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Norma Goolsby Frazier

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PIONEERING ON THE LOWER ALAFIA AND THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF PERU

By NORMA GOOLSBY FRAZIER



Benjamin Moody

In 1843, the year after the Second Seminole War ended, adventurer and Indian fighter Benjamin Moody and his family arrived in the Alafia River area, then a wilderness of thick pine forests, abounding in fresh game.

The Alafia riverbanks, surrounding marshes and swamplands were the habitat of wildcats, panthers, wild hogs and a variety of animals native to the area, including deer, cat squirrels, rabbits, and wild turkeys.

As the Moody family slowly made their way through thickets of bushy palmettos and stands of tall, yellow Pines, all their worldly goods packed into horse-drawn covered

wagons, alligators in varying sizes up to twenty feet in length, first appearing as fat, dark brown logs, lay sunning themselves on the Alafia riverbanks. In the distance, dusty gray colored whooping cranes with their crimson crested heads, could be seen in the swampy area nearby, as they perched erectly on their thin, stilt-like legs, their young strolling casually nearby, poking among the small rocks and shells as they searched for food, oblivious to the alligators who were lurking nearby. The Florida Indians called the cranes, which are said to reach six feet in height, "Wartola-lacha," their croaking or whooping sounds echoing for a great distance. The cranes were often seen feeding in the high lands as well as savannas, feeding like a deer.¹

Hunting expeditions in the vast wilderness lying east of Tampa Bay and in the proximity of the Alafia River had long been favored by the Florida Indian tribes with a bounty of fresh game available. The peaceful and winding river was not only favored for its beauty; its waters held an abundance of fresh fish for food, and within a five mile radius of the site of an early Indian village, where Peru would be founded, crystal clear water flowed profusely from an underground "silvery spring" first known by white settlers as McLaughlin Springs, now known as Lithia Springs. In a westerly direction at the mouth of the Alafia, lay rich oyster beds, not only a favorite of the Indians but settlers as well.

According to oldtimers, many kinds of people have lived along the lower Alafia in



William Ben Moody Jr. (born 1861, died 1935, grandson of adventurer and soldier, Benjamin Moody who came to the Alafia Section in 1843. William Ben Moody, Jr. was an early Hillsborough County Commissioner, owner of the Alafia Hotel, general store and postmaster of the first Riverview Post Office which was established November 19, 1891 (photo taken circa 1930.)

years past with stories having circulated about a colorful deerskinner. They say that he made his abode in a crude hut beside a branch of the river located just east of the Rice Creek bridge in a swampy area at the base of the hill on what is now McMullen Loop. Deerhides and also fresh deer meat were said to have been traded or sold by the early Peru swamp dweller.

The beautiful and peaceful Alafia, "Alafeah," "river of fire," was believed to have been named by the Indians as it appeared to them at night as a river of fire due to the high phosphoric content of its waters.

The river which had long been desired by the Florida Indian tribes whose villages were found on its banks, including the



John Barnes and wife, Dee Brewer Barnes, early settlers of Peru, the settlement which existed on the south bank of the Alafia River. The Barnes family shared early Hillsborough County with the Seminole Indians whom they considered not only as neighbors but also as friends.

Timucuan; their village was located near its mouth, bordered by Tampa Bay. The Timucuan, Calusa (Caloosa), Apalachees, and Ais, were early Florida tribes. The Calusa and Timucuan tribes were two large tribes in early Florida with the chief and main town of the Timucuan being located on Tampa Bay. The Caloosas were congregated further South, mainly near the mouth of the Caloosahatchee River, while the Timucuan reigned from St. Augustine southwesterly to the headwaters of Peace River, and along the west bank of the Caloosahatchee to the Gulf. The northern boundary of the Caloosas was the east bank of the Peace River to its head and in a northeasterly direction towards the east coast to a point near Cape Canaveral. The Peace River was the dividing line between the two tribes with the river being neutral and holy ground.²

The beauty of the Alafia's tranquil waters later drew the Creeks fleeing the conflicts which took place north of the Georgia border during Andrew Jackson's campaigns; some of whom fled to the beautiful

woodlands lying east of Tampa Bay. Peter McQueen, uncle of the great Osceola, and McQueen's followers, were among those who came in the early part of the nineteenth century to McQueen's Village, found on the east side of Tampa Bay with Low-Walta Village and Red Town at Tampa Bay, believed to have been in the same vicinity, as stated in a letter addressed to a Committee of Congress in February 1821 from Captain John H. Bell, Agent for the Indians in Florida, naming the Indian villages which existed at that time.³

The Florida Indians, who no doubt loved the area no less than its later residents, left many evidences of their habitation and lifestyle such as chippings of flint used by the Indians to make arrowheads to obtain food and to provide protection, which were found by early settlers. Indian villages which existed in central Florida included villages found at the mouth of the Little Manatee River and at Bullfrog Creek. Many pilings of shells accumulated over a long period of time by the Indians who hauled oysters from the nearby bay, would later be used to build roads in southeastern Hillsborough County over the dusty trails which had earlier carried oxen and horsedrawn wagons. Many of these Indian trails would carry supply wagons of volunteers and soldiers who fought during the Seminole Wars and were the beginnings of roads which exist today.

The Alafia would later be seen and admired by riverboat captains and seafaring men whose vessels plied the waters of Tampa Bay; many of whom would fulfill their vow to settle on the riverbanks found on the south bank of the Alafia in the early settlement of Peru. John Pixton used to steamboat on local waters; he was a fireman on the tug, "Resolute," a fireman on the "Clark," and the "Mistletoe," which ran

between Tampa and Sarasota in the 1800's. He was also employed on the "Pohanet" and the "Manatee," and was an oiler on the "General Timothy," a government steamer which ran from Tampa to Egmont Key. This was during the time when a fort was maintained on the Key. Captains Brophy and Bob Starton were sea captains who settled on the Alafia riverbanks, the latter being the captain of the "General Timothy." These early seafaring men, together with the early Barnes, and Duzenbury families were numbered among the first white settlers in the settlement of Peru.

Following fifty years with the Bull Steamship Company as its commander, Captain Tom Thebald made his first home ashore on the banks of the Alafia River in the mid 1800's. Warren Hall, owner and master of the steamer, "Ancient City," which was reportedly quite a novelty in that a figure made of brass, highly polished, and holding a bow aimed and ready to shoot, appeared on the large vessel's pilot house. Captain Hall, who was also an engineer, when short of crewmen, would hire a boy to steer the vessel and take on the task of stoking the boilers himself. In later years, the "Ancient City" made three or four trips weekly between towns lying on the Alafia River and Tampa, bringing needed supplies to the early settlers.⁴

Soldiers from Ft. Brooke (from which Tampa grew, established in 1824 on the east bank of the Hillsborough River), who would fight in the Second Seminole War (1835-'42), so impressed by the beauty of the forests, savannas, and meadowlands found in central Florida, would also vow to return and bring their families and earthly possessions for a "fresh start" on the Alafia riverbanks and the wilderness that lay beyond.

One early pioneer soldier was Benjamin Moody, who settled in 1843 along the Alafia. Few white settlers had ventured that far south at that time, but the Barnes family, believed to have been the earliest settlers in the tiny community of Peru, made their home in rustic dwellings near the shoals of the Alafia River, now known as Bell Shoals. Peru was the name of the pioneer community established on the south side of the Alafia River during the mid-1800's.

The area was a virtual wilderness when the Moody family arrived with many tall, lean "cabbage palms," their crooked "necks" hanging low, casting a dark shadow over the dark waters, amidst centuries-old oaks draped with Spanish moss, flowering bay trees, hickories, and waxy green leaved palatka holly trees ablaze with clusters of shiny red berries, growing nearby. Wild plums, persimmons, mulberries, and guavas were found growing not far from the riverbanks, proving to be a further enticement to the Moody family as well as the handful of other early settlers who would make their home in the Alafia River section.

In 1840, when the first census was taken in Hillsborough County, the county population was 452 persons with approximately 360 of these living at Ft. Brooke; this included the Pinellas Peninsula and the areas of Manatee and Sarasota Counties.⁵

The Barnes family, comprised of the families of Lon, John, and Bud Barnes and believed to have been among the first settlers to penetrate the central Florida wilderness as far south as early Peru, settled not far from the Alafia River near the present day Bell Shoals bridge, in an area which today, continues to provide some of the most beautiful scenery found in central Florida. Understandably, the family found the availability of fresh game and fish from



Elizabeth McDonald Moody, wife of William Ben Moody, Jr. and member of the pioneering McDonald family of Hopewell in eastern Hillsborough County. The family was one of the earliest producers of citrus in central Florida (photo taken circa 1930).

the waters of the Alafia deciding factors in their selection of homesite, with the natural beauty of the area an enticement as well. Today, as in the 1800's, as fall approaches, rust colored scarlet maples, snowy white blossoms of wild plum trees, sweet gum, white bay, hickory, pecan and other trees native to the "Sunshine State," still paint the roadside in varying hues of browns, rusts, and golds, with colorful lantanas I pale orchid colored morning glories and yellow jasmine vines often found growing near their base, covering the hillsides surrounding the Alafia riverbanks.

The Barnes family children swam in the shallow, clear falls of the cool river waters as no doubt did the children of the area's earlier residents, the Florida Indians who

swam the waters of the Alafia and nearby lakes and streams while older family members hunted the abundance of deer, bear, wild turkeys and the plentiful bounty of game then found in the thickly wooded forests with areas so dense they were never penetrated by the light of the sun. The pioneering Barnes family came to central Florida from their home in Southern Alabama, the Barnes menfold having made a previous trip, returning to their Alabama home for their wives and children prior to embarking on the long journey by covered wagons drawn by teams of oxen. The children and livestock walked alongside the caravan which reportedly stopped each day as the sun made its way over the horizon, as they located a campsite along the trail.

Descendants of oldtimers who lived in the area during its founding days, and visible evidence of the remains of somewhat crude wooden dwellings of the early Barnes family, found on the Alafia riverbanks near the present Bell Shoals river bridge by settlers arriving much later, substantiate the belief that early settlers found land lying near the Alafia a desirable place to settle and raise their families. Pottery remnants and other household utensils believed to have been used by the Barnes family were also found near a stand of tall, old oaks situated northeast of the Boyette Road/McMullen Loop intersection. Timbers of another early dwelling were also found at a site near the Valrie Lane/McMullen Loop intersection. Remnants of glass and pottery were found by early residents who came to Peru in the late 1800's, evidencing the fact that a few brave settlers shared the wilderness then found in central Florida.

Otha Goolsby, of the pioneer Goolsby family who came to Hillsborough County from Orange County near the turn of the century, recalled visiting the Barnes family



Leon Whitt Murphy (born 1890), daughter of Amanda Barnes Whitt and Jefferson Whitt. The Barnes family was among central Florida's early settlers. Leon Whitt Murphy vaguely remembered attending the early Peru Baptist Church and school situated on the south bank of the Alafia River. (photo circa 1905)

homeplace near the Bell Shoals bridge and viewing the many small graves found in a family cemetery there indicating the likelihood of an epidemic occurring in the 1800's, causing death to many of the Barnes children who either died in infancy or early childhood.

The Barnes family, no doubt learned survival secrets and choice locations to secure food from the Indians living in the area at that time, as they either grew, caught, or killed their foods which were then often smoked or dried. Indications are that the earliest settlers enjoyed a relatively peaceful coexistence with the Indians during that period.



William Amos Goolsby, Jr. and wife, Effie Vernon Tyner Goolsby (both born in 1872), pictured with Will's "toy," his 1902 Model T. Ford. The Goolsby family was among Peru Baptist Church's earliest members with the Goolsby family property on Boyette Road serving as home to the sixth generation of Goolsby family members. (photo taken 1938).

Many tales of events which occurred during this time have been handed down through the years. It is said that during a time of unrest between the races, a group of Indian braves made their way cautiously toward the home of a white man, and upon peering through a window, the night lit dimly by a small candle, viewed the family at their evening devotions. According to the storyteller, upon finding the family praying to the "Great White Spirit," the young braves retreated.

Since leaving their home and moving slowly southward, the Moodys' journey had taken them across some of the most beautiful areas of the Territory, having crossed the waters of a number of scenic rivers enroute, including the historic Suwannee, but considered the serenity and beauty of the Alafia to be unrivaled.

Pioneering families such as the Simmons, Bravos, Saffolds, Barnes, Murphys, McGriffs, Whiddens, Hendrys, Hardings,

and a handful of other families, began raising their families, cutting the long virgin timber, and ranging their stock on the rich land lying on the curving banks of the Alafia River.

No roads existed at that time, only a few wagon trails made from the oxdrawn carts of those who dared the trials, hard times, sickness and often hunger which often accompanied early experiences during those settling days. Many early settlers barely eked out a day-to-day existence for themselves and their families.

Benjamin Moody, the son of Samuel Moody, was born April 15, 1811 in Telfair County, Georgia. On February 7, 1833, Benjamin Moody and Miss Nancy Hooker were married in Hamilton County, Florida. She was born May 23, 1811, the daughter of Stephen Hooker and Elizabeth Brinton, with the bride's brother, William B. Hooker performing the ceremony.⁶

Moody eventually settled in early Peru at the old Weldon place, establishing his residency in a log cabin by the Alafia River, where he began raising cattle on the vast open ranges which existed in central Florida at that time.

Benjamin Moody was among numerous brave, adventurous early settlers in the Territory of Florida who were lured by the beauty of the Alafia River and who filed applications under the "Armed Occupation Act of Florida" (1842); the unified Territory of Florida having been established on March 30, 1822 with President Monroe signing into law a Congressional act providing for a government headed by a Governor and a Legislative Council.⁷

James Whitton, Henry S. Clark, James C. Pearce, Uriah John Collier and Benjamin Moody filed their applications at the



The first bridge spanning the Alafia River, connecting the early settlements of Peru and Riverview, built circa 1900. The impressive ironwork was formerly used on the Lafayette Street Bridge in Tampa with the wooden floor of the bridge "raised" to allow riverboats and steamers passage. Dr. G. H. Symmes, Peru's first medical doctor, is pictured 8th from left.

Newnansville office for property lying on rich land lying near the Alafia River. Land applications under the "Armed Occupation Act" were also filed in St. Augustine with the Act stipulating that 160 acres would be given to any head of family or single man over 18 who was able to bear arms, with the applicant required to live on the land in a house fit for habitation during five consecutive years and cultivate at least five acres.⁸

Soon after arriving in the area, Benjamin Moody built a spacious log cabin home which was said to have been one of the first and finest in central Florida. In 1845, following three years in her new home near the Alafia riverbanks, in the same year in which Florida attained statehood, Moody's wife Nancy, mother of his six children, died.

Benjamin Moody, soldier, cattleman, civic leader and now a young-widower, and the father of Martha E., William B., James

O.A., Jane, Mariann, and Eloise M. Moody, soon became involved in politics and in 1846, he was chosen as one of the first County Commissioners in Hillsborough County. He also served as Chairman of this group. Other Commissioners serving on that first Board were James Goff, William Hancock, and M.C. Brown, with their first meeting held January 5, 1846. It was at that time known as the "Commissioners Court," and paid its members a fee of \$2.00 for each meeting they attended. The total amount of money in the county treasury at that time was \$267.63. S.L. Sparkman was Tax Assessor with John Parker serving as Tax Collector.

Moody donated land for the first Methodist church at Peru on the south side of the Alafia River about 1850. With the assistance of George Simmons, the earliest known operator of the ferry crossing the Alafia, and two or three other families, he erected a small log cabin on the back of Moody's land at the edge of the Alafia River where a handful of families met each Sunday morning in that small wooden structure to worship the Lord. This early church in Peru was one of the first Methodist Churches to be constructed in Hillsborough County and also in south Florida. The church would later be moved across the river, reorganized by Rev. Leroy G. Lesley, (himself a soldier during the Indian wars) and renamed Lesley's Chapel in his honor.

The title of "Grandfather of the Southern Methodist Church" had been bestowed upon Benjamin Moody by Judge Wilson of Bartow in recognition of his early efforts in organizing the Peru church. He was reportedly a man who devoted much time to his church. Lesley, who would become well known in central Florida, not only as a "man of God," but also as a soldier, was born in

Abbeville, South Carolina on May 11, 1808 and settled in Tampa in 1848.⁹

Historical accounts bear out the fact that following the Civil War, Lesley moved his family into the log cabin church Benjamin Moody and Simmons had "reared" on the Alafia riverbanks at Peru. Lesley operated a ferry on the Alafia River there by 1867, providing settlers access to Peru and to South Florida as well. The ferry crossed east of the present bridge, near an old store on the riverbanks. This store in later years was converted to a church, serving as the second building occupied by the Peru Baptist Church.

It is believed that Lesley Chapel, served as a schoolhouse five days each week for six months of the year during a period in its history. Hillsborough County School Board minutes dated September 2, 1883 make mention of a school named "Lesley's Ferry:" "G. W. Kennedy, J. M. Boyet, and G.H. Symmes were appointed trustees for "Lesley's Ferry." An earlier school, the earliest known school in South Florida, was situated on the Alafia riverbanks in 1850. Soldier and adventurer, Francis C.M. Boggess, in *A Veteran of Four Wars*, said that he "took a school on the Alifia River and taught almost continuously for three years in the same neighborhood, and taught the first free school for forty days, that was ever taught in South Florida."

Boggess, a young man who loved adventure, a sailor and also a soldier in the Seminole Wars, was very familiar with the wilderness then found in central and South Florida. Boggess had met Mr. Gideon Tyner (uncle of Effie Vernon Tyner Goolsby, wife of William Amos Goolsby, Jr.), who had come to Tampa to catch a supply of mullet. Tyner and his family were then making their home at Fort Dade north of Tampa, In

conversation with Mr. Boggess, Tyner had mentioned that no schooling was available at Fort Dade for the Tyner children; this situation causing him great concern. Mr. Boggess finally agreed to return to Fort Dade and serve as a teacher for the Tyner children.

Boggess wrote that the schoolhouse at Fort Dade had only one door, no benches and no blackboard, but with the aid of the young men, several of whom were older than Boggess, benches were made and he taught a successful school for a three months period, at a salary of thirty five dollars a month. After trying his hand at sailing and spending some time in Key West, Boggess agreed to return to Fort Dade with Mr. Tyner, serving as schoolmaster to the Tyner children for three months more. After deciding he had nothing better to do, Boggess then took a school on the Alifia (Alafia) River and taught the first free school ever taught in South Florida.¹⁰

Rev. Leroy G. Lesley, who contributed greatly to early Methodism in central Florida, often traveling by horseback to outlying sections, became well acquainted with much of the wilderness area to the east and south of Tampa. On April 17, 1856, while he was in Tampa, word came that a white man had been murdered and scalped in the Bloomingdale area. Rev. Lesley and a party of men including his son, John, conducted a mounted search near the home of John Carney, continuing on the trail of the renegade Indians, tracking them to the Peace River valley. The white man, John Carney, operated a ferry crossing the Alafia River, probably at a site near what is now known as Lithia Springs. Rev. Lesley had served in three wars; the Second Seminole War, 1835-'42, the Third Seminole Indian War, 1855--58, other Indian conflicts; and also the Civil War which began in 1861 and

ended in 1865. In the last Indian war and in the Civil War, Lesley raised and commanded companies of cavalry as a Captain, and in the Civil War, served as a soldier in the Confederate States of America.¹¹

Members of early settling families who served in Captain Leroy G. Lesley's Company in the Seminole War of 1856, included Parker, Alderman, Blount, Hancock, Mizell, Seward, Summerall, Varn, Wiggins, and Whidden families. Captain Lesley's son, Corporal John T. Lesley, Antoine Wordehoff; John Carney, murdered by renegade Indians in 1856, and Carney's neighbor, John Vickers.¹²

One of the young men who served in Captain Leroy G. Lesley's Company in 1856 was Willoughby Whidden, Jr. The Whidden family is known to have made their home on the Alafia riverbanks in the early 1840's, near the site of an early Indian village.

A killing which touched the Whidden and McCullough families occurred in July 1849. The incident took place at the Indian store of Messrs. Kennedy and Darling at a location on Peas Creek which is now known as Bowling Green. On July 17, about noon, Echo Emethla Chapco and three Indian women came to till store bringing watermelons, venison, sweet potatoes, skins, and beeswax, with trader, Captain Payne, purchasing a few of the watermelons along with the other items. The Indians told him that they had a large pack of skins on the east side of Peas Creek and needed his boat to get them across; the Indians also stating that they wanted to spend the night in the store. Upon closing the store, Capt. Payne went inside for supper with the Indians being seen outside smoking their pipes. Without warning, the Indians fired inside the door with Capt. Payne and Dempsey

Whidden being killed. William McCullough, a trading post employee, was shot in the left shoulder. He quickly grabbed his child, and joined by his wife, the threesome fled into the night. Frantically, they proceeded in the direction of a bridge, all the while being pursued by the Indians who fired at the fleeing family with a ball passing through the flesh of McCullough's right thigh, the same ball passing through his wife, Nancy's leg. After crossing the bridge, they hid themselves as the three Indians passed close by, searching in vain for the family. After eluding the Indians in the darkness, the family fled through the thick underbrush, having their clothing torn from their bodies as they made their way through the woods some twenty to thirty miles distant, finally reaching their home on the "Big Alafia".¹³

Nancy Whidden McCullough, sister of Dempsey Whidden, one of the men killed at the trading post in 1849, would lose another brother, Lott Whidden, seven years later in another killing involving renegade Indians which took place at the Tillis homestead in Ft. Meade in 1856.

Benjamin Moody, one of central Florida's earliest residents, and his grown sons, James, and William Ben, fought in the Indian wars and the Civil War. The Moody family is believed to have taken refuge in nearby forts during the early settling days on three separate occasions, the last being at the early fort at Ft. Meade which was established in Polk County in 1849.

"Miss Mary" Moody, born in 1901, great granddaughter of pioneer Benjamin Moody and beloved teacher of many of the children of Peru's founding families, recalled experiences related to her by her grandmother and other family members of the days when they and the Florida Indians

shared central Florida. Rachel Alderman Moody, daughter of the man for whom Alderman's Ford was named, and grandmother of "Miss Mary", was among those who took refuge in Fort Alafia.

Oldtimers tell us that during one Indian uprising in the early area of Peru, settlers hurriedly sought refuge in Fort Alafia, located in the Alafia settlement in southeastern Hillsborough County. Due to the urgency of the situation, they left virtually everything behind but their children. As a sense of calm and peace was once again restored, and the early settlers returned to their homes in the community of Peru, the group found the body of a neighbor woman whose home was situated on the outskirts of the small community who had not reached the fort in time, having been ambushed and killed as she sought refuge in Fort Alafia.

Indian uprisings at that time were reportedly quite rare, as oldtimers have also passed down many tales of the Indians' friendliness and desire to coexist with early settlers. The brave settlers who ventured as far south as central Florida were lured to the area by its beauty, availability of fresh game, and rich soil on which to grow food for their families and themselves, all this at the risk of hostilities from renegade Indians. Following the end of the Seminole wars, Benjamin Moody is said to have gathered his children from the homes of family members and returned to his log cabin home on the Alafia riverbanks where once again, he began raising cattle on the open range.

With the coming of settlers into central Florida, the establishment of homes, churches and schools, and the passing of time, settlers were soon faced with the need to bury their loved ones. Early families often buried family members in small family cemeteries, oftentimes locating them behind their homeplace. Today, the location of their

remains is often known only to God as the wooden crosses or other markings used soon deteriorated, resulting in no visible evidence of their early burial existing today. One of the oldest cemeteries in Hillsborough County and the first in the community of Peru, is the Duzenbury cemetery, now known as the Samford Cemetery, and located approximately two miles south of the Alafia River. The early "burying place" is named for the Duzenbury family, one of Peru's earliest. Oldtimers recalled orchards of avocado and citrus trees on one of the community's earliest homesites. A number of family members are believed to have been buried in unmarked graves there during the early 1850's. Some oldtimers believe that the cemetery also holds the remains of Russian nobility.

Early circuit riding "preachers" are among those buried in the Duzenbury cemetery with Reverends Urban S. Bird and A.M. Samford, both having served as early ministers of the Riverview Methodist Church, lying side by side.¹⁴

The old Duzenbury Cemetery also holds the remains of a beautiful young mother who is said to have had soft, delicate features and long black hair. Vianna Clardy Watts Hendry died in April 1858 at the age of twenty-five, leaving behind two tiny daughters, Julia Amanda, age 3, and Tampa Anna age 1, also her young husband, Charles Wesley Hendry.

The Hendrys had been married on December 2, 1853 and made their home in the early community of Peru. This was the second wife Charles Wesley Hendry had lost; the first, Jensie Alderman, whom he had married on January 10, 1847, had died in 1852 and left an infant daughter who made her home with her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. James Alderman.¹⁵

In 1866, William Ben Moody, Sr., purchased the first general store in Peru which had been jointly owned by F.S. Morrison and J. M. Boyett. Groceries, supplies and mail were brought from Tampa once a week on a little schooner owned by Moody called the "Josephine," stationed on the south side of the Alafia near the old Humphries home.

The first post office was established in Peru on December 8, 1879 with J.M. Boyett serving as its postmaster; mail had earlier been distributed to settlers by horseback. During the early days, children of pioneering families were instructed at home, often by their mother. Moody, being concerned at the lack of education available to children living in the early Peru settlement, soon secured the services of a schoolmarm named "Miss Annie" who taught a handful of neighborhood children living in Peru in the late 1860's. F.S. Morrison would serve as schoolmaster when an early school was built near the Moody store in 1875. This was the second known school on the Alafia riverbanks.

Official School Board minutes for Hillsborough County date back to the year 1871, at which time there were already several schools in existence in southeastern Hillsborough County. A "Moody's" and/or "Moody's Church" is mentioned in minutes dated October 15, 1875. September 1, 1885, Peru School is mentioned: "Upon motion, J.M. Boyett, G.M. Parrish, and O.P. Buzbee were appointed trustees of School No. 29 at Peru. This community was on the south side of the Alafia River near what is now Riverview. August 4, 1893 minutes: "Petition from patrons of Pine Landing and Peru schools to consolidate these two schools was granted." Pine Landing is believed to have been east of Peru on the Alafia riverbanks. This tiny school was

attended by members of some of Peru and Riverview's earliest families including the Whitts, Murphys, Goolsbys, Sharps, Brandons, Killions, Symmes, Thompsons, Mays, Scotts, Kerseys, Baumings, Buzbees, Williams, Thomassons, Roddenberrys, Halls, Mansfields, Duzenburys, VanLandingshams, Caldwelles, Alsobrooks, and Shakers. Many of these early settling families, who were primarily engaged in cattle raising, logging, and the planting of citrus groves, not only shared close friendships, but many of these intermarried. Large grove operations in Peru in the late 1800's included the Mays, Carlton, Drew, and Pelham groves.

The small school then found on the south bank of the Alafia River, also served as the first facility of the Peru Baptist Church (now known as the First Baptist Church of Riverview) and was just northeast of the home of Captain Robert Sharp and his family. The church, organized May 7, 1893 by a handful of early dedicated Peru settlers desiring a "meeting place" to worship the Lord, joined by Rev. Tom Jaudon, a farmer and the father of fifteen children, who rode his mule to outlying areas preaching from the "good book" and establishing many churches still in existence today. The First Baptist Church of Riverview will observe its centennial May 1993.

Mrs. Leon Whitt Murphy, born in Peru on December 5, 1890, vaguely recalled attending the church and school there, with vivid memories of children romping on the structure's neat little front porch as their parents chatted with their neighbors.

Since the arrival of the Spanish explorers in the sixteenth century and the introduction of citrus to the Florida Indians, orange trees grew in abundance near hammocks and marshes; a result of the seeds being scattered

by the Indians and their families as they moved from place to place.

By the 1870's "orange fever" was spreading throughout the state and the Mays' groves in Peru on land acquired by the Mays family soon after the Civil War, were some of the first in the county. About 1875, Samuel Edwards Mays, a merchant, in addition to a citrus grower, planted hundreds of acres on the family property which at that time was the last outpost of early Peru; beyond that point, lay a virtual wilderness.

Neighbors in Plant City, Civil War soldier, CSA, William Amos Goolsby, Sr., his son, Will, grandson, Otha, and the Goolsby family, also came from Plant City to Peru to assist in clearing the thickly overgrown land which had never before been cultivated, and also in the planting, budding, and nurturing of the young seedlings. First, they cleared the land of virgin timber, stands of tall pines, oaks and viny vegetation, also undertaking the task of ridding the woodlands of stubborn scrub palmetto clumps which dotted the landscape and whose long brown roots anchored them deeply in place in the sandy soil. This task was slowly and painstakingly completed by hand utilizing a grubbing hoe. Many varieties of citrus such as valencias, pineapple oranges, Parson Browns, tangerines, kumquats, and grapefruit trees would fill the sprawling citrus groves. The grapefruit trees would in years to come, grow to such heights that the Goolsby grandchildren would often scamper to the top of the tallest of these to view the huge Peoples' Gas tank in downtown Tampa, some fifteen miles distant.

For generations, the Goolsby menfolk had been known as successful planters, having come to the state in 1850 from their home in Jasper County, Georgia, and settling in

Orange County prior to their move to Plant City near the turn of the century.

As the tiny citrus trees in the Mays' Groves grew, the three Goolsby children played nearby, spending their childhood at the Mays homesite found at the crest of a steep hill topped by a huge camphor tree; the dusty, dirt topped wagon trail leading southward from Peru, not far from its base. The Florida Indians had often followed this early trail on their many treks to the bay for oysters, as evidenced by the huge mounds of oyster shells found on the shores of Duck Pond on the Goolsby family property, near the Indian burial mounds. The children often played quietly near the small family cemetery (its location known only by a few), "protected" by a neat, white-washed picket fence, containing several graves including one tiny one, as blossoms from violet colored crape myrtles which had been planted in the corners of the small cemetery, randomly fell on the windsept, sandtopped graves below.

Within a few years, the Mays' Groves had become one of the major producers of citrus in Hillsborough County and "Grandpa Will" Goolsby, his working days past, began to enjoy the long awaited "fruits" of his labor. His long handled shotgun resting on his shoulder, his old hunting dog tagging close behind, he could often be seen headed out to the bayhead just east of the Mays' grove, ever mindful of the Florida Indians who had lived on the land and enjoyed similar hunts in the nearby forests years before. Granpa Will, who with his long, silver handlebar mustache, could easily have stepped out of an early tintype, spent his happiest hours with his favorite "toy", his shiny black, Model T Ford. The old man, in his black, shiny boots, his shirtsleeves rolled to his elbows, all but disappeared in the motor and assembly of the early Model T Ford with its

wooden spoked wheels; the car, purchased shortly after it was invented, was his pride and joy. Granpa Will's son, Otha, often related tales of his early childhood to his children, many of these centering around the family's days of rest, when their work was finished and their evening meal enjoyed, his parents and siblings, joined by his beloved grandfather, the devoted Christian and music teacher, William Amos Goolsby, Sr., took the family's horse-drawn wagon and headed down the steep hill which was topped by the mammoth camphor tree, toward the "church on the river," the second building of the Peru Baptist Church. As they slowly made their way down the hill which was flanked by sweet smelling magnolias on the south and banana trees to the north, winding their way towards the early church, the old man sang, his clear, strong voice rising above the treetops of the woodlands bordering the dusty wagon trail; his grandchildren believing that the old hymns were being enjoyed by the wildlife as well as themselves. The family happily made their way towards the early church where they would see their friends and neighbors, sing their favorite hymns and hear a Bible message delivered by a circuit riding preacher. On Sunday afternoon, the Goolsby family, consisting of three generations, and other early settling families who attended the Peru Baptist Church, often spread their noon meal beneath the live oak trees on the Alafia riverbanks.

During central Florida's settling days, circuit riding preachers often served churches in several counties as they delivered God's word to pioneer settling families. Their visits were much anticipated by children and adults alike who often travelled several miles on horseback or by horse and buggy to the "meeting place". On Saturday, their best clothing was made ready for the Sunday meetings, with children often

going barefoot on weekdays, saving their one pair of shoes to be worn on Sunday. Favorite dishes such as sweet potato pie, green tomato pie, collard greens and cracklin' cornbread, baked wild turkey and dressing and pitchers of tea were prepared for the day's activities which included Sunday morning preaching, and dinner on the grounds, served on rustic, wooden tables carved from oak timbers. The gathering also provided an opportunity for neighbors living as much as ten miles distant, to congregate and fellowship.

One delicacy enjoyed at early church dinners on the ground was huckleberry pie. The shiny, deep purple colored huckleberries, grew in abundance in the pasturelands of early Peru.

A tale is told of a lady who found great delight in picking huckleberries from which she baked delicious huckleberry pies. These berries grew very near the ground on small bushes requiring the picker to bend or stoop very low to retrieve them from their delicate and waxy green bushes. The lady was found by neighbors, still in her wagon and quite dead, having hurriedly driven into old Peru after an unfortunate meeting with a rattlesnake who lurked among the patches of huckleberry bushes.

In 1885, six years after the first post office was established in early Peru on the south bank of the Alafia River, Riverview would be established on the river's north bank with postal service there beginning on November 19, 1891, and discontinuing in Peru on December 31, 1900. William B. Moody, Jr. served as the first postmaster at the Riverview Post Office which also housed a general store where early settlers could purchase needed supplies. A winding shell road was found not far from its entrance, crossing

the Alafia and continuing on to Wimauma, having originated in Tampa.

Soon after phosphate was discovered in Florida in the mid 1880s, mining operations in the Alafia River were begun, with the Peruvian Mining Company, the name derived from the early community, conducting mining operations. The Alafia Hotel, built in 1898 to house mining workers, was situated west of the present W. T. Williams bridge at the top of the hill near Riverview's first post office.

Tampa became the principal shipping point for the mineral with shipments totalling 345,327 tons being shipped from Port Tampa in 1892. A large quantity of pebble phosphate was mined in the Alafia River and carried by barge to the drying plant near Platt called the Peruvian Phosphate Works.¹⁶

Crossing the Alafia River became somewhat less of a problem when the ferryboat was replaced by a wooden bridge built about 1900, with a section allowed to open when needed to allow riverboats passage. It also had a steel frame and was located some sixty to seventy yards west of the present bridge. Minutes of the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners meeting of August 15, 1900, state that bids were received on the Alafia River bridge with the project awarded to Virginia Bridge and Iron of Roanoke, Virginia for their bid of \$7,864.00. Board members present at that meeting included S. J. Drawdy, Chairman, J. E. Tomberlin, E. C. Blanton, W. A. Belcher, and J. W. VanLandingham.

When the City of Tampa decided to build a better bridge, it sold the ironwork of the old bridge on the Hillsborough River at Lafayette Street to the county. In an early photograph, Dr. G. H. Symmes, Peru's first medical doctor, who traveled by horse and buggy to the outlying areas of Peru as he

delivered babies and doctored the sick, was among early residents who assembled to admire the "modern" bridge with its vertical iron bars stretched skyward.

The two communities, old Peru, known to have existed for nearly one hundred years, and Riverview, established in 1885, now connected by the impressive new conveyance, would coexist until the late 1940s when the town of Peru, one of the oldest settlements in central Florida, remained only in the minds of its early settling families. Riverview today, includes the land lying south of the Alafia River, the beautiful wilderness where Peru once stood.

ENDNOTES

¹ *Notices of East Florida With an Account of the Seminole Nation Indians*, by W. H. Simmons, pg. 39.

² *DeVane's Early Florida History*, by George Albert DeVane, Sebring Historical Society, 1978, pages not numbered

³ *Notices of Florida and the Campaigns*, by M. M. Cohen, pg. 46

⁴ "Pioneer Florida," by D. B. McKay, *Tampa Tribune*, Nov. 6, 1955

⁵ *An Inventory of the Built Environment*, by the Historic Tampa/Hillsborough County Preservation Board, pg. 7

⁶ "South Florida Pioneers," Issue #8, pg. 9

⁷ *The Florida Handbook*, 1985-86 Edition, pg. 28

⁸ *The Story of Southwestern Florida*, Volume 1, by James W. Covington, pg. 106

⁹ *Genealogical Records of the Pioneers of Tampa and of Some Who Came After Them*, by Charles E. Harrison, pg. 67

¹⁰ *A Veteran of Four Wars*, by Francis C. M. Boggess, pg. 18

¹¹ *The Early Days of New Hope Church*, by Paul B. Dinnis, pg. 5

¹² *Soldiers of Florida in the Seminole Indian, Civil and Spanish American Wars*, published under the supervision of the Board of State Institutions, pgs. 19 and 20

¹³ *DeVane's Early Florida History*, by George Albert DeVane.

¹⁴ "Riverview Methodist Church," by Garnet K. Tien

¹⁵ "South Florida Pioneers," Issue 35/36, pg. 31

¹⁶ *Tampa*, by Karl H. Grismer, pg. 222

Many oral interviews conducted over a period of some twenty years wztb "Miss Mary" Moody, (born 1901) great-grandaughter of soldier, cattleman and civic leader, Benjamin Moody. Oral interviews with Otha and Alva Goolsby, Effie Vernon Tyner Goolsby, Lulabelle Goolsby Bugbee, Cecil Bugbee, Sr., (born 1899); Leon Whitt Murpby, Irma Whitt Egnor, Theresa Sbarp Powell, Kenneth Brandon , Sr., and others. School Board of Hillsborough County and U.S. Postal System records, and Hillsborough County archives.