

November 7 1974

Miss Amy Diamond:

These are more or less "hurriedly dictated impressions" and do not necessarily reflect true facts. Because, you see I am talking about something that occurred, in some instances, 65 years ago.

Responsive to your inquiry concerning early history of RUSKIN, FLA., I give you the following:

As far back as my memory goes I lived with my parents, Joseph M. and Julia Walker, and my two Sisters, Minnie (oldest) and Claudia, and my Brother Joseph M. Junior, who was 3 years older than me. We lived  $4\frac{1}{2}$  to 5 miles southeasterly from where Ruskin was established, at a point called "the bend of the river" and the River was, of course, the Little Manatee.

A couple of miles east of where the main part of Ruskin now stands, there was what was called a "turpentine still" and a "turpentine still" was a place where gum from pine trees, was hauled in barrels on waggons and dumped into tanks and "cooked" to the point where the turpentine oil separated from the residue, and the residue was called "rosin". See the dictionary for definitions.

The turpentine still worked quite a number of employees, mostly blacks, in those days called "niggers". (Niger is Biblical spelling of nigger).

The number of employees created a village, and most all the houses in which they lived were made of "rough lumber" and were built and furnished to employees by the owner of the turpentine still.

During a period when the said village was abandoned, as I recall now, and which village was called "Siberia" by the old settlers of the area, what we called "the yankees" moved into the village, and occupied the better of the dwellings. These yankees, were the Millers and Dickmans.

Going back a step, now, at the turpentine still there was a commissary, or store, where groceries, cloth, drygoods, small farm tools, and many necessities could be purchased.

Now, when the "yankees" moved into the abandoned or deserted village, they converted the "commissary" into a schoolhouse, and it was not long until they had a school going, for their children and for all children in walking or driving (waggons, buggies, etc) distance, attended.

In a year or so, as I recall, they obtained a post office, which was called "Ruskin, Florida"

The teacher of the school, was Miss Aurora Miller, the oldest daughter of George MacA. Miller, the founder and leader of the new settlers.

The Wife of Mr. George MacA. Miller, as I remember was Mrs. Adaline. These names I will give you, I am not sure about, and you would be able to straighten out the names and relationships by consulting Mr. Paul B. Dickman, who lives in Ruskin and is quite a prominent man in those parts, at this time.

Miss Aurora Miller, the teacher, was a beautiful, wonderful young lady, and I could not even guess her age. I was only 6, and it was my first school. I would say she was 19 or 20, or somewhere in the range of a year or two either way.

Not once did I ever see Miss Aurora display any sign of temper or impatience with the children, and I know she must have had just cause to -- but it just appeared not to be in her nature. Around her beauty and charm, it appeared to me that the whole social atmosphere blossomed, especially so far as younger people were concerned.



I was a boy with no promise, or chance in life, the youngest child of the poorest family in the County.

Aurora Miller seemed to be the leader of the several small classes of Sunday-school, which she established as a Sunday function at the old commissary building which was the only school in many miles. I do not know if Miss Aurora actually taught a Sunday-school class, but it seems to me that she would just appear, while the class was in progress, and sort of move from one to the other, in an effort to see that the persons who were was "teaching" at the time, were doing it well.

I can recall most vividly once when she appeared at the class I was in, and I may have appeared disconcerted, or ignorant, or something and she looked straight at me and said "GOD IS LOVE; if we do not love one-another, God will not love us, and if God loves us, then we do not have to fear to live or fear to die, because He is always with us, even after death." That may not be her precise words, but are my best memory.

On other occasions she would appear at my class, and I recall on one occasion, she admonished us all that "everyone should read the Bible at home, because only in that way, are we prepared" and I remember that she would ~~sometimes~~ <sup>say</sup> "believing" which at the time was not too clear to my young untrained mind, but now as I reflect back I know what she was saying was to "believe and have faith", in God.

This young lady, Miss Aurora, seemed never to command, but to suggest to the children, as if she was doing them a favor by having them do what she suggested that they do.

Once, I noticed a piece of chalk lying on the floor under my seat in school, and child-like I put my foot on it, and smashed and smeared it all over the floor, and at "recess," she came up to me and handed me a wet "wash-rag" and said to me, "Eddie, here is a washrag, and I am going to let you go back inside, and clean up that chalk you smeared on the floor beneath your seat, and when you have finished then bring the washrag back to me".

This is an example of her kind approach to the school children, she taught. And, they all dearly loved her.

Yes, later, when I had grown into youngmanhood when I seldom saw her, she always came close to me, paused, spoke to me, inquired how I was getting along and always let me know she remembered me back in her school.

She had a great influence on my life, particularly, how to be kind to other people and thoughtful of them, and her approach to the Sundayschool lessons when I was only 6 or 7, lingered on and influenced my reading of the Bible, joining the Baptist Church, and my Christian Life in later years, and until this day.

I knew all of the Dickmans: There was Mr. Bert and his Wife, Mrs. Rose. Mr. L. L. and his Wife, Mrs Elizabeth; and Mr. N.E.(Don) Dickman and his Wife, Mrs. Pearl. The Bert Dickmans had two children, Paul and Pauline, and the L. L. Dickmans had two children, Reese and Nedra, and Mr. N.E. Dickman and Wife had two daughters, Zada and Cleola.

I believe the women of Dickman and Miller Families, were the most elegant of their day, and their charm and mannerism would be unequalled today.

Miss Aurora had a Sister, Georgadda. I never knew if that was a nickname or her real name, but she was younger than Aurora. She, too was charming, and elegant, but I thought Aurora had more charm than any young lady I had ever known, and I think few could compare, even in this day and time.

My parents came to Florida in 1883 from Georgia. And we lived off of a few hundred dollars a year, raising hogs and chickens and selling in Tampa.

I always personally liked the "yankees" because of their charm and manner and was the only one of the old settlers that I know of, who did like them, so I never associated with them nor they with me.

Within a year or so after settling at the old turpentine still, "Siberia" the Dickmans and Millers began building new houses, where "Ruskin" was finally and finally established. The first location was temporary.



The "yankees" always appeared to have more money than my family did, and more than most all the old settlers had. They were better educated, too, and had a higher level of outlook on life in general.

The leader and founder of Ruskin, Mr. George McA. Miller, had four children that I knew -- and I think that was all -- and their names were Aurora, oldest, Georgadda, next, and two boys, Onton and Willard.

I think Paul, Son of Mr. Bert, prospered, probably, more than any of the others of the Miller and Dickman families -- although I might admit that I do not know anything about the prosperity and progress of any of them, except Paul. He has never told me, but I understand that Paul is worth several million dollars -- how many I do not know.

I probably prospered more than any of the off-spring of the old settlers that I knew in my childhood. I sought an education, and was employed by the railroads, and other corporations, and lived in Norfolk, Va., Wilmington, N.C., and Atlanta, Ga. I attended law school, became a lawyer, and even at my present old-age, I am still enjoying law practice that brings me lots of satisfaction, as well as considerable financial income. I have invested well, and reached the status of being a millionaire, with probably a single million, a good many years ago.

Most of my wealth came from investment in stocks, which increased in value and it did not require very much intelligence, I suppose, to do that. Just this week I purchased stock in a large insurance company, while the market is low, and if it gets back to normal, I will have amassed quite another sizable sum of money.

If there is anything specific you would like to ask me, I will be glad to try to answer.

You did ask me what a day was like, back when I first recall the founding of Ruskin.

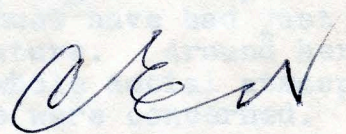
Well, my day was to get up in the morning, and eat an early breakfast with my parents and the other children. My Father went out about his daily work, and I had nothing to do, but go out and sit on the fence -- a rail fence, and watch the cattle graze -- wild cattle. The same herd came from the same direction every morning, and moved slowly as they grazed, and within an hour or two they would have vanished to the northwest -- having approached from the Southeast. Sometimes wild deer would be scattered among them or following closely. Then about mid after-noon, the same herd would be seen approaching from the northwest grazing in the same pattern, returning to the Southeast, where they doubtless bedded down in the oak-thicket near the bank of the Little Manatee River.

During the rest of my day, when the cattle were not close by to watch, I usually sit under the great black-jack oak trees near the side of our yard, and watched birds of various colors and kinds. I knew the habit of every bird, and the sound of its call.

And, to get money to attend Tampa Business College, I trapped raccoons, opossums and wildcats, and cured and shipped their furs. I read the Bible and prayed and "believed" and God did wonders for me, and everything I undertook, worked just fine for me.

If you have interviewed Paul B. Dickman on the subject of your thesis you probably got a better, first-hand statement of facts and the history of early Ruskin than I can give you. But, ask me on any point, specific point, that is, and I will try to give you an answer.

Sincerely,

  
C. E. WALKER