

# STARS

## Florida Historical Quarterly

---

Volume 7  
Number 2 *Florida Historical Quarterly, Vol 7,*  
*Issue 2*

Article 7

1928

### Jefferson County, Florida, 1827-1910. Part I

Samuel Pasco



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

#### Recommended Citation

Pasco, Samuel (1928) "Jefferson County, Florida, 1827-1910. Part I," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 7 : No. 2 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol7/iss2/7>

## JEFFERSON COUNTY, FLORIDA, 1827-1910

By SAMUEL PASCO

### PART I

It was in January, 1827, that Jefferson County was formed out of Leon, with its western boundary nearly the same as at present and the eastern boundary remaining at the Suwannee until December, 1827, when Madison County was established. Thus Jefferson County became a separate territorial division and governmental organization, after being at times a part of the provinces of East Florida and West Florida, and of the counties of Escambia, Jackson, Gadsden, and Leon. It extends from the Georgia line to the Gulf, a distance of about forty miles, and at the base line is about twenty miles wide. Its area is 593 square miles.

In the Act of January 6th, 1827, establishing Jefferson County, it was provided that the County Court at its first session should appoint five commissioners to select a permanent seat of justice and it was authorized that the courts be held at the house of John G. Robinson until the selection was made and approved. The location chosen was the site of an old Indian town in the west half of the northwest quarter of Section 30, Township 2 North, 5 East, which was entered by William Bailey, August 15, 1827. The town was laid out early in 1828 and was named Monticello, after President Jefferson's home in Virginia.

A postoffice had already been established in this vicinity, May 10, 1826, called Robinsons. John G. Robinson was the first postmaster and it was at his house that the courts were temporarily held before the county seat was selected. The name of the office was changed to Monticello December 26, 1827, and

Robinson continued to be postmaster. Some of the early post routes, by which mail matter was received and sent from this office were as follows: From Tallahassee by Tusawilla and Bailey's Mill to Monticello, one round trip a week; Thomas Heir was the contractor. From Thomasville by Grooverville, Ga. to Monticello, then by Bunker Hill, back to Thomasville. From Monticello by Ocilla and Rossiter's Ferry to Miccotown, the first county seat of Hamilton County, situated in the forks of the Allapaha, one round trip every two weeks. From Monticello to Lipona and Waukeenah to Magnolia; R. B. Scott was the contractor.

*Early settlers.* - As soon as the lands in this section were surveyed and offered for sale, they were in great demand; in fact, many were ready to establish their locations before the surveys were completed and accepted. The date of the earliest entry in Jefferson which I have found upon the record is April 23, 1825, while it was still a part of Leon County. Elizabeth W. Wirt on that date entered the west half of the southeast quarter of Section 34, Township 2 North, Range 4 East. Other entries made that year were by Richard Parish, Charles Williamson, Robert Jameson, Samuel R. Overton, James Gadsden, Daniel E. Burch, Romeo Lears, John Bellamy, Thomas K. White, Thomas Townsend.

Many prominent people established their homes within the present boundaries of Jefferson very soon after the Indians ceded and relinquished to the United States all their claim or title to their lands in Middle Florida by the treaty of Moultrie Creek, September, 1823. Capt Lewis M. Goldsborough of the U. S. Navy, who had married a daughter of Attorney General William Wirt, settled at Wirtland about three miles west of Monticello and the place still retains its name. A little later he established a colony here of

Swiss and Italians for the culture of mulberries for silk, olives, and grapes. The colonists afterwards became dissatisfied and went to Frenchtown, near Tallahassee. Colonel Joseph M. White, a distinguished lawyer, who represented the Territory as delegate in Congress from 1825 to 1837, established his home at Casa Bianca, about three miles south from Monticello, on the Waukeenah road.

Welanee, several miles further to the south below the St. Augustine road, was settled by Robert Gamble of Virginia. He and other members of the family always took an active part in the affairs of the Territory and State in time of war as well as peace. John G. Gamble's place a few miles to the west was named Joachina in honor of a lady of Pensacola of Spanish descent. The post office established at the plantation was removed to the crossing of the St. Augustine road, first known as Marion Cross Roads, and the settlement there was afterwards known by this name, but the spelling was Anglicized into Waukeenah. Thomas Randall, the first judge of the Superior Court, named his place Belmont.

Prince Achille Murat, eldest son of the former king of Naples, had his plantation about four miles west of Waukeenah. He called it Lipona, reversing the syllables in the Italian name of his native city and state, Napoli. He married the grand niece of Washington, Kate Willis, afterwards the "Widow Grey," famous for her beauty and accomplishments. Mrs. Ellen Call Long has written a very interesting sketch of our Florida princess and her husband, which was published in the Quarterly of the Florida Historical Society, July, 1909. It contains many interesting incidents of their life at Lipona. Those of us who in past years enjoyed the hospitality of this fair lady when she presided over this home, will ever remember the charm

of her manners, her sweet courtesy, and her uniform kindness.

General James Gadsden, one of General Jackson's aides, had a large plantation close by Lipona and a little further north and west was El Destino, belonging to William B. Nuttall, His widow married George Noble Jones and the property is still [1910] owned by members of the same family.

These large planters occupied some of the best lands in the County and although they lived remote from the great centers of population, they had their full share of the enjoyments and luxuries of the days in which they lived. During the holiday occasions different families would give house-parties and the guests would ride in turn from place to place, keeping up a round of entertainments and prolonging the festivities until the season was closed. There were other representatives in town and country of the best families in the older states, mainly from Virginia and the Carolinas; and a visitor at Waukeenah in 1828 said of them, "There is more intellect and intelligence to be found among the settlers of Florida than in the same population in any other new state."

Among the early settlers who bought lots in Monticello and entered lands near by were Adam Wirick, William Blackburn, Martin Palmer, J. B. Watts, Everett White, Joseph M. White, T. R. White, Isaac G. Teague, John Bellamy, Abram Bellamy, Littlebury Harbour, William Connell, Alexander Adair, Benjamin Chaires, Solomon E. Mathers, Turbutt R. Betton, and Edward R. Gibson. There are many descendants of these early settlers in this and the adjoining counties at the present day.

As already stated, William Bailey entered the eighty which was fixed upon for the location of the county seat, and the forty designated as the western

addition to the town was entered by Romeo Lewis. I have not been able to ascertain the exact location of John G. Robinson's home.

Courts.-At a very early date the courts were held in a small wooden building on the lot at the northeast corner of Washington Street and the Court Mouse square.

When the commissioners had the town surveyed and laid out in 1828, a square was reserved for the location of a permanent court house at the intersection of the two principal streets, Jefferson and Washington, running north and south and east and west; but several years elapsed before the building was commenced. The county was but thinly settled and its taxable resources were small, so that the construction of the necessary buildings was a great undertaking for those days. The United States census of 1830 showed that the total population was 3,312 of whom but 1,695 were whites. Few of the new settlers were wealthy and the property of those who were in easy circumstances consisted of slaves, horses, mules, cattle, vehicles and other movable property, and their newly entered lands. Their ready money was needed to pay for their lands, build their homes, and start their planting operations. It was not easy to raise by taxation large sums for public improvements and the plan of placing a part of the burden upon a later generation by issuing bonds was not included in the financial system of those early days. The disturbed condition of the country on account of the dissatisfaction and hostility of the Indians to which I will refer later, increased the difficulty of raising the necessary funds and carrying on the work.

In November 1834, the grand jury presented "the want of a decent and comfortable Court House as a great inconvenience that should be remedied." They

called attention to the manner of the expenditure of the funds, which should have been applied to the erection of a court house and jail and urged that the work be commenced without delay; but as it appeared that sufficient funds could not be raised at that time by taxation they suggested that an application be made for aid to Congress by an appropriation of land or money.

The spirit which prompted this suggestion must have stimulated the county authorities to some decisive action, for at the next session the general presentment expressed satisfaction at the prospect of a new court house in a few months. This expectation was not realized, and in November, 1835, they determined to make a direct appeal to Congress. Accordingly, a memorial was addressed to the United States Senate and House of Representatives, setting forth the unfinished condition of the public buildings and the desire to erect a permanent and commodious court house to serve all the conveniences, which ought to pertain to such a building. It asked for assistance to complete the house and stated that the county was unable to do more than finish the outer work. In consideration of the aid thus asked for, the county would agree that the Superior Court should have offices for the clerk and marshal and the use of the court room in which to hold its sessions without charge, and it was stated that the building had been planned and designed with this purpose in view. Upon a motion of the District Attorney, it was ordered that copies of this memorial be sent to the delegate in Congress to be laid before the two houses. This appeal seems to have been ineffectual, for in 1838 the buildings were still unfinished.

During the session of the Territorial Council in February of that year Albert J. Dozier, one of the members from Jefferson County, introduced a resolu-

tion upon this subject. In addition to the statements contained in the memorial of the grand jury, it was represented that the county had by direct tax on its citizens raised about five thousand dollars for the building of the court house; that this amount had been expended and that the house had not been completed. An appropriation of four thousand dollars was asked for, and it was ordered that a copy of the preamble and resolution be transmitted to Charles Downing, the delegate, to be presented to Congress. I have been unable to find that such an appropriation was granted and it is fair to presume that this effort also failed and that the citizens and tax payers were left to struggle with- their financial difficulties unaided by the authorities in Washington.

Jefferson County was included in the Middle Circuit of Florida, which comprised all the country between the Apalachicola and Suwannee rivers. The first term of this court, after the establishment of the new county, was held in Monticello on the fourth Monday of May, 1828. Thomas Randall was then judge of the Superior Court and continued in office until 1840, when he was succeeded by Alfred Balch. The grand jury was organized by the appointment of James Smith, Sr., as foreman and there was a full panel of petit as well as grand jurors present. The attorneys present were William Allison McRea, United States District Attorney, Richard K. Call, John Lee Williams, Achille Murat and John K. Campbell. Wm. II. Mathers, Jr. was clerk of the Court and continued in office till May, 1835, when he resigned and William Budd was appointed as his successor. The Grand Jury found no true bills and there being no business the term lasted but a single day. On the fourth Monday in November following, a second term was held. Zachariah Bailey was appointed foreman of the grand jury,



but again there was an early adjournment for the want of business.

The records of the court show that there was more or less work at every term after this on the civil as well as the criminal docket. The most frequent violations of the law originated in personal difficulties, but though the juries brought in verdicts of guilty of assault and battery, they were lenient in their penalties, fines of six and a quarter or twelve and a half cents, sometimes a dollar with the costs of prosecution, were often imposed on offenders; indicating very clearly that in the opinion of the juries, the person convicted was guilty of no moral turpitude. In a general presentment of the grand jury in November, 1834, it was stated that these personal assaults often grew out of the violence of party spirit. The grand jurors further said: "The aid and shield which the violators of the law sometimes receive and in most cases confidently expect from political friends on party grounds are an encouragement to crime which has a most demoralizing and dangerous influence."

Convictions of larceny were regarded in a very different light, and the culprit was punished by stripes upon the bare back to be inflicted at once by the marshal. Convictions of those indicted for homicide were rare. The accused persons found it less hazardous as well as less expensive to make a change of residence rather than face a jury. At the November term, 1834, the grand jury complained that four under such indictments had fled from justice, and it was recommended that the governors of neighboring states be called upon to aid in their arrest.

Judge Balch was succeeded by Samuel J. Douglas as judge of the Middle Circuit in November, 1841.

The first deed was recorded on the fourth day of

June, 1827, and the record of deeds from that date is complete and in good condition.

Churches.-The records and history of the early territorial days afford satisfactory evidence that the different religious denominations were well represented among those who established their homes in the Floridas after the exchange of flags and the opening of the lands to settlement. As early as 1821, Rev. John J. Triggs, who was in charge of the Allapaha Mission extending from the Ocmulgee to the Florida line, extended his labors across the line and was in all probability the first Protestant minister who preached in Middle Florida after it became American territory. In 1822, Mr. Triggs organized a mission in south and west Georgia and this mission embraced parts of Alabama and Florida. Rev. John Slade was appointed junior preacher on this work the following year and from his great success and his continued labors in the territory he has been called "The Father of Methodism in Florida." In 1824 Florida was made a district and Josiah Evans was appointed presiding elder. Among the faithful pioneers who proclaimed the word in this district was John L. Jerry, who had rendered effective service in his Master's cause for two years or more in the eastern part of the State with appointments at St. Augustine, Cowford (now Jacksonville), Fernandina, Newnansville, and other places.

In Monticello, the temporary court house was used for religious services, and it was doubtless in this building that the Monticello Church was organized. It was not until 1832 that the congregation undertook the erection of a building for their own use.

In April of that year, Martin Palmer deeded to Adam Wirick, William Connell, Darius Williams, Zach Wirick, and William H. Mathers, Jr., as trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church, lot number sixty-

four, where the jail has recently been erected, in trust that they erect a house or place of worship for the use of the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. Here a small wooden structure was built and used by the congregation until a larger building was erected in 1844. In October of that year, the trustees bought lot number two, and a more commodious building was built, which was occupied by the Church till 1887, when it was displaced by the beautiful brick structure, completed in the following year, in which the Methodists have since worshipped.

Adam Wirick was one of the early settlers in Monticello and devoted many years of his early manhood to ministerial and missionary work in the Methodist Church. He was a man of great intellectual force, energetic, enterprising, and thoroughly in earnest in all that he undertook. He was somewhat advanced in years when I first met him and I was impressed with the vast fund of information he had at his command derived from his extensive reading and a large experience with the realities of life acquired in his association and dealings with his fellow men. This information and these experiences were interesting to a younger man and they were made attractive by his fine description and the choice language with which he adorned his narrations. His early residence was on the east side of Jefferson Street on the block between Pearl and Dogwood streets, where Thomas Simmons lived in later years and where his daughter now resides. At one time he had a store on the same block, south of his home. Later in life he lived on his plantation about eight miles' from town, on the road to Lloyd, where his son John E. Wirick, now resides. Here this venerable pioneer passed away at an advanced age.

Other Methodist churches were formed in differ-

ent parts of the county as the result of the labors of the missionaries and local preachers and later the Waukeelah Circuit was formed, but I have been unable to ascertain the date. It appears, however, that in September, 1853, Mrs. Maria Ulmer deeded to the trustees of the Methodist Church there, a piece of land in the southeastern part of the settlement, near the old school house. Here a large wooden building was erected and a cemetery established close by. The parsonage was built on the St. Augustine road and the preacher in charge filled appointments at a number of different stations in the eastern and southern part of the county. The cemetery is still in use but the present church and parsonage are located on the old Pinbook or Monticello road, a little north of the Waukeelah settlement at the old Marion Cross Roads.

Rev. William Peeler was the preacher on the circuit when I moved to Waukeelah in January, 1859, and often when he was filling his appointments in other parts of the field, his brother, Dr. Anderson Peeler, then a local preacher, occupied the pulpit and conducted the services.

In those days the annual camp-meetings were held at the Cabell camp-ground, where Edward C. Cabell had deeded in December, 1857, six acres of land of his Bolton place to George W. Taylor and other trustees of the Monticello Circuit. These gatherings were held every summer and were largely attended. Prominent members of the Monticello and Waukeelah churches established themselves here, when the meetings were to be held, in spacious cottages with large stables and lots close by where they extended a generous hospitality to all who visited the grounds and participated in the daily services.

During the Seminole War the preachers continued their work, going from one block-house to another as

they filled their appointments, notwithstanding the dangers which constantly threatened them. Father R. H. Howren, whom many of us knew in his later years, referring to his own experience said on one occasion, "I knew that I was exposed to sudden and violent death every day, but the divine promise sustained me, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world'."

But these brave men had something worse to dread than personal exposure to danger. Who would protect their homes in case of an Indian attack? The sad fate of the family of Rev. Tilman D. Purifoy illustrates the peril to which the wife and children were exposed during the absence of the husband and father. He married a daughter of Daniel Bird and they lived in the Pettus place. While he was filling some of his appointments a band of hostile Indians destroyed his home. On his return he found a scene of desolation. His two children had been murdered and burned with his house, the dead bodies of his negroes were lying about the place, and his wife, though still alive, had been shot and tomahawked. Though desperately wounded, she partially recovered and after some time was taken back to her old home in South Carolina.

The Baptists were also represented among the earliest settlers. Rev. James Connell was one of the pioneers of that denomination who held services in the first court house. The first Baptist church in the county was established not in Monticello, but at Casa Bianca plantation, about two miles south of town. It was called Ebenezer and was the first Baptist church organized in Florida. Colonel Joseph M. White, territorial delegate, in September, 1829, conveyed to the trustees of this church two acres of the south part of the east half of the northeast quarter of Section one, in Township one north, Range four east. The old

building was located on the west side of the road leading to Waukeenah and no vestige of it now remains, but on the opposite side of the road the old burial place is still used. The Ebenezer Church was afterwards moved to the Bolton plantation about four miles south of the old location on the road from Drifton to Waukeenah. Here a new church was built in the centre of a tract of four acres which was afterwards, in January 1860, conveyed to the trustees by Edward C. Cabell, a former Representative in Congress from Florida.

The Baptist Church in Monticello was constituted in September or October, 1841, with six members—Jesse Goodman, Sampson Barrington, Emily Clark, Amelia Palmer, Julia Bacon, and Elizabeth McCants. Rev. Richard J. Mays, father of our present Representative in Congress, was the first pastor. A place of worship was erected in 1845 or 1846 upon a lot south of the court house, which was afterwards, in May, 1846, given to the Church by Martin Palmer, husband of one of the original members. His brother, Stephen Palmer, built the house. It is the same building that is now used by the Baptists and it is in good condition. The trustees named in the deed of conveyance were Joseph McCants, William H. Scruggs, and Aaron Marvin. When the court house was occupied by a company of United States soldiers, raised in Florida, soon after the War Between the States, they used the north wall of the church in their target practice and shot their guns from the court house square. The marks of many bullets are still visible in the brick foundation.

Another early Baptist church was established at Bethpage in what was afterwards known as the New-some neighborhood, on the plantation which at a later date belonged to the late William C. Thomas. When I

first became a resident of Waukeelah, Rev. Zachariah Wheeler, one of the old soldiers who defended the Withlacoochee block house, which I shall give an account of later, held the monthly service here, but the church is now extinct. Messengers from these three churches in Jefferson and others from churches in Madison, Hamilton, Leon, and Gadsden counties in Florida and Thomas and Lowndes in lower Georgia met at old Ebenezer Church in October, 1843, and established the Florida Baptist Association, the mother association of our state, which now numbers 24 associations with 524 churches and a total church membership of 32,326 (1908).

I have not been able to ascertain when the Presbyterians first organized their church in Monticello. The Rev. Mr. Graves was an early settler in the town. He established his home on Tucker Hill and was interested in silk, which at one time promised to be a profitable industry. He was the stated supply for some time after the establishment of the church. Their first place of worship was erected on lot 35, which was deeded to Daniel S. Graham, Benjamin Johnson and Andrew Denham as trustees of the church, January 20th, 1841. The first building was destroyed by fire, soon after which the present one was built on the same site. Mrs. Adaline Denham, widow of Andrew Denham, one of the original members of the church is still living at the advanced age of ninety-four.

The Protestant Episcopal Church in Monticello was incorporated by a special act of the Legislative Council of the Territory, approved February 28th, 1844, as Christ Church; and William D. Moseley, Joseph R. Rowles, James R. Tucker, and such others as were elected church wardens and vestrymen of the Episcopal congregation. and their successors in office were made trustees of the church property. Their first

place of worship at the corner of Washington Street and the Waukeedah road was destroyed by fire and they erected their present house at the corner of Jefferson and High streets and the rectory on the adjoining lot.

Another Protestant Episcopal church was established at Waukeedah, and in December, 1840, Abram Grantham conveyed two acres of land there to a board of trustees for church purposes. It was called St. Paul's Church and the trustees named in the deed were John B. Page, John A. Edwards, Octavus H. Gadsden, Julius High, Alexander Jernigan, Alexander Scott and Pickney Bellinger. While I had charge of the Waukeedah Academy, just before the War, Rev. William E. Eppes, the rector of Christ Church, held a Sunday afternoon service for the little congregation of St. Paul's. After his morning's work was ended, it was his custom to mount his horse and ride eleven miles, regardless of the condition of the weather, to fill this second appointment.

*Education.*- The early records afford abundant evidence that the first settlers of the county took a great interest in the cause of education. In 1832 the trustees of the Jefferson Academy received a charter from the Legislative Council, and when the western addition of the town of Monticello was laid out a square of four lots was reserved for academy purposes. The lots west of this reservation upon which the present academy stands were afterwards purchased by the trustees. A large part of the money used in the construction of the brick building which still stands there was raised by subscription, and the work was completed in 1858. The Masonic and Odd Fellows lodges each raised a part of the building fund and as a consideration for the assistance the trustees leased to them for a period of ninety-nine years, the rooms in the upper



story, which were fitted up and occupied by each for lodge purposes.

On the lots south of Washington Street reserved for academy purposes, a young ladies' boarding school was maintained for many years by Mrs. Ferguson, and afterwards by Rev. and Mrs. Myers, under the direction of the trustees. This school enjoyed a high reputation but during the War the buildings gradually went to decay and were removed during the days of reconstruction. In 1840, the Oscilla Academy, east of the river, was chartered by the Legislative Council. The trustees named in the Act were John Bellamy, A. B. Shehee, Lloyd Skannal, William Bailey, Elias Edwards, Abram Bellamy, and Samuel Sessions.

*(Part II, beginning with the Seminole War, will appear in the next number.)*