

**Fort Lonesome**  
**Hurrah Creek**  
**Lewis Branch Creek**

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3 pgs

The following is an excerpt from:  
**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**  
**HISTORIC RESOURCES SURVEY REPORT**

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\* These excerpts have been taken from the Historic Resources Survey Report with permission given by the Hillsborough County Historic Resources Review Board on December 15, 2003. The intention is to help provide targeted historical information on the water bodies in Hillsborough County.

## *Fort Lonesome*

Located around the intersection of State Road 39 and State Road 674 in the southeastern corner of the county, Fort Lonesome has the distinction for having the most origin accounts for its name. One version relates that U.S. military personnel during one of the Seminole Wars built a fort here and their wives named it Fort Lonesome because of its isolation. However, no historical documentation has been uncovered indicating that a fort was built in the area; the closest was at Alafia. The two predominant accounts have their origins in the late 1920s/early 1930s, and both have been repeated in Tampa Bay newspapers. In 1929, Florida experienced a Mediterranean fruit fly outbreak, and agricultural inspectors were stationed in the Fort Lonesome area, checking fruit. Outside of their camp at the intersection of State Road 39 and State Road 674 the men posted a sign with “Fort Lonesome” on it. The other story concerns Dovie Keen. She moved to the area with her husband from Manatee County in 1929. When her husband was at work, Mrs. Keen began crying because she was so lonely. A car with two men who were lost stopped by to ask for directions. They inquired as to the area’s name, and Mrs. Keen said that they were in “the heart of Fort Lonesome.” These men, depending on which version of the story you believe, were either newspaper reporters or cartographers. They put the name down on paper and it has been named Fort Lonesome ever since.<sup>i</sup>

Fort Lonesome’s origins date back to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. F.M. Carter immigrated from Lowndes County, Georgia, to Picnic in 1900. He operated a naval stores operation, naming it F.M. Carter Company. Mr. Carter, along with H.P. Mickler, a Tampa business partner, opened a large steam-driven sawmill in Fort Lonesome in 1920. As workers moved to the area to cut the wood, a store opened up in a tent with the owner living in the back. Eventually a Mr. Snyder built a permanent structure and put in hand-operated gas pumps. During the 1930s two stores operated at the Fort Lonesome crossroads, one operated by Gus Haywood and another by “Runt” Carter. Fort Lonesome, however, was so small that it never had a post office. Upon moving to Fort Lonesome in 1929, Mrs. Keen and her husband built their house from lumber taken from a turpentine camp that had recently been torn down. The area had no paved roads nor any electricity, with the houses being lit by coal oil lamps. Mrs. Keen, like her few neighbors, farmed, raising cattle and growing vegetables, selling whatever they did not eat. During the 1930s, local children picked strawberries to help supplement the family income, earning two pennies for each quart picked. Because the farms in Fort Lonesome were generally small, women often times worked in the packing plants for supplemental income. As the 1930s came to a close, much of the virgin timber had been cut, and the sawmill burned down. Consequently, Mr. Carter went out of business, but Mr. Haywood stayed in business, supported by the area’s few farm families.<sup>ii</sup>

When phosphate companies began mining in Fort Lonesome during the late 1960s/early 1970s, life for many residents changed. What used to be farm lands were transformed by the large phosphate drag lines. Today, oranges, cattle, and phosphate mines dominate the Fort Lonesome landscape.<sup>iii</sup>

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i. Bob Balgemann, “Fort Lonesome: Country Folks like it Despite Desolation,” *Tampa Tribune*, East Hillsborough edition, June 9, 1983, 8-EH; Bruton and Bailey, *Plant City*, 25; Leland Hawes, “Fort

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Lonesome Experienced Boom in '30s," *Tampa Tribune* June 4, 1995, 10-Baylife; Mary Jo Melone, "Fort Lonesome: It's a Long Way from Downtown Tampa," *St. Petersburg Times* January 31, 1986, 11B; Morris, *Florida Place Names*, 96; Susan Snyder, "Fort Lonesome," *Tampa Tribune* November 17, 1992, 1-Baylife, 6-Baylife.

ii. Balgemann, "Fort Lonesome," 8-EH; Bruton and Bailey, *Plant City*, 117; E.E. Durrance, "Strawberries Gave '30s Kids Pocket Change," *Tampa Tribune* January 2, 1990; Hawes, "Fort Lonesome Experienced Boom in '30s," 10-Baylife; Melone, "Fort Lonesome," 11B.

iii. Snyder, "Fort Lonesome," 1-Baylife, 6-Baylife.