

# **Springhead**

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## **English Creek**

4 pgs

The following is an excerpt from:

### **HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY HISTORIC RESOURCES SURVEY REPORT**

Submitted to:  
**Florida Department of State  
Bureau of Historic Preservation**

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Prepared by:  
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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.

## *Springhead*

Springhead, the name connotes its geological definition, is situated on the Hillsborough/Polk County border in Township 29 South, Range 22 East, Section 12. While several families settled in the region prior to the Civil War, Springhead's growth came after 1865. Early pioneers, most of whom were from Georgia, included George Hamilton, Joseph Howell, W.M. Clemons, and William M. English. They were followed by the Morgan, Harrell, Blanton, Bryant and DeVane families. George Hamilton was possibly the earliest colonist, relocating from Georgia to eastern Hillsborough County in 1844 in search of pasturage for his cattle. Bringing 12 slaves and 300 cattle to Hillsborough, Hamilton built a log cabin on his property in Springhead. He abandoned the property for four years, returning to his home in Georgia, but Hamilton returned in 1848. The 1850 census listed Hamilton as a 23 year old farmer married to the 20 year old Mary Hamilton. Mr. Hamilton reportedly planted the first orange trees, an important crop for area farmers throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Joseph and Sarah Howell and their five children were neighbors of the Hamiltons. In 1850, Joseph was a 45 year old Georgia native who owned \$212 worth of property and was married to Sarah Howell, a 32 year old Georgia native. Their five children ranged in age from one to 14. Because of the dearth of population, many people merely squatted on vast tracts of unclaimed property, never filing a homestead claim or leaving that task to their heirs. Early settlers typically built unhewn log houses, and since most farmed and raised cattle their nearest neighbors usually lived four to five miles away. Most of Springhead's cattlemen drove their herds to Fort Meyers, where they were shipped to Cuba. Oranges were the main cash crop until most of the trees were wiped out in the disastrous freezes of 1894 and 1895. After that, most families began truck farming, with many growing strawberries and raising poultry.<sup>i</sup>

Between the 1860s and 1870s, as people continued to move into the area, John Rogers, Hiram Sears, Benjamin and Samuel Rowan DeVane and William English became Springhead's leading residents. Mr. English and Samuel DeVane established a grist mill on English Creek which in time became a gathering place for area residents, some of whom came from as far away as Lakeland to have their corn ground. Eventually English and DeVane ended their partnership, with Mr. English taking full control. As the mill became more popular, Mr. English included a sawmill. Mr. English was also associated with the founding of Springhead's first public school in 1876. Prior to this, a Mr. Belton taught a few students for a fee in a one-room, log schoolhouse with seats made from cedar logs. Students only went to school for three months each year. Springhead residents petitioned the county for a school which was granted on September 2, 1876 with William English, Nathaniel C. Bryant, and William Clemons selected as Trustees. The school was moved several times, until 1914, when a brick building was erected. Growth in the region warranted the establishment of a Missionary Baptist Church about the same time as Springhead's first school.<sup>ii</sup>

The last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought about several changes for Springhead. As Henry Plant constructed his railroad, area trees were cut down to make railroad ties. Not all of Springhead's families supported Plant's investment; they viewed it as a destructive force. Mr. English went so far as to tear down a bridge across English Creek to prevent the cross ties from reaching the workers. Mr. English was persuaded to rebuild the bridge, and the railroad reached Tampa, passing ten miles west of Springhead. The critics eventually were proved right as to the powerful influence the railroad would have upon Hillsborough County. Communities such as Shiloh withered after the railroad went through.

Springhead residents began truck farming after the great freeze of 1894-1895. Truck farming was possible because of better roads which offered easier access to the railroad and the northern markets it served. As part of this change, farmers discovered that Springhead has some of the best land in Hillsborough for growing strawberries. In fact, the soil was so good that the county leased an acre of land in 1925 to conduct strawberry experiments. Two years later the county bought two acres and established a Strawberry Investigation Laboratory which became part of the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station. The laboratory remained in Springhead until 1963 when the county and state built a new laboratory on twenty acres of land two miles northwest of Dover. Farming continued to play an important role in Springhead, but in 1908, it received competition from the phosphate industry. After graduating from Springhead elementary's eight grade, boys had the option of learning to farm or going to work at the Coronet phosphate mines a few miles to the northwest.<sup>iii</sup>

By the mid-1930s, Mrs. C.L. DeVane, a lifelong resident of Springhead and descendent of a pioneer settler, gave a glowing description of Springhead when she wrote:

Springhead is now a community of progressive farmers. Located here is an experiment station for the study of diseases affecting agricultural products especially for strawberry experimentation.

Electricity has been available in this section for ten years and many electrical devices are found in the homes and work shops. By using automobiles and trucks and having good roads leading to nearby towns, citizens of communities such as Springhead have the pleasures of the country live and the accommodations of towns and cities.

The reward of years of interest and labor for better educational facilities is a school plant seldom equaled in a rural community.

The Springhead Baptist church has an all-time pastor supported by a membership of more than three hundred, and a live Sunday school and Baptist Young People's society.<sup>iv</sup>

Today, the church, school, and farms still play a prominent role in the majority of Springhead's families lives. The same qualities of rural living with the advantages of urban opportunities that Mrs. DeVane celebrated in the 1930s has continued to draw others to Springhead throughout the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>v</sup>

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i. Bailey, "A Study of Hillsborough County's History, Legend, and Folk Lore, with Implications for the Curriculum," 122; Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Eastern States, "General Land Office, Automated Records Project, Pre-1908 Homestead and Cash Entry Patents;" Mrs. C.L. DeVane, "Springhead Progressive Farm Center," *Plant City Courier* circa. 1929, Springhead Community Historical File, Quintilla Geer Bruton Archives Center, Plant City; Mrs. C.L. DeVane, "Interesting Tale of Early Days in Springhead Section When Neighbors Were Few," *Plant City Courier* September 21, 1934, 14; *Hillsborough County, Florida, 1850 Census*, 20; Cheryl Michaels, "Springhead Folk Proud of History

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that's Deeply Rooted in the Land," *Tampa Tribune*, East Hillsborough edition, July 16, 1986, 1EH; Peggy Shaw, "Everyone in Springhead is 'kin,'" *Tampa Times* May 24, 1974, 1Baylife. Michaels states that Joseph Howell's wife died in 1841. I am assuming that Howell remarried between 1841 and 1850.

ii. Bailey, "A Study of Hillsborough County's History, Legend, and Folk Lore, with Implications for the Curriculum," 126, 260; DeVane, "Springhead Progressive Farm Center;" DeVane, "Interesting Tale of Early Days in Springhead Section when Neighbors were Few," 14; *When History was in the Making*, 10.

iii. Bruton and Bailey, *Plant City*, 150-151; DeVane, "Springhead Progressive Farm Center;" DeVane, "Interesting Tale of Early Days in Springhead Section when Neighbors were Few," 14; Federal Writers' Project, *Seeing Tampa*, 135; Robinson, *History of Hillsborough County, Florida*, 76; Shaw, "Everyone in Springhead is 'kin,'" 1Baylife.

iv. DeVane, "Interesting Tale of Early Days in Springhead Section when Neighbors were Few," 14.

v. Michaels, "Springhead Folk Proud of History that's Deeply Rooted in the Land," 2EH.