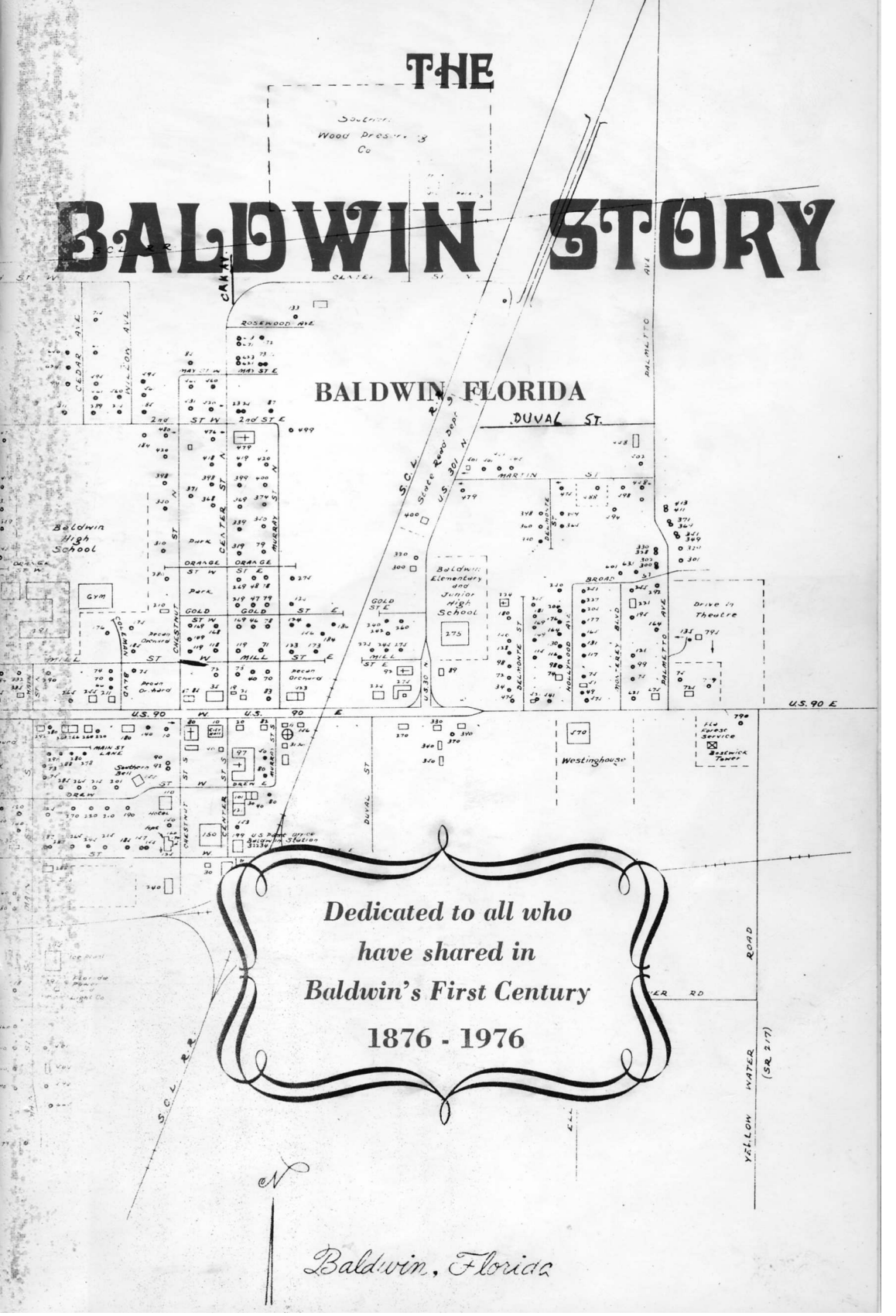
THE BALDWIN STORY

BALDWIN, FLORIDA



Dedicated to all who have shared in Baldwin's First Century

1876 - 1976

Baldwin, Florida

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PREFACE

The Baldwin Story is a narrative of a small town whose beginnings reach much further back in history than the date it was incorporated. The reader may find more enjoyment in this book if they understand its plan beforehand. This is more than a gathering of historical facts. It is a searching out of early pioneer citizens whose individual involvement have contributed to the growth of the town and the attempt to reveal the heart-beat of the times in each era, the personalities and events as they project themselves in the present.

It can be an adventure into the past that YOU can be a part of.

So many people have helped in the making of this book that to enumerate them all would weary the reader, however, special mention seems warranted to Emma P. Tanner who graciously supplied us with most of the historical facts toward the birth of Baldwin. Efforts in the "Mining" of such documented information are "pearls" of great price. We are greatly indebted to her generosity because of the limitation of time to prepare this book would not have permitted us to gather as much of this data which she compiled in her thesis of the story of Baldwin.

Some information concerning portions of family and church histories in our town have been shared so graciously it shows the blessing of God on the place where we call our home town . . . BALDWIN.

The first chapter is devoted to the underground roots of Baldwin's role preceding the Civil War and its formative years through the struggle of its early founders . . . thus forming an introduction to THE BALDWIN STORY, in its first century 1876-1976.

The remaining four chapters trace the progress of its people through the past century.

Hopefully in the reading you may discover some of the history YOU have helped to make.

We gratefully acknowledge those of you who have been so helpful and to share in this project by the Senior Citizens of Baldwin for a Centennial Birthday Observance in October 1976. To an unusual degree this is OUR book. I am privileged to compile and put it together.

Lillian Adams

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THOUGHTS ABOUT A BOOK

The word "book" will never again be thought of lightly by this writer. The undertaking of this task, even with all the help in gathering of facts, sorting of such, writing, re-writing, proofreading and making corrections, then sometimes beginning the cycle all over again . . . groping for words to convey thoughts . . . was no small venture with my limited amount of ability; anyway it is an attempt to communicate to the future children of Baldwin . . . what it was like before what it is now. When grandpa was a boy, or what grandma did when she was a little girl . . . those stories have died out to a great extent with the coming and staying of television. Perhaps through this "body of words" we can bring forth the thoughts that will cause our children to experience a deeper walk with their creator and observe God's hand in the affairs of men because such was true with the founders and builders of Baldwin. The toil involved with establishing laws which were in harmony with Gods laws. Baldwin's leaders have proved that great progress is possible but much remains to be done. If we combine our efforts in unity and continue with a heart that is right and encourage one another then the path of our progress will be much brighter much sooner. God's yoke is easy and his burden is light.

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LILLIAN ADAMS

Chapter 1

The Earliest Pioneers

The humble history brought forth in THE BALDWIN STORY is remarkably unique, as the reader of this book will soon discover. Stretching back in time, over four centuries ago to exhume the raw material of historical facts are responsibility of historians. They have fashioned them well into a pattern which helps complete our story portrait of Baldwin.

Its citizens of today are inclined to look at the immediate years rather than back at the early formative years of its conception, but the spirit and quality of Baldwin pulls both heart and mind. It is filled with vivid light and black shadows. The violence of the past which is recorded in this first chapter gradually disappears like vanishing thunder and is replaced with a more tranquil spirit in its people today.

The earliest residents of Baldwin were the Indians. It is thought that the first was a tribe of the Timucuans, and later the Seminoles. In addition to the old trails there are several Indian mounds. One is located about seven miles northeast of Baldwin near the homeplaces of Nate Fouraker and Luke Lane.

Flint arrowheads at one time were scattered all about us; mute testimony that dark-skinned, silent stealthy people once roamed at will through the swamps and piney woods of this vicinity. They are gone . . . leaving little to evidence the mystery of their wild picturesque life, the music of their language except their mounds and enduring arrowheads. Some are found near Baldwin Bay; a body of water several hundred feet wide which stretches across the northern section of this area.

Much of the early history is lost in obscurity due to lack of records or conflicting records; however, information is adequate in saying the Spaniards constructed a road from coast to coast across the northern part of Florida nearly four centuries ago. The road was known as "The Old Spanish Tail." The purpose of the Spaniards was to connect their misions and settlements from St. Augustine to Pensacola, Mobile, Biloxie and New Orleans.

Another road known as the "Alachua Trail" crossed the "Old Spanish Trail" twenty miles west of Jacksonville, thereby forming a junction. By the year 1835, a four horse stagecoach line was in operation between Jacksonville and Tallahassee via Baldwin. The coachline ran its advertisement in the old Jacksonville Chronicle, a weekly newspaper. The trips were made once a week at a fare of $25.00. Passengers were very fortunate indeed when there was no call for all to get out and lend a helping hand

to push the coach out of a muddy place, regardless of wind or weather. Even when all went well the journey was never one of comfort. The coaches were rather crude affairs having two small front wheels and two large rear wheels There was a constant rocking motion with only great leather straps to cushion the jolting ride. The horses plowed on in the sand and dust during the hot dry weather or floundered through mud, water and washouts during the rainy season. The crossroads always brought a sigh of relief to weary travelers, because it was there the first and last lap of the journey ended. It was there they could refresh themselves.

A man, known as Mr. Thigpen, had opened a tavern at the crossroads for the benefit of this stageline. He furnished fresh horses for the stagecoach, and for the travelers following the trails radiating from this point . . . he supplied food and a chance to rest. So, not later than 1846, Baldwin was known as THIGPEN. This was the same time Jacksonville was known as Cowford in its early history.

On January 18, 1851, the Legislature authorized the building of a plank road from Jacksonville to Alligator . . . later called Lake City. The cost was $75,000.00. This was a toll road. By the early 1850's the country felt the pressing need for railroads. Among those most interested in rail transportation was a very prominent man in the history of Florida . . . David Levy Yulee. It is recorded that he told his son:

"Well as I love my fellowman, I shall spend time in doing what will make them happy. One of the things that will make them happy is to make a railroad so they can visit each other easier, and get more good from that which they labor to make from the earth. And so, nobody else was attending to make this railroad for them and I could do it. It was my duty to do it."

The railroad Mr. Yulee had reference to was the Florida Railroad, the first railroad to cross the state. Fernandina on the Atlantic was its eastern terminus and Cedar Keys on the Gulf of Mexico its western, a distance of 150 miles. The building of this railroad, a cherished dream of Mr. Yulee, was completed in 1860, but it never served the great purpose for which it was conceived by the mind of its creator . . . a strategic link in a commercial chain of world proportions, but it did serve as a boon to the little community of Thigpen. That portion of the Florida Railroad in Duval County was built in 1857. This was also the year when the Baldwin post office was established; August 10th, 1857.

An epidemic of yellow fever was raging in Jacksonville during the period of 1857-1859 which hindered the building of the Atlantic and Gulf Central Railroad from Jacksonville to Alligator (Lake City). The railroad did reach its destination on March 13, 1860. Two days later the event was celebrated by an excursion to Lake City; the name having been changed from Alligator on January 15, 1859. At a barbecue there Dr. Abel Seymour Baldwin was one of the speakers who addressed a large gathering that day. On March 21st a return trip thru Thigpen (not yet named Baldwin) and on to Jacksonville where another celebration took place at the Judson House with a colorful ceremony.

With the coming of the railroad there were changes made in Thigpen. We have no record of the fate of Mr. Thigpen but it appears that he

was the right man at the right time and accomplished his purpose well, but the coming of the railroads automatically closed his business. It was around this period when the people of Thigpen desired to change the name of the community to Baldwin in honor of Dr. Baldwin who had rendered so much of his valued services in this area since 1838.

Abel Seymour Baldwin was born in Oswego County, New York on March 18, 1811. Orphaned in infancy, he was adopted by an uncle in Madison County, New York, where for some time he was taught by private tutors. He was graduated from Geneva (now Hobart) College in 1834 with the Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts Degrees and then studied medicine.

Two years later he received an appointment as botanist in the geologic survey of Michigan, but exposure incident to camp life in that state resulted in an acute attack of rheumatic fever, which made it impossible for him to continue with the work. He returned to New York completed his medical studies, and received the degrees of Master of Arts and Doctor of Medicine from Geneva College in 1838. The climate in the North did not agree with him, he suffered recurrent attacks of rheumatic fever, and the following winter he departed for Florida with his bride. He arrived in Jacksonville on December 2, 1838. This was about midpoint of the Seminole War. Looking back from the vantage point of today, it can be seen that the history of Baldwin would have been quite different had he decided to settle elsewhere. He was a versatile man. A newcomer with unusual qualities in being practical, studious, and scientific. Because of his training in botany he was well versed in the life and growth of plants. He did fine carving on ivory and wood and also played several musical instruments. He was an active member of the St. Johns Episcopal Church and for many years was the leader of its choir. His medical practice carried him within a radius of thirty miles of Jacksonville, much of the territory he covered on horseback. From 1839-1852 he kept records of the reading of the thermometer and the state of the weather. After that date he was a regular correspondent of the Smithsonian Instituion at Washington, to which he furnished a full meteorological record. Later these records became a basis for studies of the climatology of Florida. Their publication did much to attract great numbers of tourist to Florida each winter. He was instrumental in obtaining appropriations from Washington, D.C. to close the mouth of the St. Johns river at the Ft. George Inlet thus forcing a channel deep enough to allow the passage of larger vessels up the river to Jacksonville. He derived this from his studies and observations of the tides and currents. Years later because of his continued interest in the project, the system of jetties which now stand at the mouth of the St. Johns river was developed. His many and varied talents and dedication to help his fellowman are recorded in history at the Hayden Burns Library in Jacksonville; under Florida collections. For sixty years, almost to the day, he led the vanguard of progress in Duval County.

His death was on December 8th, 1898 at the age of eighty-eight. This is the man to whom the people of Thigpen wished to do honor by dropping the former name and calling the town BALDWIN. In Webb's book on Historical Florida, he says Baldwin was settled in 1858, but the map on file in Washington, D. C. compiled by Lt. Blake for General Winfield Scott, in 1846 shows Thigpen in the present location of Baldwin.

We know that settlers were here before that date. The 1860 census gives the name of John S. Sammes, wife and three children. He is listed as a farmer and valued at $120,000. Mr. Sammes was a native of New York. He was a scalawag during the Civil War and Reconstruction. He is also associated with Jacksonville. He left nothing of antiquity for future posterity in this area except his label of scalawag.

The 1860 census also revealed general occupations were farming and logging. Some were registered as laborers, one a gentleman, a light ship tender, teamster, and one a seamstress. Regardless of any census, we know the names of a few famlies who lived in Baldwin during the late 1850's and immediately after the Civil War in 1865.

It is told they fled from Baldwin to Waldo, Florida when the Federal troops came to Jacksonville. The names of those families were Coy, Crighton and Duprey, Mr. and Mrs. Coy were natives of Boston, Mass. The Coys had several daughters. One married a Duprey who lived and kept a store in Baldwin. A frame building in which Viola Brinson ran a restaurant and rooming house across from where the post office now stands. It was torn down during the early part of the year, 1976. Another daughter married Alexander Crighton, whose name is listed as one of the signers of the state Constitution. They reared one child, a daughter, who married G. W. Bryce, a lieutenant in the Confederate Army.

In 1859 the first telegraph line was built from Jacksonville to Baldwin where it connected with the line from the North.

During this time of peaceful settlement, war was threatening to engulf the nation. In April of 1861 Fort Sumpter was fired upon, thus beginning the bloodiest war in history. A war in which the South was completely devasated and impoverished. Would it be ironical to say that LOCATION being the cause which led to the birth of Baldwin, now, for the same reason, led to her devastation?

By March of 1862 the coast from St. Augustine and North was in Federal hands or under the protection of northern gunboats. The southern troops who had not been sent north had fallen back to Baldwin and Sanderson.

The Legislature in 1862 passed a law allowing the circuit Court of Duval County to be held at Baldwin for the reason that the county seat was in the hands of the Union forces.

The Aaron Acosta family fled from Jacksonville when the Union gunboats came within view. Mr. Acosta, with his wife and four children, with what belongings they could carry, took a rowboat and poled along the river's bank to Ortega. Here they stayed several days in the deserted home of Wilkinson Call. Then, in company with other fleeing refugees . . . they walked to Baldwin over the Old Plank Road. The Acosta family, whose descendants remain prominent in Jacksonville today, stayed in Baldwin until the community was captured and Negro troops came to arrest Mr. Acosta and forced him to return to Jacksonville and take the oath of allegiance. To be certain that nothing was hidden, the Negro soldiers thrust bayonets through their beds. Strategically, the community was important to the Federal Government, being the railway junction from which dispursed lines to Jacksonville, Georgia, Fernandina, Cedar Keys

and Central Florida. Supplies belonging to the Confederacy were stored here in warehouses. Camp equipment, cannon, accoutrements, forage, cotton thread, cotton sheeting, rice, molasses, blankets, salt, hides, sugar, flour, turpentine and such. These with forty horses and mules were captured and used or destroyed. Herders were organized by Summerline and cattle trails established from the Caloosahatchee range to Baldwin. Here they were shipped to the Confederate troops at the rate of 600 a week during the freighting season from April to August. The following account is given by Fredarick T. Davis; History of Jacksonville, Florida and its vicinity:

In February of 1864 just at dawn. Col. Henry, head of a detachment, the 40th Mass. Mounted Infantry . . . RODE INTO BALDWIN TO DESTROY THE BREAD BOX OF THE CONFEDERACY. ITS RAILSTATION, WAREHOUSES, BUILDINGS, STORES AND PROVISIONS passed into Federal possession without a shot being fired. The few people remaining in Baldwin, many had fled, told the invaders that the Confederate troops had retired westward. "Yes, sir, Baldwin is a dreadful poor city with a right smart poor people in it," said one citizen to a man in the Federal ranks. The trooper had no reason to doubt the pitious truth of the remark.

February 17, 1864 the Federal troops were still in Baldwin. General Seymour sent General Gillmore word that he was proceeding to the Suwannee River to destroy the railroad bridge. He did not reach the Suwannee as he was intercepted by General Joseph Finegan and his men near Olustee. At Olustee, February 22, 1864, the Battle of Olustee was fought. It was a decisive victory for the Confederates. The Union troops killed in battle were 203 and wounding 1,152 while the confederate soldiers lost 93 in death and 847 wounded.

On Sunday, July 24, 1864, the Union forces were observed by Confederates when they began to cross the south fork of Black Creek. The Confederates were driven back and a force sent to destroy two small trestles on the Baldwin-Gainesville railroad. Colonel Morgan with 200 men, made a march of 31 miles around the Confederate camp and burned the large trestle over the St. Marys river, capturing the guard there.

Baldwin was again occupied by Union troops in July of 1864. Negro troops tore up sections of railway track between Cedar Keys and Baldwin. In August Negro troops destroyed much of the track between Baldwin and Jacksonville. August 15th Baldwin was evacuated by the Union troops, but not until Col. W. H. Noble had set fire to all buildings, warehouses, stores of iron, and almost anything else that would burn. According to records the postoffice could have been an exception as it was established August 10, 1857 and was not dis-established until July 7th in 1868.

On August 9, 1864, there were three regiments of infantry, a battery and battalion of Cavalry in Baldwin. On August 10th there was a skirmish a few miles west of Baldwin near the Duval County line between Union and Confederate Cavalry. The Confederates attacked the Union, who were tearing up the railroad tracks. Two companies of Confederates drove the Union troops back toward Baldwin, but General Hatch sent reinforcements of 100 cavalry and two pieces of artillery, forcing the southern troops to retire beyond the St. Mary's. This was the last action on Duval county soil during the war, excepting occassional minor forays.

Some of the Confederate troops were paroled at Baldwin. Among