

Hickory Bluff Cemetery

A Charlotte County Pioneer African American Cemetery

Research conducted for the Blanchard House Museum of African American History and Culture of Charlotte County by Blanchard House Historian, Scot Shively, during the period February 2007 through January 2016

Every effort has been made to check the facts and verify all dates, however as mistakes do happen, any errors that are found herein are mine alone and will be corrected in any revised editions.



GPS Coordinates:

26°58'16.62" N

82°02'51.72" W

12 ft elevation

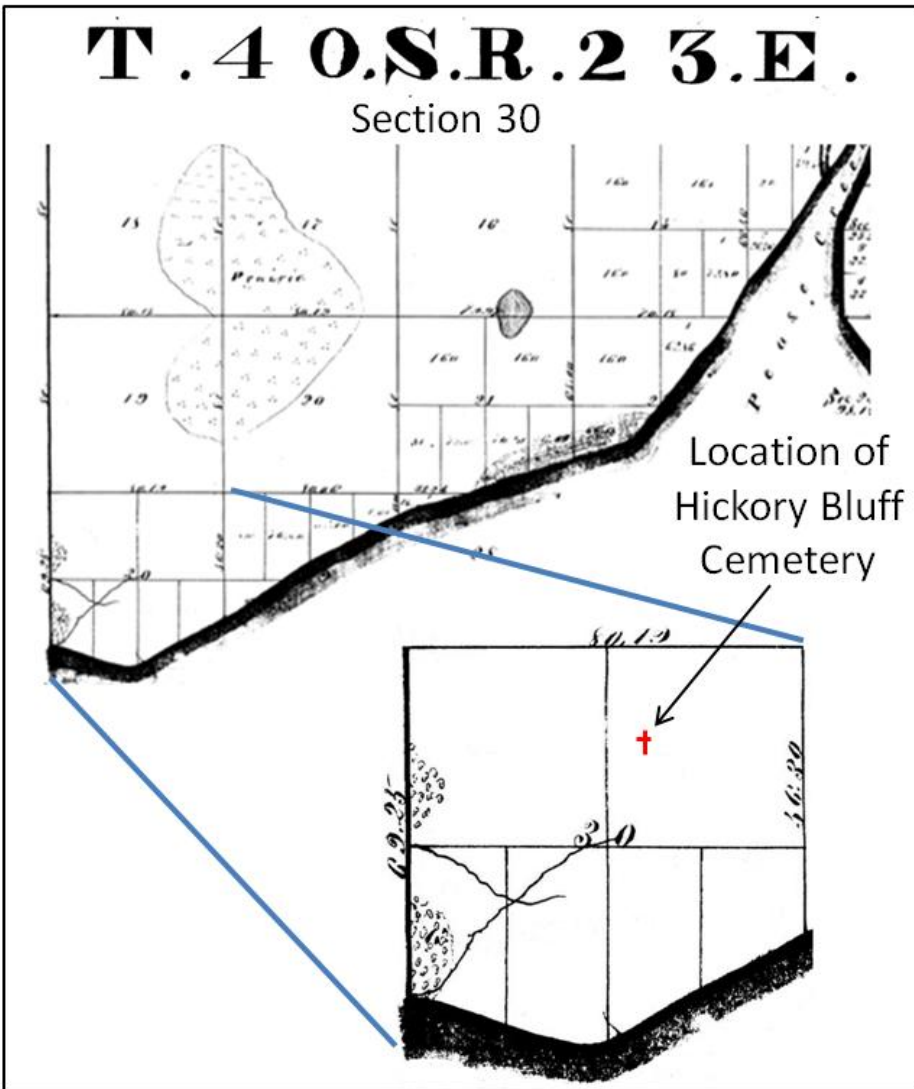
Hickory Bluff Cemetery

(Photo by Scot Shively, May 2008)

Lower Peace River, 1840s

The initial survey of the lands in the Peace River area was conducted in the 1840s following the end of the Second Seminole Indian War in 1842. Florida became the 27th state of the United States on March 3, 1845. (In the 1850s, with the potential transfer of ownership of federal land to the state, including Seminole land, the federal government decided to convince the remaining Seminoles to move out of Florida and settle the lands in the Oklahoma Indian Territory. Increased Army patrols led to more hostilities and another period of conflict. The Third Seminole War lasted from 1855 to 1858 and ended with most of the remaining Seminole moving to the Indian Territory.)

As the Indians were being moved out and forced further south, the survey crews were assigned ranges of land and continued surveying the newly opened lands. The survey team led by Deputy Surveyor John M. Irwin who along with his crew of four men surveyed section 30 in November, 1849. They did not mention anything out of the ordinary in Section 30 of Township 40 South and Range 23 East in the official surveyor's notebook. The area was described as 3rd rate pine and saw palmetto prairie lands. At that time, the area around the mouth of the Peace River had very few inhabitants, mostly squatters in the area engaged in fishing and hunting. It was not until the 1860s that a very few settlers were documented having settled there.



Original survey plat, dated November 1849.

Hickory Bluff - early settlement . . .

According to historian, Canter Brown, Jr. in his book, Florida's Peace River Frontier:

Early in 1866, Nathan H. DeCoster, a Maine-born officer of the Second Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops, moved to the vicinity of the modern community of Charlotte Harbor where he homesteaded, farmed, and, at nearby Fort Winder, operated a store. Arriving with DeCoster were four black hired hands: Joseph Chapman, 40; Richard Hambleton, 30; Mitchell Harrison, 20; and District of Columbia native John Lowman, 25. Within the next two years other freedmen who would live and work in the Peace River Valley also would arrive in Manatee. Among them were Frank Griffin and Julius Caesar.

The community of Hickory Bluff continued to grow slowly as more settlers arrived to try their hand at making a living. The settlement began with the sawmill and the early settler's houses and shacks.

In time the community grew and added more improvements to include:

The sawmill was set up in the Fall of 1866.

The general store was likely established before 1870.

The Methodist Church was built in 1873.

A Post Office was established in 1877 and named "Charlotte Harbor Post Office.

Hickory Bluff School was built in June 1877.

By 1880 there were a dozen families living in the area.

An early look into the Charlotte Harbor area just a year after the end of the Civil War was published in a Tampa newspaper.



Newspaper article from:

The Florida Peninsular
Sam C. Craft, Editor
Tampa, Florida
Saturday, July 28th, 1866

Peas Creek – July 14th, 1866

Mr. Editor: - Just now, when the public seems to be interested in the country bordering on Peas Creek, and Charlotte's Harbor, it would not be out of place, to state a few facts in regard to it. Though so much has been written, on that subject most that can be said, will be old to nearly every one.

We will just look at the Islands in the Harbor, and those situated further south near the mouth of the Caloosahatchee river. The largest one is Pine Island. This one is twenty miles long, and is covered with large Pine-Trees, which is not the case with the other Islands they being covered with Button-wood, Gumbo-Limbo &c. – There is a fine Sweet-Orange Grove on his Island, and almost every variety of tropical fruit. The owner of this collection of fruit trees, is an old man, who lives on this lone key, in blessed solitude. He is said to have made a fortune by his Oranges and fruits. Perhaps it would be well to state here, that this man is a bachelor, and would like to have some of the ladies pay him a visit, so that, his fine Orchard, and fortune, may not be lost to the world. It has been estimated to be eighteen males to one female, in Florida, therefore every bachelor should be brought to light and made to fulfill his part in taking care of the females. This one has lived so long in perfect solitude, unless some lady takes advantage of the privilege which Leap Year allows, I fear he will never be brought to a proper sense of his duty.

Pardon me, Mr. Editor, for this digression and I will now go with my subject. The next largest Island is Cynabyl, which is near mouth of the Caloosehatchee river. This Island furnishes a great quantity of Button-wood, which is used a great deal for cooking purposes, in Key West , and it is also much used by the government steamers. There is no one living on this Island, except wood cutters, as it is impossible for any one to live there, who has a family with them, on account of Musquitoes, which are so numerous, it is almost "one of the impossibilities" to rest at all. There are a great number of Palmetto Cabbage trees growing here The bud of this tree preserved the life of a great many persons during the late war. It was on this Isle that a man was left, during the war and who lived on the bud of the Cabbage twenty-four days. From Cynabyl, west, is Uzeppa, here was a Refugee bivouac, during the whole of the

war and the size of the grave-yard will testify to the dreadful mortality which prevailed amongst that unfortunate class. In a uncommon degree they were called upon to part with their loved ones. About three miles from Uzeppa, is Mundungo or Tripe Island. The land here is very fertile, and it is a beautiful and romantic spot. Seagrape, Sugar-apple, Papaw &c., abound here as well as a great many young Cocoanut trees. Here lives an Italian family, and a more hospitable and interesting family would be hard to find. All these Islands are high and never overflow, which makes them a safe and delightful place to spend the summer months. Large vessels can get within ten feet of almost any of them. I think the day may not be far distant, when stately and beautiful summer residences will be built by some of our wealthy citizens, upon some of these ocean bound mounds. From Mundungo, northeast, we will find Cape Hays, and Peas Creek. – There are two wharves being built, for the purpose of shipping cattle. One on the north by Messrs. Alderman & Co., and one on the south side, by M. Summerlin. – There are many good settlements on both sides of the river, near the wharves, and at no distant dry there will be a town at both places. Further up the river, Mr. Hughes is building a saw mill, which will no doubt make a handsome fortune, for the owner, as it is a convenient place, for both Cypress, and Pine, and well situated for shipping to market. All along the banks of the river as we go up, we see beautiful places for building, until we come to Ft. Winder, here we find a store, kept by Mr. DeCosta, who keeps everything needed by the country people, from a paper of pins to ploughs &c. This seems to be an excellent place for building a town, but as yet there is only one or two families living there. We need not follow the river any further up, for no large vessel can go any further than Ft. Winder. We will leave the rest of Peas Creek, to be described by some abler pen than ours. So predicting a brilliant future for Peas Creek, with its beautiful vine-walled banks we will close our brief letter.

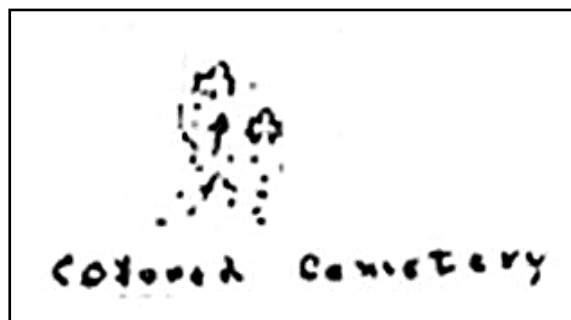
Respectfully,
TRAVELLER.

The settlement of Hickory Bluff began to grow with families primarily engaged in fishing and farming. The need for more farmable lands for crops and citrus groves meant that outlying areas had to be cleared of scrub and saw palmetto and these additions to the original Hickory Bluff area were surveyed.

Discovery of the pioneer cemetery at Hickory Bluff

The first and most likely only early mention of a burial ground was when local settler, William Curry platted his May 12, 1886, Addition to Hickory Bluff. Local surveyor, Kelley B. Harvey labeled the burying ground as the “Colored Cemetery” and drew what looks like the outline of 3 crosses and one drawn cross.

Researcher’s speculation: if the ground only contained one or even two graves - it probably wouldn’t be labeled as a cemetery. He specifically drew multiple crosses which could be interpreted to indicate multiple burials were in existence during the time of the survey.



Cemetery as drawn on the plat map by Kelly B. Harvey, dated May 12, 1886.

1888 - Description of Hickory Bluff – John Bartholf’s pamphlet "South Florida, The Italy of America"

This place is located on a ridge of pine, scrub and light hammock growth, extending about four miles immediately on the water, and is characterized for its healthfulness, entire absence of malarial, or other local cause for disease, adaptability of soil to the culture of the semi-tropical and many of the tropical fruits; also, for farming and gardening purposes. It is the head of deep water navigation, the depth of water being about twelve feet, and, being a land-locked harbor, is safe from the disagreeable and injurious effects of a more exposed situation, which operates very materially in its favor as locality for the cultivation of the orange and other trees of the citrus family, which, by reason of their thorny nature, need a protected location. It must not be inferred that the wind does not blow hard here sometimes; but where does it not? And we say thank God for it and its live-giving influence, bringing to us, as it does, the flavor of Old Ocean, away down the bay, twenty miles from our shores, and dispelling every taint of miasma or debilitating influence that lurks in the surrounding atmosphere.

The settlement of Hickory Bluff comprises about one dozen families, its store, post office, church, and school house. There are several new and handsome private residences, which would reflect credit upon any locality. In addition, is an extensive cattle wharf, from which load after load of fine beef cattle is annually shipped to Cuba.

As a resort for invalids, and pressure-seekers who are content with natural pleasures-such as the vast forest prairies, and vast expanse of water teeming with fish, oysters and turtle; birds of all kinds and descriptions; clams, the finest kinds; and the attractions of natural scenery, the most gorgeous sunset and moonlight views on the water-a residence at Hickory Bluff cannot be excelled by any other point in South Florida.

Present day description of the pioneer cemetery at Hickory Bluff

The pioneer cemetery is very small, only 4,050 sq ft (.093 acres) and is reported to contain 14 known graves. The cemetery is located 5 ft off the west side of Rowland Drive, 365 ft north of Harbor View Road in Port Charlotte, and is just 1,530 feet north from the shore of Charlotte Harbor. The Hickory Bluff Cemetery is well maintained by Charlotte County, and is bordered by a 4 ft high white PVC fence that surrounds the property. As of January 2016, there are no signs onsite to identify the property. The only identifying features that would prove the fact that it is a cemetery are three flat concrete grave covers laying on the ground and are located near the far side of the graveyard.



U.S. Cleveland and Bernice Russell uncovering a grave marker in the “Colored Cemetery” now known as the Hickory Bluff Cemetery.

Photo by Lindsey Williams

(Source: [Our Fascinating Past Charlotte Harbor: Early Years](#), by Lindsey Williams and U.S. Cleveland, p. 63)

Lindsey Williams and U.S. Cleveland's book, Our Fascinating Past Charlotte Harbor: Early Years, describes the cemetery:

Mrs. Russell, U.S. Cleveland and your writer located the family cemetery of James B. Roberts, son of July Roberts, on Harbor View Road where Esther Lowman is buried. July Roberts may be buried in the Black burial ground now obscured.

In 1993, the Charlotte County Genealogical Society described the Hickory Bluff Cemetery in their publication entitled: Lt. Carl A. Bailey Memorial Cemetery & Other Early "Black" Burials Charlotte County Florida. The CCGS was perhaps the first group that compiled all known information on the cemetery and those individuals interred there.

Early African American burials

The cemetery dates back to as early as at least the year 1886. Who could be those early burials within this cemetery?

There were some early black settlers with families that lived in the Hickory Bluff area. When Nathan DeCoster mustered out of the Union Army at Key West he had plans to establish his residence along the banks of the Peace River. He hired four former black soldiers who had served with him at Fort Myers. They assisted to assist him in setting up and operating his steam sawmill. The soldiers were:

John Lowman

A former Union private who was born about 1847 in the District of Columbia. He married 15 year old Easter Knight (on May 3, 1867, in Manatee County by Justice of the Peace, E.E. Mizell). Easter had been a former slave. According to the 1860 slave Census, Easter Knight was one of seven slaves that area cattleman Jesse Knight owned. They included: Easter age 8, an older sister age 10, a brother age 5, a brother age 3 and a baby sister age 1, along with their mother, age 25 and an older male age 50. John was a laborer who worked for the early settlers, especially Nathan DeCoster. John and Easter had fifteen children of which only four lived to maturity.

It is certainly possible that the Lowman children who died in infancy could have been interred in the Hickory Bluff Cemetery. John and Easter lived the rest of their lives in the Hickory Bluff area. John reportedly died in 1899 at the age of 59. The location of his burial is not known. He was either buried in the Hickory Bluff Cemetery or another unnamed burial ground for African Americans near where the sawmill was located, close to Live Oak Point. In her later years, Easter moved to Ft Myers to live with her family until her death on April 18, 1931. She was brought back and buried in Hickory Bluff Cemetery along with other members of her family.

Joseph Chapman

A former Union soldier who was born about 1825 in South Carolina. Joseph was a laborer and a farmer who was a next door neighbor to Nathan DeCoster and his family. Joseph was married to Rachel, also from South Carolina. They had one daughter and could have had other children who may have died and were buried in Hickory Bluff Cemetery. By the 1880 Census the Chapman family had moved on.

Richard Hambleton

Reportedly a former Union soldier, he may have been considered contraband, a former slave that was freed by the Union. There were two Hambletons who had ties to the Knight family in Hillsborough County. In the 1860 Census George Hambleton had 13 slaves and James Hambleton had 7 slaves. Richard was probably a slave of James Hambleton. Richard married Hannah, and they lived and farmed

in Hickory Bluff. They started their family in 1868 with a son, Thomas. They had moved on by the 1880 Census.

Mitchell Harrison

Also reportedly a former Union soldier who came to the Hickory Bluff area to settle and farm. He was from Georgia. He and his wife Lucy had two small children when they came to the area. They had also moved on by the 1880 Census.

Other early African American settlers

Anderson McCauley

Anderson and his wife Mary, both from Georgia, came to live in the Hickory Bluff area where they took up farming. They were both young (in their early 20s in 1870) and most likely had children while living in the area.

July Roberts

Another early African American settler was July Roberts. He was probably born into slavery in 1852 Florida. July may have been a contraband at Fort Myers since he was found to be living with fellow former Fort Myer soldier, Francis Ivey. July picked up work as a farm laborer around Hickory Bluff. He married Tiner Griffin (also spelled "Tenah") a previously married woman with a 3 year old son. They raised their family in the Hickory Bluff area, working at farming and fishing.

And in 1876 there were a few other African American inhabitants of Hickory Bluff, "Old Joe," George and Fanny and their infant baby. (Their last names are unknown).

The Hickory Bluff cemetery remained in use even after the Colored Cemetery, (later called the Cleveland Cemetery, and today known as the Lt Carl Bailey Cemetery) came into use in the late 1880s. Carl Bailey Cemetery became the main burying grounds of early African Americans probably because it was located on the south bank of the river where the railroad tracks brought progress. The towns of Cleveland and Trabue (later renamed Punta Gorda) were to grow and bring necessary jobs. The railroad opened the lands on the south bank of the river and doomed the small community of Hickory Bluff.

Known burials in the cemetery

In the February 24, 1984, edition of the Daily Herald, staff writer David Flechsig interviewed the caretaker of the cemetery, Dan C. Smith, Jr., age 77. Dan Smith stated there were fourteen people buried in the cemetery. The active years of burials was over 39 years, from 1908 – 1947. In order of burial, the known interred are:

George Roberts	1878 - 1908
Centhia Coleman	Abt 1877 – by 1910
George Lowman	Abt 1874 - 1911
Jordan Roberts	1882 - 1923

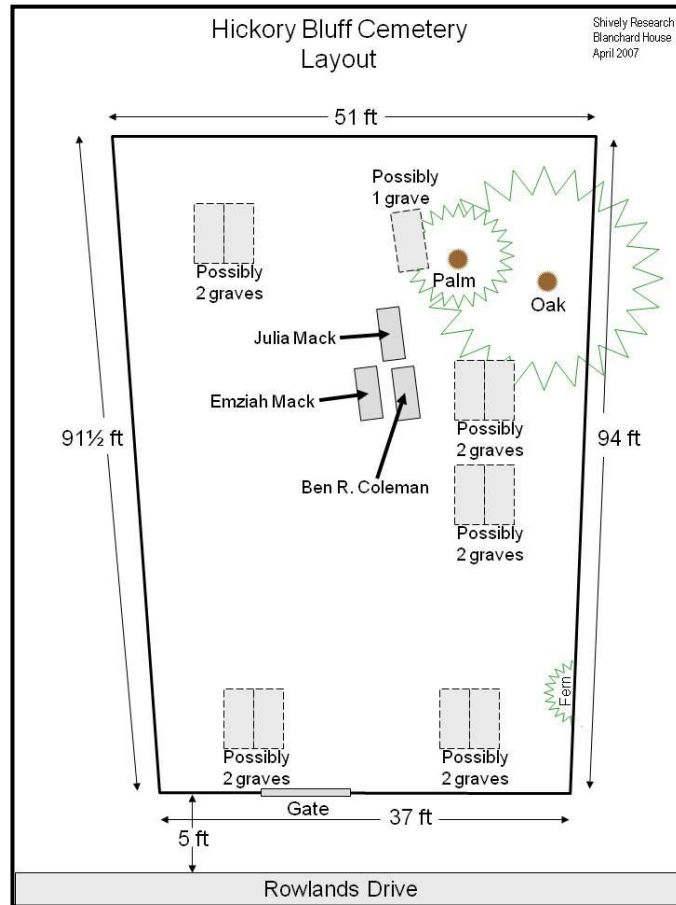
James Roberts	Abt 1872 - 1925
Lewis Roberts	1875 - 1931
Easter Lowman	1852 - 1931
Victoria Gator	1869 - 1941
Emesiah Mack	Abt 1873 - 1943
Ben R. Coleman	Abt 1866 - 1944
Stephen Gator	1873 - 1946
Julia Mack	Abt 1895 - 1947
Glorene Owens	
George Wetherbee	



The only three marked graves in Hickory Bluff Cemetery. (Photo by Scot Shively, taken: Feb 3, 2007)
 (Graves, left: **Emziah Mack**, right: **Ben R. Coleman**, rear: **Julia Mack**)

Hickory Bluff Cemetery Field Trip - 2007

In April 2007, a field trip to the cemetery was conducted to attempt to locate the unmarked graves. The method I used was simply depression location. Disturbed soil will settle or compress once the wood plank cover and the wooden casket collapses and decays. Early burials most typically utilized wooden boards as the cover over the open dirt or brick lined grave. Unless the cemetery caretaker mounds the soil over the grave or fills in the slight depressions over time the graves will develop a noticeable depression. From feeling the depressions in the cemetery I created a map of where the unmarked graves may be located.



Hickory Bluff Cemetery Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) Survey - 2015

Charlotte County Public Works surveyors brought a new GPR unit to the Hickory Bluff Cemetery to attempt to locate the precise locations of the eleven known burials not marked by concrete tomb slabs. The GPR survey was conducted on September 15, 2015, by county surveyors (Steve Ford and Robert Carson). The entire area inside the fence was surveyed; however the GPR survey was unable to determine any changes in the ground and therefore no graves were located.

There are any numbers of reasons why the GPR was unable to locate individual graves. The most likely is probably due to the fact the ground was composed of wet sand. Also the surface layer of the entire area had been disturbed when the property was cleared of its overgrowth of trees, bushes, weeds and saw palmetto. There are a number of correct sized depressions within the fence; however the exact locations of the individual graves will probably never be identifiable.

Hickory Bluff Cemetery Historical Marker

Hickory Bluff Cemetery is the last county owned historic cemetery to have a marker dedicated. The marker was approved and ordered on August 14, 2015. The newly formed, local chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of American Revolution, the Hickory Bluff Chapter raised the funds to sponsor and purchase the historical marker. The marker dedication was on February 24, 2016, 129 years after the land was platted around the site.

(The Marker)

Hickory Bluff Cemetery

The Hickory Bluff Cemetery was established in the late 1800s, adjacent to land purchased on June 2, 1884 by July Roberts, an early African-American settler. Initial burials began following the Civil War when freed African-Americans settled in the area and engaged in farming and fishing. William Curry, an early white landowner added to the original plot and recorded a “colored cemetery” already in existence. Burial records prior to 1908 are undocumented; however, the last cemetery caretaker recorded fourteen known burials between the years 1908 and the final interment in 1947. The cemetery is now owned and maintained by Charlotte County.

Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners, 2015

Biographical Data:

Names of those (in **boldface**) who are known (*remembered*) by Dan Smith Jr. to be buried in the cemetery.

July Roberts

B: about 1852 in Florida

D: by 1899 in Florida

Tiner (Baines, Griffin) Roberts

B: February 1848 in Florida

D: probably by 1900 in Florida

July Roberts was probably born into slavery in 1852 Florida. July may have been a contraband at Fort Myers since he was found to be living with fellow former Fort Myer soldier, Francis Ivey. July picked up work as a farm laborer around Hickory Bluff.

July married Tiner Griffin (also spelled “Tenah”) on Dec 1, 1874, in Manatee County by Justice of the Peace, Nathan DeCoster. She was a previously married woman with a 3 year old son.

Tiner was born a slave in Florida in Feb 1848. Tiner’s last name was Bains (probably Baines). The only slaveowner named “Baines” in the 1860 Florida was James Baines, a cotton plantation owner in Leon County, Florida. Tiner may have been a slave on the Baines’ cotton plantation.

Before she married July Roberts, Tiner Baines married Francis Griffin on November 3, 1866, in Manatee County by Justice of the Peace, Francis C. M. Boggess (a former Confederate soldier). They had a son, James B. Griffin who was born in March 1871.

July and Tiner had six more children in addition to James B.:

James B. Robert	born: March 1871, probably in Manatee County, Florida
Lewis H. Roberts	born: about 1875 in Manatee County, Florida
George W. Roberts	born: about 1877 in Manatee County, Florida
Mary A. Roberts	born: 1880 in Manatee County, Florida
(Albert) Jordan Roberts	born: May 11, 1882 in Manatee County, Florida
Rosella Roberts	born: December 1883 in Manatee County, Florida
Rebecca	born: April 1886 in Manatee County, Florida

July and Tiner raised their family in the Hickory Bluff area, spending some time in Pine Level at farming. At Hickory Bluff they worked at farming and fishing. July Roberts had died by 1899 because on the DeSoto Co. Tax rolls have listed his lands as "Estate of July Roberts." Tiner had also probably died by 1900 since there are no records of her after that year. Their children remained in the northern Charlotte Harbor/Hickory Bluff area. July and Tiner Roberts are very likely buried in the Hickory Bluff Cemetery.

James Roberts (son of July and Tiner Roberts)

B: March 1871 in Florida
D: 22 November 1925

Loretta (Fleming) Roberts

B: about 1875-81, Lake City, Columbia County, Florida
D: September 2, 1920, at Gadsden County, Florida – buried in Florida State Hospital Cemetery at Chattahoochee, (Cemetery 3, Division 3, Row 3, no stone)

James B. Roberts (he may have actually been a son to Frank Griffin) was born March 1871, probably in Manatee County. He was 3 years old when his mother Tiner married July Roberts. James married Loretta (or Lueretta) Fleming on July 20, 1905, in DeSoto County. Loretta Fleming was born in Lake City, Columbia County, Florida. By 1910, James was a fisherman and he and his family lived in Punta Gorda. By 1920, they lived on Virginia Ave. in Punta Gorda, he was a gill net fisherman. In 1920 Loretta was sent to the State Hospital at Chattahoochee where she died and was buried.

James and Loretta had six known children:

Cyntha Roberts	born: about 1903 in Florida
Albert Roberts	born: about 1905 in Florida
Lillie May Roberts	born: about 1911 in Florida
Idel Roberts	born: about 1912 in Florida
Albertha Roberts	born: about 1914 in Florida
Emanuel Roberts	born: about 1917 in Florida

Lewis Henry Roberts (son of July and Tiner Roberts)

B: March 7, 1875 in Hickory Bluff, Florida
D: July 10, 1931, Charlotte Co. (Florida Death Index lists Lewis as "buried in Arcadia")

Eula (Dorsey) Roberts

B: about 1894 in Georgia
D: unknown

Lewis Henry married Eula Dorsey on July 4, 1910 in DeSoto County. By 1920 he was listed as a widow. No known children. In 1910 Lewis was a boarder with Easter Lowman and in 1920 he was a gill net fisherman living on Virginia Ave. in Punta Gorda.

George W. Roberts (son of July and Tiner Roberts)

B: about 1877 to May 1878 in Florida

D: August 9, 1908, Punta Gorda, DeSoto County, Florida

According to his obituary, George never married.

Obituary posted in the Punta Gorda Herald – 13 August 1908 (page 5)

George Roberts, an industrious and popular colored man 30 years old, died of paralysis on Sunday night and was buried next day with Masonic honors at his former home at Charlotte Harbor. He was stricken with paralysis about a week before his death, this being the second attack. He was unmarried, but leaves three brothers and three sisters to mourn his loss.

(Albert) Jordan Roberts (son of July and Tiner Roberts)

Born: 11 May 1882 in Florida

Died: 12 Feb 1923, Punta Gorda, Charlotte County, Florida

Julia (Coleman) Roberts

Born: about 1894 in Florida

Died: 1947, Charlotte County, Florida

Albert Roberts married Julia Coleman on July 1, 1909, in DeSoto County. Witnesses to the marriage were James Roberts (Albert's brother) and Ben Coleman (Julia's father). In 1900 Albert was working as a day laborer in Charlotte Harbor. In 1910 he was a fisherman in Punta Gorda and in 1920 he was a gill net fisherman in Punta Gorda and Julia was a washerwoman.

Albert and Julia had two known children:

Mary Roberts born: Dec 1909 in Punta Gorda, Florida

Frances Roberts born: about 1910 in Punta Gorda, Florida

John Lowman

Born: about 1847 in the District of Columbia

Died: 1899 (as reported by Bernice Russell), probably Hickory Buff

A Union soldier who served in the 2nd United States Colored Troops, stationed at Fort Myers during the Civil War. Following the war he made his way from Key West to Hickory Bluff. He came with 4 other black soldiers and his white officer, Nathan DeCoster in 1866, to establish a saw mill in the vicinity of Hickory Bluff.

Easter (Knight) Lowman

Born: about 1852, Hillsborough County, Florida

Died: April 18, 1931 at her daughter's house in Ft. Myers, Lee County, Florida

Easter Knight's name has been found to be "Easter" and "Esther". I would speculate that she was named Easter because she was likely born on or around Easter.

Easter Knight was born into slavery about 1852, in Hillsborough County, Florida. At the time, her mother was the only slave owned by Jesse Knight. Jesse, his brother Joel and their father Samuel Knight, were cattle ranchers in the Ichebuchesassa community in the 1850s. Jesse Knight married Rebecca Varn, daughter of Frederick Varn, a wealthy cattleman in Hillsborough County. Andrew Varn was a slave of Frederick Varn. Easter Knight's death certificate lists her father as Andrew Varn, but her mother's name was not listed. Following the Civil War the Knights moved to Manatee County seeking better pasture lands for their cattle. Easter's emancipation probably found her in Manatee County, Florida where she initially followed the Knight family.

John Lowman married Easter Knight on May 3, 1867, in Manatee County by Justice of the Peace, E.E. Mizell.

John had served as a voter registrar for Manatee County in 1867 and 1868. He served as a juror in Manatee County on November 14, 1868. John and Easter have been found in Pine Level but mainly lived and worked in Hickory Bluff. John was employed as a laborer and Easter took care of their children and tended house. John Lowman's date of death is uncertain but local historian, Bernice Russell of Punta Gorda, listed his death in 1899, at age 59. In 1910 Easter was living and working as a laundress in Punta Gorda. Later she moved to Ft. Myers to live with her daughter, Evelyn Fulton. She died April 18, 1931 (age 79) in her daughter's house on Price Avenue. She was buried in the Hickory Bluff Cemetery on April 20, 1931.

John and Easter Lowman were reported to have had 15 children. Only 5 are known to have reached maturity.

John and Easter's known children:

Mary N.E. Lowman	born: about 1868
Tony Lowman	born: about 1870
Francis Victoria Lowman	born: about 1872
George Thomas Lowman	born: about 1874
Cinderella Lowman	born: about 1877
Berta Lowman	born: about 1883

George Thomas Lowman (son of John and Easter Lowman)

B: about 1874 in Florida

D: May 23, 1911, in DeSoto County, Florida

Rosa (Rosella Roberts) Lowmanus

B: December 1883 in Florida

D: unknown

George Lowman married Rosa Roberts on June 30, 1902, in DeSoto County. In the 1910 Census, George was a fisherman and the family lived in Punta Gorda. They had a son, Lucius, who was born in June 1909. George died May 23, 1911, leaving his wife and infant son alone.

George and Rosa had one known child:

Lucius Lowman	born: June 1909 in Punta Gorda, DeSoto County, Florida
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Benjamin Russell Coleman

Born: December 7, 1866, West Point, Mississippi

Died: 1944 in Punta Gorda, Florida

Victoria (Lowman) Coleman

Born: about 1872 in Manatee County, Florida

Died: unknown, probably by 1893

Benjamin Russell Coleman was born to father Allen Coleman, and mother Sally Hamilton, in West Point, Mississippi. Benjamin married Victoria Lowman on November 10, 1887, at Pine Level, in DeSoto County, Florida by Justice of the Peace, J. B. Thomas.

Ben and Victoria had one known child:

Julia Coleman born: about 1889 in DeSoto County, Florida

Victoria either died or they were divorced. Benjamin then married Victoria's sister, Cynthia Lowman. They married on February 17, 1893 in Arcadia, DeSoto County, Florida.

Cynthia (Lowman) Coleman

Born: May 1877 in Florida

Died: unknown (probably by the 1910 Census, Ben is listed as a widower)

Ben and his second wife, Cynthia had three known children:

Annie M. Coleman born: April 1895

Bessie Coleman born: about 1902

Cynthia Coleman born: September 15, 1904 Hickory Bluff, DeSoto County, Florida

She died: December 3, 1922

Cynthia Coleman may have died or she and Ben were divorced by 1910. The 1910 Census listed Benjamin as a widower. He married his third wife, Pauline about 1910, no known children.

Pauline (maiden name unknown)

Born: about 1894 in Florida

Died: unknown

Ben worked as a fisherman and Pauline was a beautician in Punta Gorda who operated her own shop. In 1940 they lived on Milus Street in Punta Gorda. Benjamin died in 1944 in Punta Gorda, Florida.

Stephen C. Gater

Born: February 15, 1872, The Bahamas

Died: May 4, 1946, Charlotte County, Florida

Victoria (Monroe) Gater

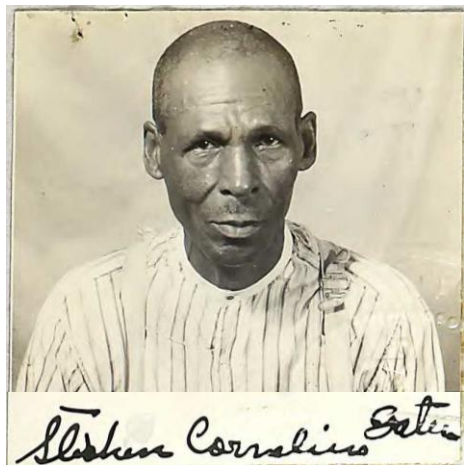
Born: July or October 1869, The Bahamas

Died: March 11, 1941, Charlotte County, Florida

Stephen Cornelius Gater was born in Ruin Cayman (Nassau), Bahamas Island on February 15, 1872. He was the son of Julius Gater and Rachel (Strachan) Gater. The last name has been found spelled both

Gater and Gaitor; the federal immigration documents that Stephen filed spell the last name as Gater, local sources spelled the name Gaitor.

He came to the United States on the Steamship Ozama, arriving at Key West, Florida in March 1890 seeking permanent residence. Stephen lived in Key West where he met and married his wife Victoria Monroe.



Victoria was born in Nassau, British West Indies in October 1869, and had immigrated with her family in 1885.

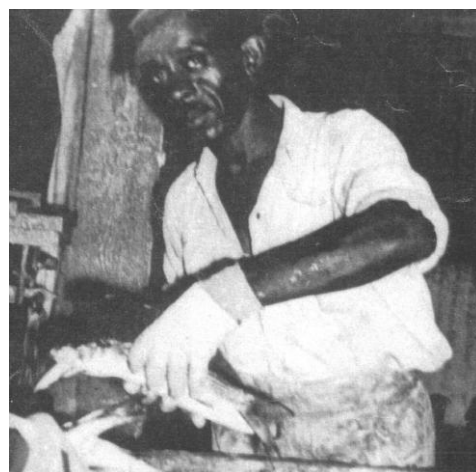
Stephen and Victoria were married on January 31, 1900 at Key West Florida. They lived with Victoria's mother, Mary Monroe, a nurse who lived on Fort Street. The Gaters came to Punta Gorda, Florida by 1910.

They purchased property in Punta Gorda on Block 40, Lot 25 (north corner of Wood St. and E. Virginia Ave) and lived in a one story house located on the corner at Block 41, Lot 25 (north corner of Nesbit St. and E. Virginia Ave). Stephen was a laborer and an oyster fisherman. Stephen was known as the fastest oyster opener in the county. They owned a small oyster house in Punta Gorda. Stephen and Victoria attended St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church where they both sang in the choir. They both appeared on the 1924 Punta Gorda register of electors.

They did not have any children, however they raised a boy named Andrew Owens. He was born about 1905 in Florida, the son of a widow named Florence Owens. Andrew married Willie Lee Harris in Charlotte County, on July 23, 1928. His nickname was "Mullet" and he worked down at the fish docks. Andrew and Willie Lee only had one known child, Howard Owens.

Stephen Gater petitioned to become a citizen of the United States on March 13, 1940 in the U.S. District Court in Tampa.

Victoria died March 11, 1941, in Punta Gorda, Florida. Stephen died on Saturday, May 4, 1946, in Punta Gorda. His funeral arrangements were handled by Sears Funeral Home at 208 East Anderson Ave in Fort Myers.



Andrew "Mullet" Owens

His will appointed Mrs. Mary Baker, second wife of Principal Benjamin Baker as his executrix. This only property was his house on PG Block 41, Lot 25, the north corner of Nesbit St. and E. Virginia Ave.

Andrew and Willie Lee Owens only child, Howard Owens was lost in an accident.

19 Jul 1945 – Punta Gorda Herald

TRAIN KILLS TWO COLORED YOUTHS

Hit Section Car Saturday When Victims Were On Way Home

Howard Owens, 20, and Charles Haines, 15, both colored, were killed Saturday afternoon at about 3:30 o'clock, when the section foreman's motor driven workers' car, on which they were riding, was hit and demolished by the northbound freight train on the Seaboard railroad as it rounded the first curve north of the trestle crossing Shell creek. Foreman N. F. Pittman, who with Frank (Junk) Blake and Dan Clark, two others of his colored workers, was riding on the driver's seat, escaped injury by jumping when he saw the train right on them. Blake and Clark also escaped with their lives by jumping, but the latter sustained a broken finger, sprained ankle and leg injury and was taken to the hospital in Arcadia for treatment. Blake was not injured. The section crewmen had been to Hull to get paid off and were coming south on their way home. They ran into a downpour of rain so heavy that it obscured their vision and hearing. Owens and Haines, on the after part of the car, were trying to keep dry under a canvas paulin, and could not hear or see the train so well as the others. Assumption is that if they heard the foreman's shout to jump they thought he was simply talking to Blake, calling him by his nickname of Junk, as was the practice of all the crew. Owens and Haines were badly mangled. Owens lived probably an hour after the crash, Haines only about five minutes. With the clearing of the track and removal of the damaged cowcatcher from the locomotive, which was accomplished by the engineer and fireman, assisted by Foreman Pittman and Blake, Clark and Owens, the latter not yet dead, and the body of Haines were placed in the caboose, and the train proceeded on to Arcadia. Owens died just as he reached the hospital. Howard Owens was the only son of Andrew and Willie Mae Owens; and Charles Haines was the youngest of the eight children of Willie and Annie Mae Haines two of whose sons are in the armed services of the United States. Funeral services for young Owens were held yesterday afternoon in the CME Methodist church, with burial in the cemetery at Cleveland. Rites for the Haines boy will be held Sunday in the primitive Baptist church of which his father is the pastor. Both of the dead boys stood well with the white people as well as with members of their own race.

Who was Glorene Owens?

Glorene Owens

There has been no Glorene Owens found in any county or state records. However, there are two likely explanations for who Glorene Owens was and why she is buried in the cemetery:

- 1) Glorene Owens may have been an infant daughter of Andrew and Willie Owens. If so, based off the ages of her parents, she could have been born and then died between 1930 and 1935.
- 2) Glorene Owens was actually Florence Owens, Andrew Owens' mother. Florence and Andrew were listed in the 1920 Census as living on Washington Ave, in Punt Gorda. Florence was a cook for a private family and 13 year old Andrew was working odd jobs at a hotel. There are only a few letters difference between Glorene and Florence and a misspelling of the name may occurred.

Florence Owens

B: about 1891 in Florida

D: unknown, after 1930

George Wetherbee (also spelled Weathersbee and Weathersby)

B:

D:

Nothing has been found for George Weatherbee.

Emesiah Mack

Born: about 1873 in South Carolina

D: in 1943, Charlotte County, Florida

Julia (Coleman, Roberts) Mack

B: February 1889 in DeSoto County, Florida

D: 1947, Charlotte County, Florida

Emesiah Mack's first name has been a challenge. It has been spelled differently on every record. I would guess that he was named after the Biblical name "Amaziah" meaning the strength of the Lord. Emesiah Mack was born about 1873 in South Carolina. And in 1900 was living with his wife Nellie in Harleesville, Dillon County, South Carolina. Nellie was born about 1881 in South Carolina. Emesiah and Nellie were married about 1902 in South Carolina. The marriage was Emesiah's first and Nellie's second.

Emesiah and Nellie had three known children:

Nathaniel Mack born about 1901 in Florida

Mary Mack born about 1905 in Florida

Eunice Mack born about 1906 in Florida

In 1910 they were living in Punta Gorda, Florida. Emesiah was working as a laborer for a turpentine company, and Nellie was a laundress for a family. By 1920 Emesiah, was *listed* as a widower and was listed as a farm laborer.

However, in 1930, Nellie had remarried and was living in Jefferson County, Alabama under the name Nellie Dorsey. She was listed as a widow and was living with her daughter, Eunice Mack.

In the 1930 Census for Punta Gorda, Emesiah is living as a boarder with Julia Roberts, widow of **(Albert) Jordan Roberts** (who died in February 1923), with her daughter Frances and son Lorenzo. Emesiah was 14 years older than Julia.

Emesiah Mack married Julia (Coleman) Roberts on July 10, 1932 in Charlotte County, Florida by Rev. D. W. Wardell. Emesiah Mack died in 1943 and Julia Mack died in 1947.



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