

[Mrs. John L. (Margaret Pearson) Hall]

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Mrs. John L. Hall

(Margaret Pearson)

544 Dellwood Avenue,

Jacksonville, Florida.

Rose Shepherd, Writer.

MRS. JOHN L. (MARGARET PEARSON) HALL

MULBERRY GROVE PLANTATION

Mrs. Hall was interview at her home, 544 Dellwood Avenue, and seemed eager to talk about the old Mulberry Grove Plantation, site of the proposed Naval Air-Base in the Orange Park section, extending almost to the Clay County line.

"I was born there in 1883, and lived there until I was about eight years of age.

"My grandfather, Arthur M. Reed, settled there in the latter part of the War between the States, at a time when there was danger of bombardment by the Federal gunboats then in the harbor."

She handed me a copy of the Jacksonville Journal, dated October 11, 1930, on the front page of which is the following:

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“Lots of this would be just so much Paper today,

But once here it was Genuine Money.

(Illustration of a \$5.00 note issued by Bank of St. Johns October in 1859).

“Keep Jacksonville Money in Jacksonville was a slogan in 1858 even as it is now. This ancient bill of the Bank of St. Johns demonstrates it.

“NOTE: This is another of a series of historical novelties prepared by Journal writers with assistance of Florida Historical Society.

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“Today in Jacksonville the phrase Bank of St. Johns means just some of the land along the river, but back in 1858 it meant one of the city's modern and substantial banking establishments.

“The bank was first organized in 1858 by A. M. Reed. It stood at Bay and Ocean Streets, and just behind it was his home, where the Palace Theatre now sits.

“The bill shown above was issued by Mr. Reed's bank. After the Civil War the bank was closed. During its lifetime many bills were issued under its name, just as is done by banks today. But every bill that was offered to the president for redemption after his bank was closed was taken in at face value by him, and paid for out of his personal fortune.

“Only three such bills as the one produced above are said to exist. The one above was saved by a Jaxon as a souvenir.

“It is unique, therefore, not only because of its intricate design, but also because of its scarcity. Not that five-dollar bills are ever plentiful, but the bills are almost as extinct as the famous dodo.

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“The energetic little steam engine shown on this bill is especially significant, because the bank held a considerable amount of bonds of the Florida, Atlantic and Gulf Central Railroad, the first railroad built into Jacksonville.

“Jacksonville's first bank was called the Bank of Jacksonville. It opened in 1837 and had a fine reputation in 1839 when suddenly the president disappeared. He left \$132 on hand for the public and stockholders to fight over. The St. Augustine paper headline writer had quite a lot of excitement in his paper that day. His headline said: ‘Bank Mystery! President is Flown!’”

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Mrs Hall continued: “My grandfather was a native of Connecticut, and my grandmother Harriet (Douglas) Reed was a daughter of Judge Thomas Douglas, also a native of Connecticut, who settled in St. Augustine in 1826. My great-grandfather Douglas was appointed as Judge of the Supreme Court of Florida in 1826 by John Quincy Adams, then President of the United States, and served in this office for nineteen years, being reappointed by three successive Presidents.

“Here is Judge Douglas' Autobiography,” she said, presenting a small volume bound in red leather with gold lettering. “He started writing it, and after his death it was completed and published by his family.

“In addition to the bank, grandfather Reed also operated a mercantile establishment, but I do not know just where it was located.

“He felt that his family were in imminent danger, when the Federal gunboats arrived in the harbor at Jacksonville in 1862, and retired to this old plantation with his family, out of the war zone.

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“I have /heard a Colonel or Captain Hicks mentioned as the immediate predecessor, and before him the land was part of the McIntosh grant. It comprised considerably more than fourteen hundred acres. It was a grand old place as I remember it during my early childhood.

“The large house faced east along the St. Johns River, which runs almost due south to north there. It was a frame, two-story structure, 4 painted white, with a red tin roof. A long wide porch ran the full length of the front, and around to the south.

“A wide hall ran through the middle of the house. On one side was a large living room, a dining room, also a smaller room used as a sitting room. On the other side, were two large bedrooms and a bathroom. There was an artesian well on the place, which furnished running water in the bathroom.

“The wide stairs ran up in the center of the hall, and there were two lovely bedrooms on this second floor, the back part being a storage room and attic.

“There was a door out of the dining room leading into a wide hall, off which was a locker or pantry, where supplies and linens were kept. The hall continued to the back of the house where was my grandfather's large library, off which was a back porch with steps leading down to a brick walk that ran to the little brick kitchen where the family cooking was done. There was never any work done in the house, nor meals cooked.

“Late one evening when my grandfather had first located on the place, two middle-aged Negroes with two little pickaninnies came drifting down the river in a rowboat and tied up at the landing. They were free Negroes, as the result of the Emancipation Act, and had no place to live. Grandfather Reed promptly hired them and they became an integral part of the plantation life—Uncle George and Aunt Nancy Reece—as we knew them. The little boys were named Abram and Zack. Afterwards four more were born on the place—Frank, Joe, Ike and Sam. They were all grown when I could first remember them.

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“Jack came into Jacksonville and learned the carpenter's trade, and he did all the building and kept up the repairs an the place.

“Abram attended to the cattle, attending to the milking and looking after the herd of beef cattle, which was rather large.

“Frank and Joe worked in the fields, in season, and Ike and Sam were house boys. They brought up the food from the kitchen on big trays and waited on table at all meals.

“Afterwards Aunt Nancy's sister, Clifford Brown and her husband, Cornalius Brown came to live on the place. Clifford was the laundress. Cornalius had charge of the stables, about a block went of the big house, in which were kept about ten horses and the mules used to do the farming. He also acted as coachman, driving the family carriage. I remember the first team was bays, then there was a perfectly matched pair of blacks, of which Cornelius took great care, brushing and currying them until their coats shone like black satin.

“Then there was Maria Lyles, a house servant for many years, and my grandmother's personal maid. When grandmother became old and feeble, Maria slept an a cot at the foot of her bed, and was with her day and night. Abram performed the same personal service for my grandfather Reed.

“The darkies (we were punished if we called them ‘nigger’) were all paid for their work. I do not know how much, but I know they were well taken care of. Some of the neighbors said they were spoiled and made pets of, but they all worked hard and certainly deserved what they were paid.

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“There was a two-room frame laundry away from the kitchen, and here, Eliza, who was Abram's wife and had only one eye, did the family laundry, assisted by Clifford. They had only old fashioned tubs and washboards, but they did wonderful work. In one of the rooms

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was a stove where they heated the water and boiled the clothes in the old time manner. The men's shirts were snowy white, the bosoms, some of which were tucked, and the attached collars and cuffs starched stiff and highly polished with their hot irons, heated on top of the stove.

“The women's and children's clothes were adorned with many ruffles, and these they fluted. It was fun to watch as they heated the rods red-hot, run them in the fluting-iron which was turned with a crank and the ruffle passed through.

“To the south of the house was a large flower garden, where there were many roses, geraniums, and the usual perennials of that time. My mother took care of the flowers. Another brick walk led down to the greenhouse, with its glass top, its bins for bulbs, and shelves for the geraniums and more tender plants.

“From the front porch a long avenue flanked by large oaks, intertwining overhead, and carpeted with St. Augustine grass led to the river about three hundred feet away. There were a few old mulberry trees scattered around, the remains of the silk-worm industry started many years before at St. Augustine. I presume this gave the name of the Old 'mulberry Grove Plantation' to the place, as it bore that name when my grandfather settled there.

“On the river at the end of the oak avenue was a long dock. River traffic was heavy then, and the boats used to land if we put up the flag 7 for the purpose of shipping freight into Jacksonville, and they would deliver orders of food, etc.

“Among these river boats were the 'Crescent City,' the 'Mary Draper,' the 'manatee,' and sometimes the 'three Friends,' would tie up at the dock. I remember one day, my brother, Reed Pearson, told me I might blow the whistle of the 'three Friends.' I was hardly eight, but I climbed aboard importantly, and seized the rope, giving it a stout yank. The whistle

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shrieked, and the rope came clamoring down behind as with a 'blam' that nearly scared the life out of me.

"In the boathouse under the docks my grandfather kept two boats—the 'John Perry' and the 'Fanny Perry' — four-oared rowboats in which he used to come to Jacksonville. In later years, when telephones came into use, there was a telephone in the house and also in the boathouse, and we used to telephone around over the place and the neighborhood, where 'phones had been installed.

"The brick walk ran around the house from the front door to the back yard, divided—one walk going to the greenhouse and the other to the kitchen, where old Aunt Nancy held sway. She did the cooking for everybody, the white folks at the big house, as well as for the darkies and field hands.

"There was another frame kitchen beyond the little brick kitchen, which was the quarters of Reece's.

"There was a stone smokehouse in the back yard, where a kind of commissary was kept. You see it was away out in the country and it was 9 ceiled room upstairs was kept the dried peas for the family use.

"I remember having great fun and running up and down the stairs of the old cotton house — it was alive with rats — and sometimes we would stage battles with them.

"There were chickens raised in great numbers, as well an other fowl — turkeys, ducks, geese, guineas — 'Potracking around — and later my brother had a few peafowls. Aunt Nancy used to pick the down from the breasts of geese and make down quilts. This process did not hurt the geese, as they shed the down anyway.

"Orange trees surrounded the place, and these took a lot of attention. Finally in the late 1880's a freeze killed the trees right down to the ground, and they were not replanted.

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In the early days quantities of oranges were gathered, packed and shipped from the old place. There were other fruit trees, too; pears, peaches, plums, also strawberries, and blackberries. Under the old kitchen where Uncle George and Aunt Nancy and their family lived was a big cellar, and here was stored the surplus fruits which had been canned, or made into preserves and jellies. This was kept locked at all times.

“Enormous trees were all around — live oaks, water oaks, tall pines and palms, and the few mulberry trees, too, were immense. They were filled with birds — mockingbirds, redbirds, jays, sparrows — their chatter was incessant, and nobody thought of harming them or shooting them.

“Beyond the mulberry trees and up in the oats field was a large Indian camp and burying ground, quite large and high and overlooking the river.

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A representative of the Smithsonian Institution did some excavating there and found twenty-four bodies down deep in the ground. There was the remains of the old sort of fireplace deep underground, and the skeletons were all around that, arranged in a circle with their head towards the hearth. The skeletons, as I remember, were of enormous size.

“We had great fun with the Negroes, the pickaninnies of Clifford and Cornelius, Eliza and Abram, and I never remember having been punished for associating with them. They all loved us and we loved them, just as if they were a part of the family. After supper we used to tear down to the old kitchen, where Aunt Nancy and Uncle George would play with us. I never remember of them telling us any stories of any kind. They seldom sang any songs, but they did hum a great deal, suiting the rhythm to their work.

“Old Uncle George died in that old kitchen, and after Aunt Nancy got too feeble to work, she went to live with one of her sons who had married and lived in a cabin in the woods nearby.

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“Grandfather and grandmother were great souls, and were wonderfully good to us. We led a happy life at old Mulberry Grove Plantation.

“But after grandfather passed away, the plantation descended to my oldest brother, Reed Pearson, who was named for him, and then we moved to Jacksonville.”