

# SOME EARLY PINELLAS FAMILIES

ORIGINAL SETTLERS OF ANONA, PINELLAS CO., FLORIDA  
Anona Began When 80 Acres Were Given For Homesteading

With great appreciation, we thank the St. Petersburg Times for permission to reprint the following article written by Hazel Geissler, Times writer, for the Sunday, January 24th, 1965 edition. A copy of same was provided by Col. Leonard H. Smith, from the collection of the Pinellas Historical Comm.

ANONA -- It was a sunny morning in 1859 when Capt. John Thomas Lowe nosed his schooner "Sea Drift" between shallow sand banks and dropped anchor at his dock in what is now Anona.

He had 80 acres here, which the government gave him to homestead.

With the good captain were the original settlers of Anona, then known as "Lowe's Landing." The settlers included: Lowe's wife, Laura; his son, Jefferson, 3, and his father, William B. Lowe.

Other settlers aboard the Sea Drift were Mrs. Lowe's two brothers and their families: William B. Meares, 30, and his mother, Miriam Roberts Meares; Richard Turtle Horn Meares, his wife, Emma McBride Preston Meares, and their children, Richard, George, Alfred and Clarence.

An old family friend, Capt. August R. Archer, was also on board.

Capt. John's father was a sea captain who sailed between Key West and Cedar Key. John went to sea with his father and eventually took over his activities, sailing to Central and South American, West Indies, Cuba and New York.

As Capt. John sailed back and forth from Key West to Cedar Keys, from 1847 on, he put in many times along the way at a high point of land, with a good harbor and anchorage and convenient to fresh water, reaching it through Clearwater Harbor.

In 1858, he found that South Florida had not been surveyed and called Government surveyors there. When the surveys were recorded, he secured the property and built a dock.

In 1859, he moved his family and all their belongings, along with the others interested in founding a new settlement, to Lowe's Landing. The men built log houses, the first few months and a log church between Jeff Road and Randolph Farms, clustered around the landing point. The cemetery next to the church soon held Capt. John's father, who died in 1859.

They farmed, fished and brought their own livestock. Soon cut lumber was brought in from Cedar Key and Lowe put up the first frame house in the area.

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In 1861, when the Federal Navy blockaded the Florida coast, Capt. Lowe enlisted in the Tampa Coast Guard. It was an organization resisting the blockade. The outfit was later mustered into the Confederate service and assigned to General Bragg's army in Tennessee. According to his granddaughter Mrs. Corinna Condrick of St. Petersburg, "After hard campaigns and bloody battles, during which he was promoted to sergeant, he was transferred with some others to the Confederate Navy and served in it until the end of the war. He served on the Confederate ram "Savannah" until it was blown up to prevent its falling into Union hands when Sherman's army captured Savannah."

In May 1862, William Brownell Meares enlisted in the Confederate Army and was discharged a month and a half later, after losing an eye, and suffering from other wounds. Richard Turtle Horn Meares also served with the Confederate Army. (The name "Turtle" runs through the family - apparently because of a family connection with Green Turtle Cay in the Bahamas).

Capt. John walked home from Tennessee with an ax over his shoulder after the war. He had grown a beard and his son, Wesley, born in 1859, ran and hid under the house when he saw him. Laura Meares Lowe, known as "Ma Lowe," fainted, according to stories told by grandchildren still in Anona.

Soon after Capt. John's return, in 1866, Wesley Brownell Meares married Sarah Roberts of Key West, under a large oak tree on the Lowe property. The postwar years flew by and Capt. John and Ma Lowe had two more children, Mary Ellen and Asa Milton. Ma Lowe continued to take care of the family when Capt. John returned to sea. Capt. Augustus "Gus," [Archer] had been captured at sea and sentenced to a Union prison ship off Key West. He secured parole papers and fitted a sloop "The Veto" and returned to Lowe's Landing. The only later reference to be found about him is that in 1895-1896, he was postmaster for Seminole. (See The Pinellas Genealogist, Vol. 13, #23, page 31 for Archer in Seminole. dmb)

When Archer was captured in Charlotte Harbor while trying to reach the Bahamas through the Union blockade, with him was a "Dickie" Meares who also was sentenced to the prison ship for the remainder of the war. This may have been Richard Turtle Horn Meares.

Capt. John carried the mail by boat from Cedar Key and built two more schooners, the "Emma Lowe" and the "Asa Lowe." In 1880, Capt. John decided to establish an official post office at Lowe's Landing. His oldest son, Jeff, was running a general store and distributing the mail. Making arrangements in Cedar Key for the post office, he needed a name for the community. He thought of the sugar apple trees in Key West, with their sweet custardlike fruit. The name of the fruit was anona and that's how the community got its name.

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Anona grew and other settlers came in around them. Indian Rocks was beginning to grow a few miles south. Children were in school at the church and there was talk of building a separate schoolhouse up the road. Miriam Cornelia Meares recalled a few years ago there were candy pullings and horseback riding and swimming. The men shared their time between the sea and the farms. Her father, William Brownell, "used to go as far as Cuba smack fishing," she said.

Capt. John gained the nickname of "Bulldonnie" for his persistence in carrying out his ideas and plans for this family and the community. About 1896, with the coming of the railroad into the Pinellas peninsula, Capt. John retired to his citrus grove. When he died in 1921, "Uncle Jeff" became patriarch of the clan.

Richard Turtle Horn and Emma Meares were buried in 1905 and 1900 respectively, in St. Petersburg; Capt. John and Laura Lowe in Anona; and William Brownell and Sarah Meares in Anona.

Jeff Lowe had married Josephine Whitehurst; Wesley Lowe married Mary Pinder; Asa Lowe married Mary Stowell, and Mary Ellen, who continued to live with her parents and take care of them, married Murdo Logan, a Scotsman.

In 1844 a new family arrived in the community from Virginia, settling on 40 acres next to the Meares' property. The Albert G. Wilcoxes had a son, Edward Everett, and in 1887 he and Miriam Meares were married, thus bringing the Wilcox name into the community. Mrs. Wilcox recalled the big freeze of 1894 and 1895, and the sawmilling operations of the Wilcoxes. One of her sons, Charles, lost an arm in the trade but went on to serve as supervisor of registration in Pinellas County in 1916 and tax assessor in 1924-1948.

Uncle Jeff was postmaster at Anona from 1883 until 1923 when it was abandoned by the postal department. He also served as road supervisor and member of the first Pinellas County Board of Commissioners.

Richard Turtle Horn Meares' children also had brought familiar names into the community. William had married Amanda Kilgore; George married Ellen Leonard; Alfred married Ella Acher; Clarence married Ronie Curry and later Bertha Murdock; Robert married Daisy Robles and later Mary Easter; Emma married Lucian Hart; and Richard Turtle married Nancy Jane Harris. The last two had a son they named Richard Maurice. The had a son he named Richard Maurice who is president of the Indian Rocks Nursery. William's daughter, Lillie Ruth, married John Randolph Walsingham of Lake Byrd, bringing the Walsingham line into the community.

And so the Lowes and the Meares, whose descendants still form an integral part of the Anona community - and whose ancestors left England for the Carolinas, and then moved on to the Bahamas after the Revolutionary War because they were Loyalists - became a part of the pioneer formation of Florida's West Coast

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