

Martha McCullers Hamilton

By: Janet Walker Anderson

My grandmother, Martha McCullers, came down from Taylor County, Florida, to this area around 1904 with her parents, John McCullers, Sr. and Mary Frances McCall McCullers, and her siblings, John Jr., Daniel, Joseph, Willie, Molly, and Edith.

They traveled by horse and wagon with all of their belongings, having to travel just a few miles a day. Some days, they had to wait on the rains to stop as the rivers would overflow and they could not cross until the water receded.

They settled in Hardscrable on Orchid Island which was near Bethel Creek and the House of Refuge. They built a house that was large enough for other families to stay with them. When others moved into the area, they stayed with the McCullers until their houses were built.

As teenagers, they had to help work in the fields along with helping around the house. For fun they would go the beach, visit their friends, and have sings. Church was very important to them. They traveled by rowboat when they went anywhere. School was also an important part of their lives.

They cleared off land and farmed it, sending the produce north by boat when living on the island. They were always helping others out as they planted and harvested.

There were mosquitos by the millions and they made a switch from foliage to brush them off their legs. They also build fires from foliage that would burn cabbage logs to make lots of smoke to keep the bugs out of the house at night.

Samuel Hamilton's family was one of the families that came from the same area and they knew each other before moving here. He was the young man that caught her eye and they married on March 22, 1906 when she was 17 years old. They started their own family on the Island. Their house was near what is now known as Jungle Trail. Three of their children were born on the island, Marion, Lillie Mae, and Elizabeth (Lizzie). The family had built a house on the mainland and moved over when Lizzie was two weeks old. The new house was a 2-sotry on

what is now the south-east corner of Old Dixie highway. Their other children were born on the mainland: Franklin, Worth, Alfred, Annie Bell, Ruby and Edith. The town was now called Quay.

During one of the hurricanes, my mom, Lizzie, told me that when the kids slept upstairs, the beds would roll from one side to the other because the house shook so much. After that hurricane, they had to prop the house up to keep it from falling over. Several years later, it was torn down for someone else to build their house.

The Hamiltons then built a house a block away and raised their family there on Dixie Highway. By this time the town's name was changed from Quay to Winter Beach. The house is still standing. It is probably close to 100 years old.

John M. McCullers Sr., Martha's dad, had a store on the south-east corner of what is now 67th Place. It was 2-story with living quarters upstairs. Later the store was owned by Samuel and Martha. They sold groceries and items used in farming, etc. They also sold taxidermy mounts as souvenirs from the area.

After the store closed, part of it was rented to families. My family, Emmett and Lizzie Walker, lived there for a short time. I remember waking up one morning and looked out the door and a train had wrecked during the night and several of the coaches had turned over on their side. Don't remember any getting hurt, but we spent the day watching them turn the boxcars upright.

I remember during the war, that when any of the men had to leave for training or return from their furlough, we would all meet at their house to see them off, not knowing if or when we would ever see them again. Marion and Franklin served in the Coast Guard, Worth in the Army, and Alfred in the Navy. The wives and children would stay at home to help out any way they could.

Monday at the Hamilton household was always wash day. Grandpa (Sammy, as he was called) would fill up a huge black washpot and build a fire under it to heat the water boiling. Grandma (Martha) would get all the women together and fill up the wash tubs with water, one with homemade soap and a rub board to soak clothes in, then into the boiling water in the washpot, then to two tubs of rinse

water to get the soap out, then we would hang them on a long clothes line to dry. It took a full day to get everyone's washing done.

They had a large living room and when someone in the community had pieced a quilt together, the women would come together and have a "quilting bee." It was neat to watch the ladies work. Their stitches would look so tiny and most of the time they would get it finished in one day. I remember a lot of talking and laughing going on. They would even let us little kids do a stitch or two. Never could figure out how they could get the stitches so small, and so perfect.

During a hurricane, if we knew it was coming, all the families would go to Grandma and Grandpa's house. They always had two mattresses on each bed, so they would move all furniture in the living room to the side and put mattresses on the floor and all the kids would pile in for the night. When it was all over, any of us that didn't live there would go home. We didn't always know when it was coming and would have a big surprise in the morning when we got up.

We always enjoyed going to Grandma's as some of the cousins were always there. There was an artesian well in the backyard and they always left it on which made a big pond which we all loved to play in. There was also a big chinaberry tree in the backyard which we loved to climb in. Don't remember anyone falling out and getting hurt.

Grandmas cooked on a wood stove and made the best biscuits and lima bean. We ate a lot of peanut butter and syrup with those biscuits. She had a huge kitchen table with a long bench so all us kids could fit on it. Guess we were kind of messy when we ate as I remember always having to sweep the floor after we finished. There was always a house full of people, family and neighbors as everyone helped each other, whatever the need.

At this time in life, funerals were mostly graveside and the body was brought into the homes until the service at the cemetery, with people coming and going and bringing food. It was kinda scary to us kids, having a dead body in the house.

Grandpa and Granny owned a grove, oranges and grapefruit, as well as farmed some of the land in beans, pepper, squash, etc. Everyone big enough had to help pick beans, etc. My favorite was beans. They would pack them in bushel crates

and take them to the express shed to have them shipped North by train after they moved to the mainland.

After their children were grown, they built a home on North Winter Beach Road about a mile west of the river. Grandpa died at the age of 66, in 1948 not long after they built the new house. Grandma shared her house with any of the children that needed a place to live. She never lived alone and helped raise a lot of the grandkids and neighbor kids while their moms worked.

They were pillars of the community and were involved in many areas of it. Samuel was a trustee on the school board and also donated ten acres of their land to the cemetery after the first two acres had been filled up. They were also very active in the Primitive Baptist Church.

She had one of the pedal sewing machines and taught me how to sew. She always made me make my skirts big in the waist as I would grow into it. I never did. She also made the best chocolate cake with real fudge icing. She always have one if she knew I was coming. They were so good... I can still taste them!

She had a green thumb and always had a large vegetable garden and shared with other. You could always look forward to fresh vegetables when eating with her.

She was a very special lady. She loved the Lord and never had a bad word to say about any one. She was loved by all.

Martha lived to the ripe old age of 88 and died of cancer in 1973. She left behind many grandchildren and great grandchildren who's lives where blessed with her legacy of love for God and her family.