her children. On March 15, 1873, the schooner landed in Clear Water at what is now the entrance to the causeway at the foot of Cleveland Street.

The families brought with them all of their household goods and a year's supply of groceries. In Mobile at that time, the price of flour was \$6 to \$8 a barrel; meal and grits \$4 to \$56 a barrel. In Clear Water flour sold for \$12 to \$15 a barrel and the meal and grits \$9 to \$12. The price of pickled pork in Mobile was 21 cents a pound but here it was unavailable. Kerosene or coal oil sold for 50 cents a gallon.

The first year here the Wallace family lived in a four-room house located on the present site of Calvary Baptist Church. In the second year Robert Wallace took up a homestead from the government consisting of 120 acres west of Ft. Harrison Avenue and south of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Spur to the Belleview Hotel. His house stood where Orange Avenue and Wildwood Way intersect today.

A living was made by growing sea island cotton, the first year planting the crop on Nicholson land near today's North Ward School. The cotton lint was shipped to Charleston, S.C. where it sold for 75 cents per pound. Year by year, the price dropped until it sold for only 21 cents per pound, so they stopped growing cotton and grew vegetables until the first groves they had planted began to bear fruit. All produce had to be shipped by sailboat to Cedar Key, then by rail through Jacksonville to Northern markets. There were no railroads south of Cedar Key at that time.

At the time they came to Clear Water, there were no public schools in this section of Hillsborough County, but in a short time, Jennie Plumb, the Rev. C.S. Reynold's widowed sister, came from New York to teach. The old log church, used for both church and school purposes was situated on the east side of the north entrance to the present Clearwater Cemetery. During cold weather, students moved the benches outside and built a big log fire around which school was held. The pupils carried their drinking water from what is now Belleair Lake near Ed Wright Park.

When used for church, this building was shared by both Baptist and Methodist

dances and on every May Day, a community picnic was held on the island. The trip was made by boat, either the "Mary M" or the "Falcon." The Methodist Church had a very large brush arbor on the northeast corner of Bird Lake in the present vicinity of Sunset Road and Hercules Avenue and held quarterly meetings where people went in their wagon and camped for several weeks at a time.

The Younger set enjoyed fox and deer hunting. At one time, after wounding a deer, with dogs chasing it across Little Pass (Clearwater Pass) to Indian Rocks Island (Sand Key), Robert Wallace Jr. and a friend took off their clothes and swam across Little Pass to rescue the deer. The pass then was only a small inlet but very deep from shore to shore.

In 1883, William Wallace married Mary Jeffords and they built their first home on part of the Wallace homestead at today's intersection of Overbrook and Indian Rocks Road.

In the late 1800's, the Wallace property adjoined a large development and contained a valuable spring. The developer, through an employee, wanted to buy this property for expansion but offered such a small price it was not accepted. So they built tenant houses on two sides of the Wallace property and dumped garbage directly in front of his home to make him sell at their price. Still refusing to sell, they sent a man to kill William Wallace on his own property. The would be assassin way-laid him one night with a gun. But as the gunman was pretty drunk and also a "friend," Wallace was able to talk the man out of it and take the gun away. Under such conditions, the place was sold to another party at a greater price. In 1905, William Wallace bought 20 acres of land and built his home on the corner of Druid Road and Ft. Harrison Avenue.

Wallace worked at several businesses in his lifetime including mail carrier, partner in Clearwater mercantile business with his brother-in-law, John R. Jeffords. Street Superintendent for the city of Clearwater and flower grower at his last home on Turner street. But, much of his life's work centered around the citrus business. At first he owned his own small grove with his father. They would fertilize their trees with refuse from a fish camp on Indian Rocks Island. Another fish company, located on the south end of Clearwater Beach, built a large concrete ice storage house and had natural ice shipped from Main by way of three-masted schooners. Later on he worked as a field foreman for Jeffords and Smoyer, whose packing house was on Cleveland Street. Several children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and other descendants of Robert and William Wallace live today in Clearwater.

Pinellas Genealogy Society, Inc. member #685, William Dean Wallace, is the fourth Generation of Clearwater Wallaces.

