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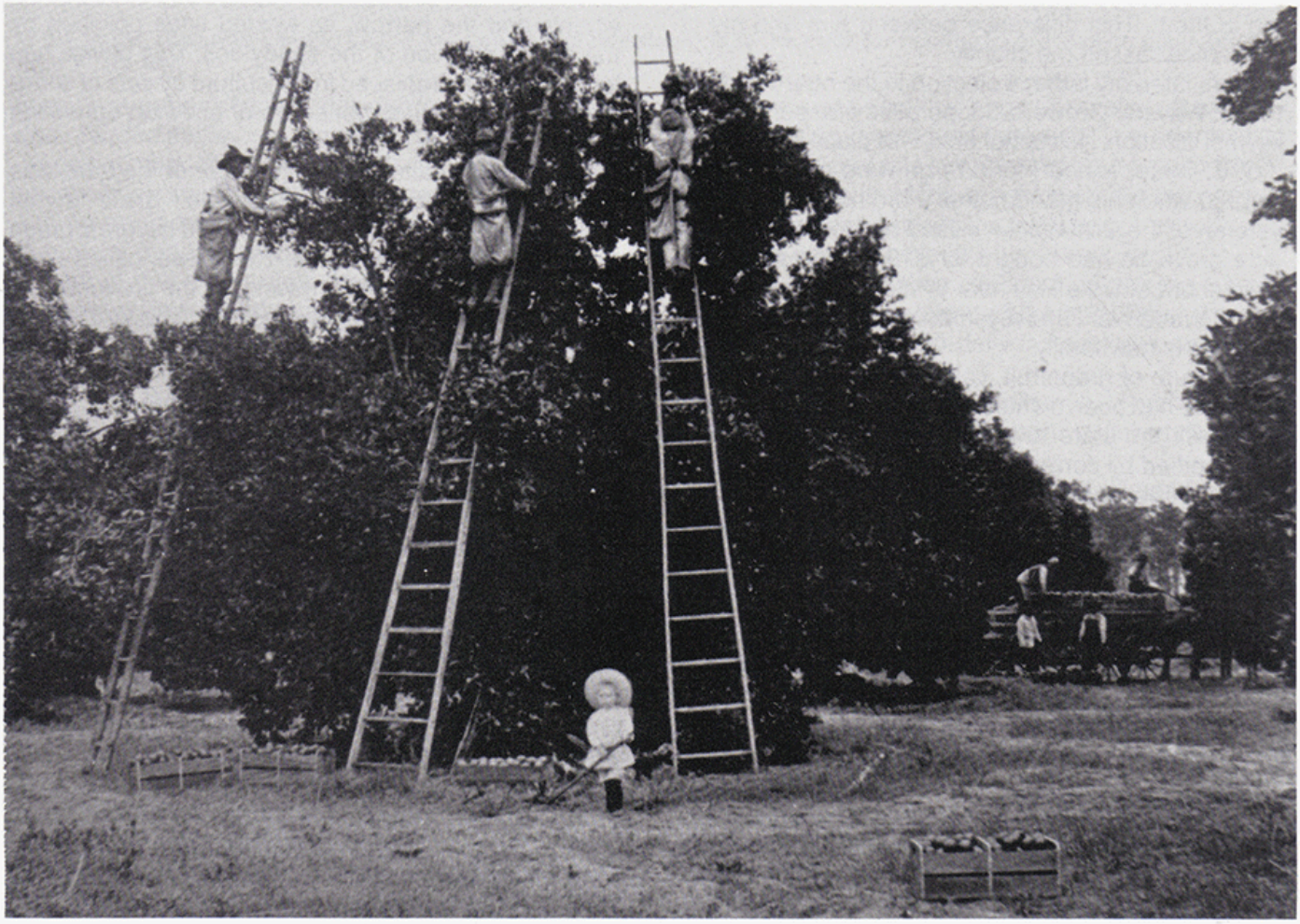
Growing Citrus in the Good Old Days *by Carroll Teeter*



Picking oranges in the 1920s required long ladders and long picking bags. Note in the foreground the child with the toy wagon full of fruit and in the background the loaded wagon pulled by mules. (Picture courtesy of Veulah and Donald Wilson)

My 10th birthday fell on a balmy day in early November in the year before the calamitous crash of the stock market. I remember it well, because on that day, my father appeared on the porch of our groveside house where I was reading a book.

"Come with me," he said, and led me to an orange tree a few rows away near the road. He handed me a half-size hoe, showed me how to hold it and how to

(continued on page two)

Good Old Days *(continued from page one)*

scuff the weeds out of the sand under the skirt of the tree.

"It's time you learned to work," he said.

The following year, he handed me full-size pruning shears with a curved companion saw and taught me how to make a clean cut at the fork of the live and dead wood. Later still, I learned to drag 200-pound bags of fertilizer off a wagon and spread it evenly by hand.

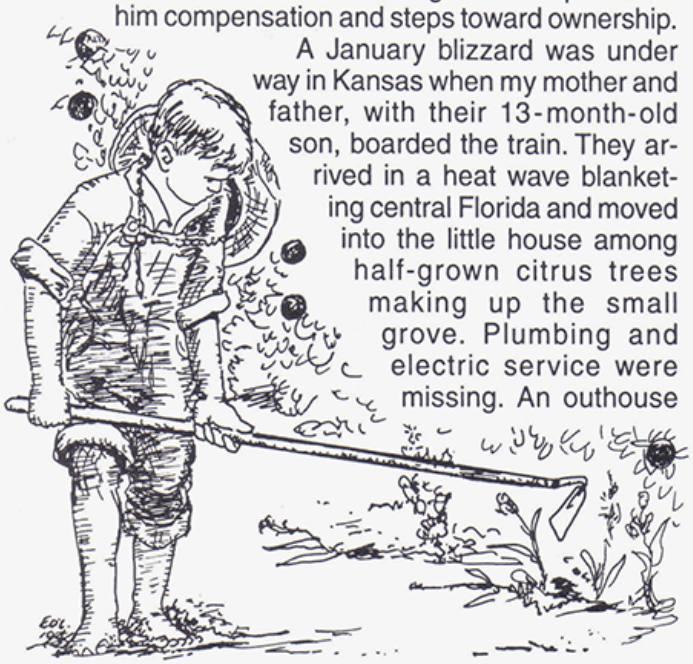
During the Great Depression that slowly evolved from the financial disaster of 1929, these muscular skills helped me to earn spending money as a teenager. The sad bread lines were far removed.

My father was what one might call a blue-collar citrus man. That is, he wore blue bib overalls and did his own work. The father of one of my friends wore a tie and hired other men to tend his oranges and grapefruit. He managed his groves, I noted, instead of sweating in them. This difference between him and my father embarrassed me slightly.

Years later, my father's election to the board of directors of Waverly Growers Cooperative erased my childish mortification. I felt better about his place in the world.

C. E. Teeter joined Florida's growing citrus industry in 1920 when his grandmother's brother — a bearded veteran of the Civil War — invited him to develop a 10-acre grove he had bought for $12,000 on the southwest shore of Lake Roy near Winter Haven. It was the end of World War I and my father was looking for a way to feed his new family.

A mixture of grapefruit, valencia and early oranges, the grove had been planted about 1913. My father didn't even visit the state to look over the situation. Terms were settled by correspondence. "Uncle Edward" said he could live in a house on the grove and promised him compensation and steps toward ownership.



The author, using his half-size hoe at about age 10.

A January blizzard was under way in Kansas when my mother and father, with their 13-month-old son, boarded the train. They arrived in a heat wave blanketing central Florida and moved into the little house among half-grown citrus trees making up the small grove. Plumbing and electric service were missing. An outhouse was off to one corner.

Lack of civilized facilities may have daunted my town-bred mother, but she seemed to face the new future with pluck.

The home's design was of a genre fast disappearing from rural Florida. A steep galvanized iron roof roared under the onslaught of summer rains. A screened porch angled around one corner. Its most interesting architectural feature was the deck off the front door of the porch. Steps led down from each end of the deck. An adjacent door led upward to the unfinished attic where I sometimes slept.

A few yards down a sandy path that angled through the grove, we reached the barn, which sheltered the farm implements to which my father applied both his muscles and those of two mules, Maude and Mabel.

Under a tin-roofed shed, out of the weather, the machinery sat, waiting to be hooked to harness — a battered wagon, a large wooden spray tank on wide iron wheels and the harrow, its twisted tines polished by the abrasive action of the sandy soil. This device has long since been replaced in citriculture by sets of sharp discs that do a much better job of chewing up weeds and burying them.

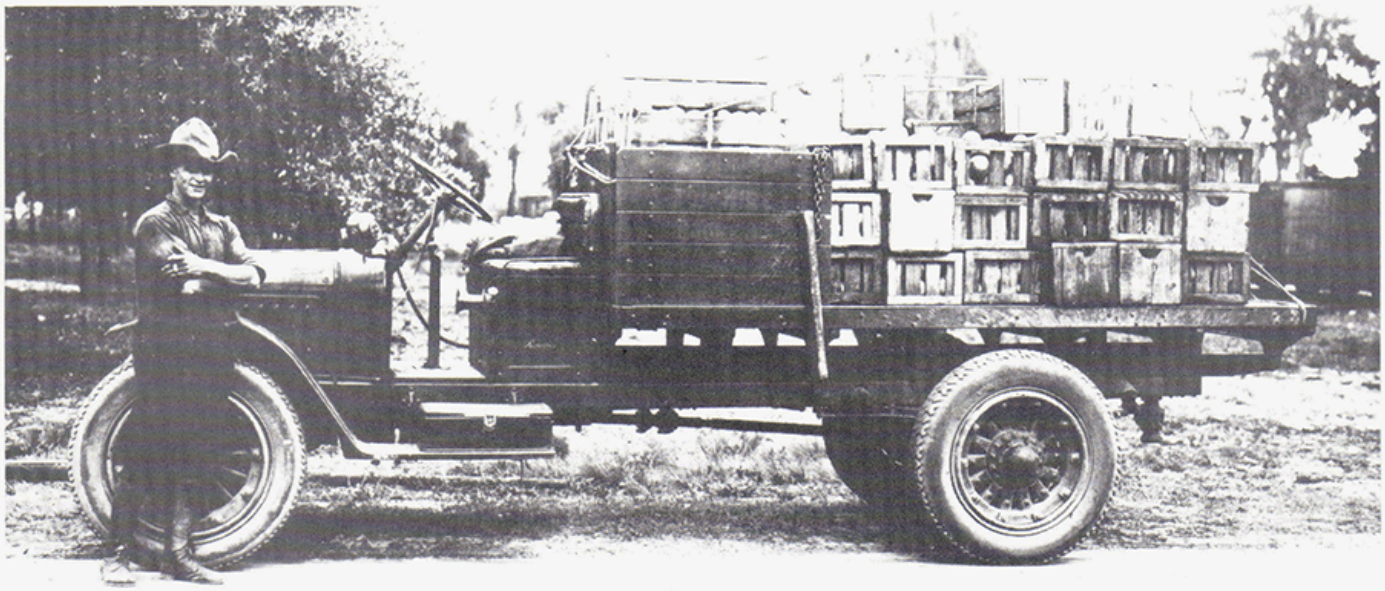
A small corral attached to the back of the barn was the home of Maude and Mabel, their brute animal muscles twitching while their tails flicked the great green horseflies that buzzed about. These two, called upon to yield the energy in their muscles to the production of citrus, were surely among the last of the hoofed beasts that helped pioneers break the earth of America and open its vast farms.

My earliest memory of the mules frames a scene when I was about 6 years old. I was riding atop a wagonload of field boxes heavy with fruit down a ramp to the unloading dock of Winter Haven Citrus Growers Association, a packinghouse near the center of town.

I marveled, I recall, at the ingenious way the 1-inch hemp rope had been tied around the load to keep the boxes, stacked eight by two by four from falling off. Reins taut and ears tight forward, the muscles of the mules rippled and their harness braced as they eased the wagon down the incline.

As I grew older, I watched the mules pull the spray rig into the sand at the edge of the lake. There they stood patiently while my father used his back muscles to rock the long, wooden pump handle back and forth, back and forth. His pumping action filled the 400-gallon tank with water which would mix with chemicals to challenge the marauding insects that threatened our crops.

The chemicals in their raw state fascinated me. There was the whale oil — whitish, oily and foul smelling — that attacked the black scale on citrus leaves. There was lime-sulphur — a beautiful brown and yellow solution my father said was effective against rust mite, which discolored the fruit and kept it from selling well. Copper sulfate (called "blue stone") was beautiful irides-



In the 1920s, rope was used to tie the wooden field crates securely to the truck for hauling to processing plant. (Picture from PCHA file)

cent, blue-green crystals that dissolved in the water and retarded melanose, also a source of discoloration.

Against other destructive threats, the soft yellow sulphur powder in which I loved to plunge my hands formed a dusty cloud around the trees when a powerful blower directed it through flexible hose.

Most of these materials have been replaced today by more sophisticated ready mixes and high-powered automated machinery that some see threatening the environment as well as unwanted insects.

The tank filled and the cover replaced, the spray ensemble returned to the grove with the new load. The mules plodded silently along, pulling the heavy tank through the clutching and impeding sand, while my father and another man sprayed the lethal liquid from long, flexible black hoses as they walked around each tree.

Later my father replaced Maude and Mabel with a powerful Fordson tractor. Mule power gave way to horsepower! The exploitation of my own muscle power continued after fuel-driven power joined the scene in the family groves — now expanded to another 10 acres in the Lucerne Park area. No pumping iron physique was mine. But clambering in the trees and wielding hoe and fertilizer bucket produced wiry sinews so strong I could chin myself 20 to 30 times.

Memory captures the scene at one particular grove where our muscles were vigorously exercised. (The "we" includes a friend whose father had also trained him in hands-on citrus work.) As my father drove the Fordson down each row, pulling a wagon loaded with taut, bulging sacks of fertilizer, Charles and I dragged the heavy bags to the ground every eight trees.

After the grove had been covered in this fashion, the tractor departed on other errands and Charles and I undertook the rest of our mission.

First, we opened the bag, unraveling the oddly stitched string that closed the sack. The odoriferous, sharply acrid contents streamed into our 5-gallon buckets from the mouth of the upright sack. We then walked around each tree, flicking the fertilizer out between our fingers to spread it evenly.

As one might surmise, 200 pounds was the amount specified to fertilize eight adult trees. Thus, we controlled our spreading to deliver the proper number of pounds for each tree.

The fertilizer stung our nostrils with its odor of nitrate and dried tobacco. Its tiny, dark brown flakes were thick in that particular formula.

As the day grew hotter, our clothes caked with sweat and fertilizer. Our muscles welcomed rest times. So it was that our entire bodies reacted with joy when time came to set down our pails, pedal our bicycles home, and jump into the cool lake. In those bright, clear waters, we thoroughly cleansed with boisterous splashings the pervasive dirt from our aching bodies and clinging garments.

It is easy to imagine that no similar pleasures await the impersonal, mechanized fertilizer spreaders working in today's groves.

As said, I was fortunate to have remunerative work as the Depression deepened. Bread lines lengthened across the distressed nation. Both adults and youth needed employment for their souls' sake as well as their bodies'.

Far from them, I worked in the grove in the summer, saved my money, and went to school the rest of the year. I recognized that I was comparatively blessed — thanks to those fellow citizens who were still able to buy our oranges and grapefruit.

Much of the work of my muscles was valued at 20 cents an hour. Sometimes, we contracted our pruning

(continued on page seven)

Greenwood and Pebble Heights — Site of Polk's Newest Park

By Hazel L. Bowman

Historian for the Scott Lake Pipkin families, Miss Beulah Mary Pipkin of Lakeland told in her autobiography published in 1979[1] about the creation of Greenwood, where she was born December 19, 1895, and how this community vanished when phosphate mining created a new village called Pebble Heights and began to mine the homesteads in Greenwood.

Today Polk County is building a new park on part of this historic land, for Greenwood encompassed the territory from Fitzgerald Road south to near Mulberry and east from present State Road 37 toward Haskell (now Highland City) and Bartow.

At the southeast corner of the property as seen today from S.R. 37, there are the remains of an old sand dump, which indicates mining that took place before draglines entered the picture. Sand dumps were favorite play places when we were children, but most have vanished, hauled away for fill. The partial one remaining on the Carter Road park property is a marker for historians tracing phosphate mining in this area. Surely it will become a permanent part of Polk's latest park.

But let us pick up the web of kinship that led to the founding of Polk County's Greenwood. Beulah's great grandparents were Mylas Alexander and Eliza Jane Proctor Fitzgerald, North Carolinians who had a family before they moved to Greenwood, Mississippi. Mylas had been in the Ocala region of Florida before the Civil War but for some reason chose to come to the west side of Scott Lake in 1880, where he bought eight acres and a log cabin. His wife was dead, and he had been accompanied on his horseback trip by a 22-year old grandson, Watson Mylas Moore.

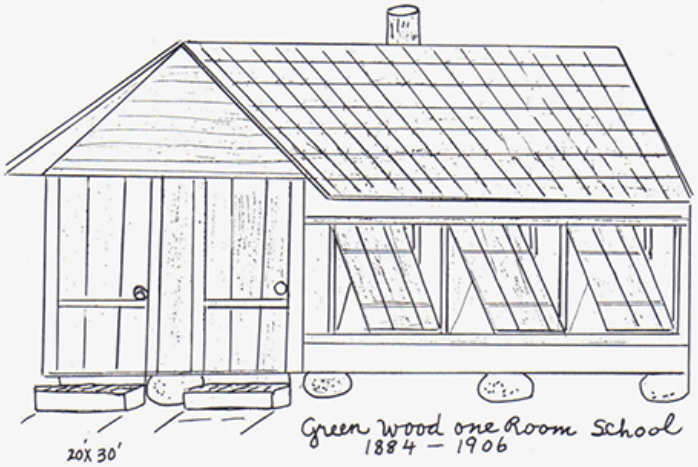
This grandson took up a homestead and persuaded his parents, David and Sarah Fitzgerald Moore, to join him. The Moores, both born in North Carolina, had gone to Saulsbury, Tennessee and already had a family of some size when they sold out and began the covered wagon journey to Polk City in 1881, a journey Miss Beulah's mother charmingly described many years later.[2]

In 1879, a dentist, Dr. James A. Hart, had ridden in from Hawkinsville, Georgia and settled closer to what was to become Lakeland in another six years. With him was his 19-year-old nephew, Daniel Pipkin, destined to become Miss Beulah's father. The wagon train that brought Dr. Hart's wife, North Carolina Anderson, also included the wagon of Samantha Pipkin, Daniel's sister.

Now Daniel and Samantha prevailed upon their parents to join them in their new home, and in 1883, Nathan and Margaret Elizabeth Hart Pipkin arrived to homestead 160 acres on the stagecoach road from Bartow to Tampa that made a regular stop at the Fitzgerald homeplace farther north. A branch of this road ran straight south to Mulberry.

Other members of the Pipkin wagon train were the son-in-law and daughter, John T. and Margaret Estella Mitchell, the James Pollocks, and the James Spences. The Spence family settled just north of Nathan Pipkin on the road to Bartow, while the Pollocks moved farther east toward Haskell (now Highland City). As for the Mitchells, they were just south of the David Moores toward Mulberry.

The Moores were centrally located among all their kin, and Sarah Fitzgerald Moore was determined to bring the blessings of civilized life to this place that



Greenwood one room school 1884-1906. (Probably sketched by Marvin Pipkin.)

she now called Greenwood in memory of her childhood years in Greenwood, Mississippi. Within three years of her arrival, her husband had given land for Methodist Episcopal church, of which John T. Mitchell became pastor. And just across the stage road, a school was built on property given by A. E. Graham, who had put up a small store. This Greenwood School, part of the county system, existed from 1884 to 1906, while the church lasted until 1905, according to Miss Beulah's account. The Rev. John Mitchell was also the earliest school teacher.

Meanwhile, Nathan Pipkin's daughter Samantha, having reached her majority, took up a homestead of 160 acres adjoining her father's land and he then built a house astride the land line so that Samantha could live at home. She married James Timberlake, a homesteader on Scott Lake Point who had business interests in the new town of Lakeland. However, they apparently lived on Samantha's land because their son James is listed as a seven-year-old pupil at the Greenwood School in 1900.

Young Daniel Pipkin married Sarah Catherine Moore and homesteaded west of her parents along the Medulla post office and Mulberry road, now the path of the new State Road 37. Christina mine homes later

were built on their property, but before that happened, Daniel and Sarah had 13 children, 11 of whom grew to adulthood and made sizable contributions to local and national life. Miss Beulah was the seventh child born on the homestead to the Dan Pipkins.

The business of all these families revolved around agriculture until 1892 when A. D. Wright, owner of Land Pebble Phosphate Co., began a small phosphate mine called Land Pebble or Pebble. Miss Beulah's famous brother Marvin Pipkin used to describe the mine to her. Close on Wright's heels came C. G. Memminger, a South Carolinian who developed the Christina and Standard mines, partially on the Dan Pipkin homestead land where Beulah was born. The Pipkins sold out and moved to Scott Lake.

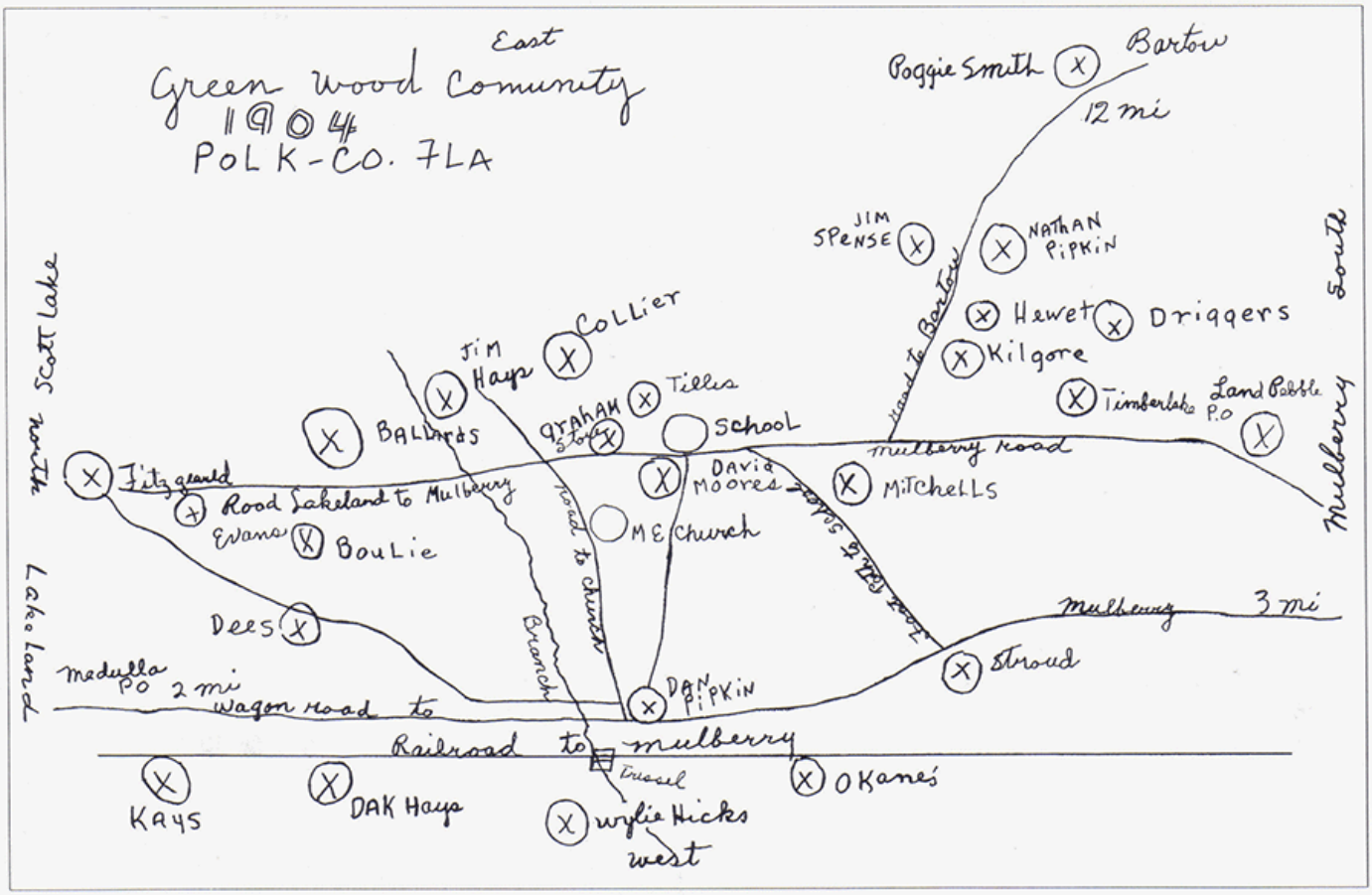
All of the Pipkin, Timberlake, and Moore holdings lay in the path of the 1905 phosphate expansion that came about when Joseph Hull bought out Land Pebble to add to his other Mulberry area holdings.[3] Now a village for workers was expanded and Land Pebble supplanted Greenwood. One of Beulah's aunts was postmistress at the new mine, whose store and other amenities drew the locals, many of whom went to work for the mining companies. Beulah's father, for example, became a prospector for phosphate.

When Samantha Timberlake lost her husband, she buried him on the homestead just south of present Mockingbird Hill, and a number of other families used this graveyard before Hull's phosphate interests bought the Timberlake property. The cemetery remains just south of Carter Road abutting the new Polk County park and presently is part of privately owned land to the east.

Find Klein Road running north a short distance from Carter Road. This is one remaining piece of the old Bartow stage road that passed the Moore place and the Greenwood School. Go north on S.R. 37 to Fitzgerald Road and east to the cemetery. Where Frances Pipkin Road comes in from the south is another marker for the old stage coach road that went north alongside the Fitzgerald Cemetery. The stop at the Fitzgerald homestead was just south of the present paving running down to Scott Lake.

When Polk County Commissioner Larry Libertore began work on the Carter Road Park during his last term of office, he was most anxious to see historical markers telling the story of the first Land Pebble mining near Mulberry. Surely his concern is also the concern of the descendents of the Fitzgeralds, Moores, Mitchells, Pollocks, Spences, Pipkins and the many others shown on Miss Beulah's map who created Greenwood in the Polk County wilderness in the 1880s.

(continued on page seven)



Greenwood Community 1904 Polk Co., Fla. (Map drawn in the 1970s by Miss Beulah Mary Pipkin.)

Water Witching

Tenth in a series on pioneer lore by Ray Albritton

A lot of hard work was required to dig a well. Someone had to be down in the hole digging, and helpers had to be on the surface pulling up the buckets of soil and water. The deeper the well, the harder the work became.

Early settlers thought it to be extremely foolhardy to start digging a well without first having a dowser locate an underground stream. Dowsers were often called water witches. Even today many people wouldn't think of putting down a well without having a dowser pinpoint the location of an underground stream.

The dowser used a forked stick about eighteen inches long. He would walk the area with the ends of the stick gripped tightly in his hands. When he approached the underground stream, the stick would start to move. Some dowsers walked over the stream and the stick would point downward as they passed over the underground water. Others would locate the stream when the stick began to rotate in a complete circle and turned at the maximum rate when they were directly over the stream. They held the stick tightly and the bark would peel off the stick when they were over a good supply of water. Still others would hold the stick horizontally and detected the stream by a slight pull on the stick.

Most dowsers chose a particular kind of wood for their divining rod. Persimmon wood was the preferred wood of many dowsers. Others used oak or any kind of green wood. One of the my neighbors, Harriet Galberaith, has reported excellent results with a pair of channel-lock pliers. It appears that having the gift of dowsing is more important than the type of divining rod used.

My mother was gifted with the ability to dowse. I can remember many times when the neighbors would get her to locate a stream for them. She was not particular about what kind of stick she used. Any green forked stick would work for her. As she approached the stream, the stick would quiver and then start to rotate. She would grip the stick tightly to try to hold it still. It would twist around in her hands and the bark would start to peel off. If it was a really good stream, the stick would sometimes wring in two. I used to get a stick and follow her around, but my stick never moved. I was told that it didn't move because I didn't have the gift.

There were methods for determining how deep underground the water was. Some dowsers would locate the stream then move off to the side. As they approached the stream from different directions, the motion of the divining rod would give them the depth of the water.

Another method was to place an empty water glass directly over the stream. A silver coin was tied to a string and lowered part way in the glass. The string was held in the dowser's hand. He would hold the string still and the coin would start to swing like a pendulum. When the coin touched the side of the glass, he would start counting. The number of times that the coin touched the side of the glass indicated the depth of the water in feet.

In many instances, the dowser uses a forked stick with ends gripped tightly in his hands.

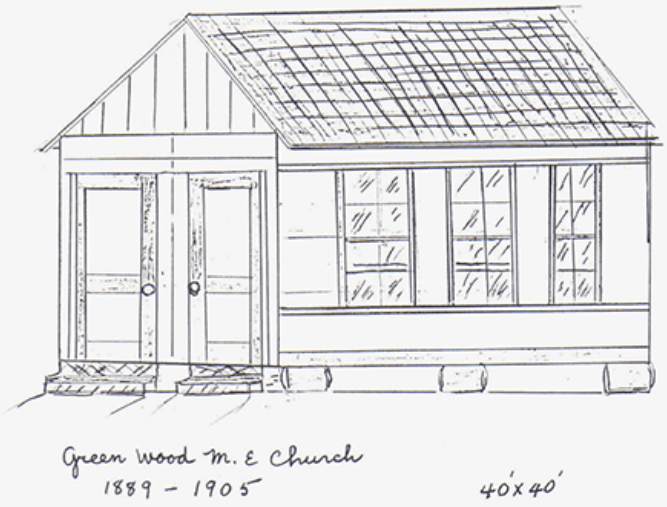
The best wells are said to be located where two streams join. It takes a lot of dowsing but the results are worth the extra trouble. Dowsing is a lot easier than digging or drilling.

Dowsing is an ancient art. It has been practiced in Egypt and China for thousands of years. Bas-reliefs from early Egypt portray diviners equipped with dowsing rods.

Underground water is probably the most common thing that dowsing is used to locate. However, dowsing is also used to search for gold or other underground materials.

I have always had a problem understanding how a diving rod made from a green stick could respond to underground water. My only conclusion is that there is a vast quantity of underground water and that any place chosen to put down a well has an excellent chance of finding a supply of water. However, dowsers can give instances of people drilling many dry holes before calling for help. After the dowser locates the stream, they find a good supply of water on the first try. My only conclusion is, don't argue with success.

Greenwood *(continued from page five)*



Greenwood M. E. Church 1889-1905 (Probably sketched by Marvin Pipkin, brother to Beulah and trained engineer. Inventor of frosted electric light; longtime General Electric researcher.)

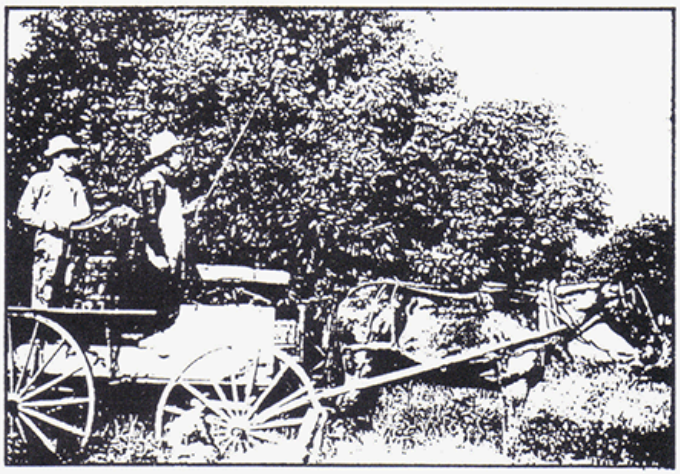
Footnotes:

1 Beulah Mary Pipkin, **A Florida Pioneer Family 1879-1979.** Self-published, 1979.

2 Sarah Catherine Moore Pipkin, **An 1881 Polk County Pioneer**, typescript ed. Hazel L. Bowman, 1984.

3 Arch Fredric Blakey, **The Florida Phosphate Industry**, 1973.

Good Old Days *(continued from page three)*



Two men are spraying trees with a manual pump sprayer. (Picture courtesy of the Thomas B. Mack Citrus Archives)

by the tree — at 20 cents for oranges, 30 cents for grapefruit, and 50 cents for tangerines. We lost money on the latter, we soon concluded, for the big tangerine trees of that era sometimes took three or four hours to prune — so full of small dead branches were they and such a perfectionist my father in his expectation of quality.

In these days, hand pruning is rarely performed except for massive killing of wood by occasional freezes. Hoeing too, is practiced today only on small trees being inundated by weeds and grass.

During Christmas vacation, we made holiday money picking up "drops," scrambling on hands and knees to find the fruit that hid in the dead leaves mulched beneath the trees. We toted this fruit to a nearby cannery in my friend's little red pickup truck and sold it for 20 cents a box.

I write these remembrances as if they were happy memories. They are. At the time, I confess that I detested what I was doing. It was hot work. It was disagreeable. Flies bit my bare skin. I had to pedal 5 miles, sometimes, to get to a grove before I could start a day's work. The pay was low. It was lonely, except for those times when my friend joined me.

But memory fades, and fading warps, and warping perhaps, redeems. Thus, the lasting effect of my loathing has been to regard all other work I have done as play.

I have had the pleasure of growing oranges and grapefruit as an absentee owner. I have enjoyed the play of "working" at other meaningful and worthwhile activities. Together, they have permeated my life with a significance that I otherwise might not have enjoyed.

My muscles, applied to deskwork, have softened, but their exercise in my youth undoubtedly blessed me with health in the years since my father thrust that little hoe in my hand on my 10th birthday.

*This article was published in the May issue of **Citrus Industry.** Reprinted with permission of the publisher.*

Historical Highlights *(continued from page eight)*

The Baynard House, a Queen Anne-style home built in 1894 by Ephrain Baynard, an **AUBURNDALE** pioneer, will be fixed up with $58,500 in grant money.

LAKE WALES CITY HALL, built in 1928, considered an excellent example of Mediterranean Revival architecture popular in Florida in the 1920s, will be restored to its original grandeur with a combination of city and $104,000 state money.

FORT MEADE has 151 buildings which have qualified as landmarks and await notice of being placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The two story former school building is being renovated with a $15,000 Community Block Grant. When completed, it will be the Fort Meade Historical Museum.

Historical Highlights

HOMELAND HERITAGE PARK GRAND OPENING SEPTEMBER 24, 1994 will feature a one-day pictorial cancellation from the Homeland Post office. The cancellation, featuring the Homeland Heritage Park logo designed by W. Lloyd Harris, past president of the Polk County Historical Association, was approved by the Postmaster General.

September 24, 1994
GRAND OPENING
HOMELAND HERITAGE PARK STATION
Homeland, Florida 33847-9998

As a community service, the Postal Service offers pictorial cancellations to commemorate local events which are celebrated in communities throughout the nation. People attending these local events may obtain the cancellations at the temporary post office station established on site. Brenda Fletcher, the Homeland postmistress, will have such a station set up at the Heritage Park for the Grand Opening. The pictorial cancellation will make a fine souvenir of this important date for Homeland Heritage Park and the Polk County Historical Association.

Preservationists in **LAKE WALES** are working to develop a "Historic Corridor" on the former railroad right-of-way which runs parallel to Scenic Highway, Alternate U.S. 27. Four 1920s era buildings are featured: Railroad depots from 1916 and 1928, a building that once housed the Lake Wales Board of Trade and the latest addition, a bungalow where E. C. Stuart, one of the city's four founders, once lived. Donations and grants have made the corridor possible.

After three tries, **HAINES CITY'S CLAY CUT CENTER** is getting its long awaited improvements. A grant of $240,000 from the state will be used to renovate the 69-year-old building which houses the city's community theater, senior recreation program and classrooms for Polk County Opportunity Council. Twenty buildings in downtown Haines City were placed on the National Historic Register in March.

Work will resume on renovation of the Old Polk County Courthouse in **BARTOW** as soon as space is vacated by temporary court activities.

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This page will feature Historical happenings throughout Polk County. We encourage each local organization to submit news of the activities of its members. Regular meeting dates and notice of special programs will be listed if enough notice is given.

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MRS. O. H. (FREDDIE) WRIGHT
EDITOR

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