

# **Turkey Creek**

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6 pgs

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

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Prepared by:  
**Hillsborough County Planning & Growth Management  
601 East Kennedy Boulevard, P.O. Box 1110, Tampa, Florida 33601**

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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.

## *Turkey Creek*

According to popular legend, the name Turkey Creek was attributed to the large number of wild turkeys once found in the area. One story tells of an arbor erected by the local Baptist congregation. In 1875, under the leadership of Reverend Thomas H. Jaudon, the congregation cleared a wooded area and used the trees that were removed to build an arbor as a place of worship. The arbor, it seems, also provided a convenient roost for turkeys. Eventually it fell into disuse and the congregation built a log cabin in which to hold their services.<sup>i</sup> A story printed in the September 21, 1934, edition of the *Plant City Courier* confirmed the abundance of turkeys in the area, "...William Weeks drifted south before the Civil War and as he drove his team along approaching what is now Turkey Creek section he was obliged to stop frequently to clear the road of turkeys and deer."<sup>ii</sup>

The history of Turkey Creek can be traced through its schools. The first dates back to 1873 with the establishment of a one room log cabin, "numbered 16 with J.J.E. Frierson as trustee."<sup>iii</sup> Two years later the Hillsborough County Board of Public Instruction approved two additional schools on the east side of Turkey Creek, numbered 25, and on the west side of Turkey Creek, numbered 24.<sup>iv</sup> In 1888 the School Board purchased approximately a ½ acre of land along what is now Edwards Road in "the North East corner of the North West quarter of the South East quarter of Section Fourteen (14) in township Twenty-nine (29) South of Range Twenty-one (21) East," for school #19, Turkey Creek.<sup>v</sup> All of this occurred prior to Nathaniel E. Moody's establishment of Turkey Creek's post office on February 12, 1892. By 1903, thirty years after the establishment of the first school in Turkey Creek, the number of school houses in the district had increased to three. The School Board, at the request of the trustees, consolidated the schools leaving two in Special Tax District 19. In June 1904, the trustees petitioned the School Board again, this time requesting that only one school be established in the district. In response, the School Board directed the trustees to select a new location or one of the two existing sites. The site selected was located along Edwards Road. The building materials, which were provided by E.T. Roux & Son of Plant City, were paid for by the School Board, and the trustees provided the labor.<sup>vi</sup>

Around 1908 the school was relocated once again, this time to a two story frame building at the school's current location on Turkey Creek and Connell Roads. Deed records show that the School Board purchased five acres in the "northeast corner of the northeast quarter of the southeast quarter of Section twenty-three (23), Township twenty-nine (29), South of Range twenty-one (21) East," from the Tampa Bay Land and Lumber Company. The lumber company, however, retained all timber rights on the property with "the right to cut and remove said timber any time within fifteen years from the date of these presents."<sup>vii</sup> The same year Turkey Creek graduated its first Senior class. The following year, the board endorsed the action of the superintendent in closing the high school at Turkey Creek and began offering Junior High course work.<sup>viii</sup>

In 1923, 15 years after the initial conveyance of the five acres by the Tampa Bay Land and Lumber Company to the School Board, the School Board acquired "All of the timber, and all of the rights and privileges...Therein and thereto, growing, lying or being" on the

property.<sup>ix</sup> By November 1925 the need for a new high school became apparent with the issuance of \$20,000 in bonds for the purchase of an additional five acres and "to erect and finish a school building."<sup>x</sup> Mr. Frank Goff, a former student who started Turkey Creek School in 1925, described the location of the new building, "On the far side of the old building it was all woods, where the Junior High is now. It was cleared for a softball field and to build the two-story building on the north side."<sup>xi</sup> The "old" building was a reference to the two-story frame schoolhouse and the "new" building was the two-story brick building. In December of that year, Frank Winn was selected as the architect and by February 1926 Winn's drawings had been accepted and approved by the School Board. In September 1926 bids were received for construction of the building and a contract was awarded to Dudley and Nulter with a bid of \$19,800.<sup>xii</sup>

Shortly after construction of the two-story brick building, the school term increased from seven months to eight months, with classes starting at 10 a.m. and continuing until 5:00 p.m. Typical of other rural schools at the time, Turkey Creek School operated as a strawberry school. Located at the intersection of the north/south and east/west branches of the Seaboard Air Line Railroad and 4 miles from Plant City, Turkey Creek prospered as a result of the agricultural success of the strawberry farming industry. The 1911 edition of the *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory* lists the population of Turkey Creek as 100 and having a Baptist and Methodist Churches, a public school, two general stores, and a saw mill. In the 1918 edition, Turkey Creek was listed as a town with a population of 100, having a Baptist church, public school and general store. By 1925, the population had grown to 200, however, the Gazetteer listed the area as a village with a Baptist church, a public school and two general stores. Also listed was the Turkey Creek Growers Association.<sup>xiii</sup>

By the 1920s the importance of the strawberry industry to Plant City and Eastern Hillsborough County was evident with Plant City declaring itself "the Winter Strawberry Capital of the World." In his description of Turkey Creek, local historian Ernest Robinson noted the following, "The soil in and around here is best fitted for general farming and truck growing with the strawberry growing as a real factor in the steady growth of the region."<sup>xiv</sup> By the 1930s, the "Strawberry School" was an institution in Eastern Hillsborough County, allowing children to attend school in the summer so they would be free to harvest during the winter. During the same period the Federal Writers' Project described Turkey Creek as "a flag stop on the Seaboard Air Line Railway....a great strawberry region, and is noted as well for its school, which is the largest rural consolidated school in Hillsborough County. The institution is one of the 'strawberry schools' which have a vacation period during the winter months in order that pupils may assist in harvesting the strawberry crop."<sup>xv</sup> These schools were essential to the local economy, providing the necessary labor for the small farms which depended primarily upon family labor and sharecroppers:

Harvesting strawberries is the work of a large part of the rural population of the eastern section of the county. Men, women and children gather the berries by hand, after which they are selected, graded, washed and packed....

Strawberry culture is frequently called a “thirteen months in the year job” for the producer. In the midst of the harvest in January and February, the farmers order nursery plants and set out the seed-beds for the coming season. These nursery plants put out runners which are cut from the parent plants in June to be replanted in the fall setting. The final beds are made in the fall and the plants are set out in rows. Cold weather is the chief menace of the crop, so pine straw or meadow hay is spread between the rows to be raked over the plants for protection on occasional frosty nights.<sup>xvi</sup>

The schools continued to operate between late March and December well into the 1940s and 1950s. However, the system came under attack in 1946 when J.A. "Jock" Murray, a *Tampa Tribune* reporter, wrote a series of exposes which presented strawberry schools as an antiquated practice. Despite the furor over rural education that resulted from these articles, there was no immediate change in the established summer school schedule in Eastern Hillsborough County. The debate continued in 1950 when Jock Murray produced another series of articles that challenged the system.<sup>xvii</sup> In the years following this second attack, the debate became more contentious resulting in an open panel discussion in December 1954 at the Hillsborough Farm Bureau at Turkey Creek. The County School Superintendent and other school board representatives verbally lambasted the summer school system. When the school session began in April 1955, there were only four schools remaining on the summer schedule -- Dover, Cork, Trapnell, and Turkey Creek.<sup>xviii</sup> Ms. Isabel Preacher, a social studies teacher at Turkey Creek High School for 35 years, emphasized the importance of the system to the community, "There was a need for strawberry schools. It (Turkey Creek School) was an important part of the life and economy of this area."<sup>xix</sup>

Fifteen months later, on July 25, 1956, over 1000 people filled the auditorium of Turkey Creek High School for a meeting called by the Superintendent to announce the end of the Summer schedule. Despite protests, the School Board called a special meeting the following night and ended the system by resolution:

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the board of Public Instruction of Hillsborough County, Florida, in a special session at the County courthouse on Thursday, July 26, 1956, that effective at the close of the school day on July 27, 1956, that all schools will be operated on a single calendar, the same to be known as "The Winter Calendar..."<sup>xx</sup>

The resolution passed unanimously with Superintendent Farnell stating that he believed the action was the "greatest step the Board had ever taken toward improving the welfare of the children of Hillsborough County."<sup>xxi</sup> Following the close of the 1955-56 term, the two story brick building at Turkey Creek School continued to be used as a high school until 1972 when the entire campus became a junior high. In 1995 the Junior High was converted to a Middle School.

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- i. "Turkey Creek Past-Present," *Plant City Courier*, September 27, 1934; Robinson, *History of Hillsborough County*, 81; "Turkey Creek First Baptist Church," (Turkey Creek Community Historical File, Quintilla Geer Bruton Archives Center, Plant City).
  - ii. Robinson, *History of Hillsborough County*, 81-82; D.B. McKay, "Too Many Turkeys," *Tampa Tribune*, December 16, 1951, 2-C. "Abundance of Turkeys Names Turkey Creek," *Plant City Courier*, September 21, 1934.
  - iii. Hillsborough County School Board Minutes, Book 1, p. 14; "El Pavo," Yearbook of Turkey Creek High School, 1972.
  - iv. Hillsborough County School Board Minutes, Book 1, p. 30.
  - v. Warranty Deed dated August 7, 1888, and filed June 26, 1889, Hillsborough County Clerk of the Circuit Court.
  - vi. Bailey, "A Study of Hillsborough County's History, Legend, and Folk Lore, with Implications for the Curriculum," 265; Hillsborough County School Board Minutes, Book 2, p. 118, 119, 120, 123, 124, 151, 154, 155, 208-209; HTHCPB, *The Cultural Resources of Hillsborough County*, 122.
  - vii. Deed Book 222, page 23, Hillsborough County Clerk of the Circuit Court (1908).
  - viii. Hillsborough County School Board Minutes, Book 3, p. 111.
  - ix. Hillsborough County Clerk of the Circuit Court (1923), Deed Book 370, p. 498.
  - x. Hillsborough County School Board Minutes, Book 8, p. 245-248.
  - xi. Frank Goff, interview by Teresa Maio, April 25, 1997, Tape 1, Side A, #.
  - xii. Hillsborough County School Board Minutes, Book 8, p. 284-290, 317-319, 361; Book 9, p. 1.
  - xiii. *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1911-1912*, 478; *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1918*, 633. *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1925*, 1053; Goff, Tape 1, Side A, #.
  - xiv. Robinson, *History of Hillsborough County, Florida*, 82.
  - xv. Federal Writers' Project, "Seeing Tampa," 133.
  - xvi. *Ibid.*, 137-138.
  - xvii. Stephen D. Andrews, "Brasshats and Baby Fingers: The Battle Over Rural Education," *Florida Historical Quarterly* (Winter 1997), 308; J. A. Murray, "Outdated Laws and Customs Hinder Hillsborough Schools," *Tampa Tribune*, October 1, 1946.
  - xviii. Andrews, "Brasshats and Baby Fingers," 319.
  - xix. Isabel Preacher, Interview by Teresa Maio, April 25, 1997: Tape 1, Side B, #.
  - xx. Andrews, "Brasshats and Baby Fingers," 319; Hillsborough County School Board Minutes, Book 22, p. 70-72.

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xxi. Hillsborough County School Board Minutes, Book 22, page 71.