

Knights

**Itchepackesassa Creek
East Canal
Pemberton Creek**

6 pgs

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

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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.

Knights (Knights Settlement & Knights Station)

Located around the intersections of State Road 39 and Knights-Griffin Road, Knights was named after the Knight family who migrated to Hillsborough County in 1844. Other people, however, homesteaded in Township 28 South, Range 22 East before the Knights. As early as 1843 Stephen Hollingsworth resided in Section 12, his son John Henry Hollingsworth lived in Section 17, his son-in-law Samuel Rogers homesteaded in Section 10, and Rigdon Brown settled in Section 10. Known as Ichebukessassa, this large area gave birth to the communities of Cork, Knights, Plant City, Shiloh, and the Seminole town of "Echebukessassa." Ichebukessassa, though, is most commonly associated with the settlement of Cork.ⁱ

The Knight and Summerlin families migrated from Lowndes County, Georgia, to Fort Drane, Alachua County, Florida, in 1843 seeking better rangeland for their cattle. Along with the family slaves, they hit the road again and moved to Hillsborough County in 1844. Throughout the years, the families acquired 1200 acres of property in what would become known as Knights settlement. Samuel Knight filed for an 80-acre homestead in Township 28 South, Range 22 East, Section five on May 15, 1852. The 1850 census listed Mr. Knight as a 58 year old, Georgia native, Methodist minister married to a 58 year old South Carolina native, Mary Knight. Their two sons were christened Joel and Jessie Knight, both having their own families and homesteads. In 1850 Joel Knight was a 25 year old Georgia born blacksmith owning \$2,000 worth of real estate. Virginia Knight, Joel's wife, was a 20 year old Alabama native. They had a one year old son, Thomas S. Knight, who was born in Florida. They also had two people living with them: John M. Morris was a 25 year old Alabama-born farmer and Daniel Plurdy was a 50 year old Connecticut-born teacher. Jessie Knight, the oldest son of Samuel Knight, was a 33 year old Georgia-born farmer. Rebecca C. Knight, his wife, was a 24 year old South Carolina native. They had five children ranging in age from one to eight years old, all born in Florida. Jessie Knight, along with his wife and children, settled near what is today known as the T.C. Maguire home, a once well-known Plant City doctor, located at 3849 Paul S. Buchman Highway (SR 39). In 1850 Samuel Knight's son-in-law, Jacob Summerlin, was a 26 year old Florida-born planter who owned \$1000 worth of property. Mr. Summerlin homesteaded 80 acres in Section 5 on May 15, 1852. Frances Summerlin, Jacob's wife, was a 23 year old Georgia native. They had three children of their own ranging in age from nine months to four years, all born in Florida. Additionally, Aaron G. Zepper, a six year old Florida native, resided with the Summerlins.ⁱⁱ

Shortly after their arrival, the Knight family held religious services in their home until they organized a Methodist Church in the Ichebukessassa community. As early as 1848, Joshua Carraway, a Methodist circuit rider, visited the settlement. By the early 1850s, Ichebukessassa grew large enough to support a general store, operated by Tampa resident M.C. Brown. In 1855 Jacob Summerlin took over operations of the store, added a cotton gin and grist mill to it, and served as the community's first postmaster. He also became Florida's most successful cattle king. During this era, in 1856, the U.S. military fought the few remaining Seminole Indians in the Third Seminole War. For protection on

several occasions, Ichepucklesassa resident's banded together in Samuel Knight's log home. On April 16, 1859, Summerlin turned over operation of his store and post office to David Hughes, his clerk. Summerlin and his family relocated to Polk County where he continued his success at cattle ranching. Within a year of the Summerlins' leaving, Ichepucklesassa's post office name was changed to Cork on March 5, 1860. After the Civil War, Samuel Knight and his family, along with his two sons and their families, moved to Manatee County looking for greener pastures for their cattle. However, Jesse Knight's son, William Knight, along with Martha Ann Collins Knight, his wife, continued to reside in his father's former home, raising their own family of eleven children.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1887 the Florida Central and Peninsular Railroad acquired property and constructed tracks through Knights, connecting the community to Plant City. The railroad erected a station in Knights, located south of present-day Knights-Griffin Road and east of the railroad tracks. Originally built by the Florida Central and Peninsular Railway, the company merged with the Florida Northern Railroad Company and in 1893 adopted the new name of Florida Central and Peninsular Railroad. Ten years later, the Seaboard Air Line Railroad acquired control of the tracks that ran through Knights. After the station was built, Knights settlement became known as Knights Station. On the heels of the railroad station Knights received a post office on June 21, 1889, with Christopher C. Wilder serving as postmaster. It was discontinued on April 4, 1890, with mail being delivered from Plant City. George W. Knight platted the Town of Knight on February 9, 1892, and two months later the post office was reestablished on April 15, 1892. By 1893, Knights had a population of 25 with J. Duffie serving as postmaster.^{iv}

Agriculture and cattle dominated the area. In fact, agriculture was so important that the train engineer would blow the train whistle three times to warn farmers if a freeze was expected. Despite such warnings, Knights was devastated by the freeze of 1895. The community sprang back, replanting citrus trees and other crops such as corn and sweet potatoes.^v By 1898, the community was in full swing, and was even able to poke fun of its neighbor to the south, Plant City:

There is no news here; the farmers are too busy to get up any excitement; everybody is at work, even the Hon. Mayor is putting in a crop.

We have been thinking lately of extending our city limits so as to take in that little village of Plant City just south of us, that little berg is struggling hard to make something of itself, and really deserves our consideration. By placing our strong right arm about its little body, we hope to bring it into popular notice. However we have not fully decided upon the matter; in fact, we may take cognizance of the dead weight connected with the enterprise and abandon it.^{vi}

The County Commission designated School Number 6 at Ichepucklesassa in the Knights settlement in 1854. If families could afford it, they hired their own teachers, as Joel Knight did in 1850. In 1866, a one-room log school was built in Collinsville, a

community west of Knights. Children from the surrounding area attended this school until 1884 when Plant City built the Central Grammar School. Eight years later the county started a one-room school in Knights, located on Varn Road. Shortly after the turn of the century, a three-room school building was constructed in Knights. This building remained in operation until approximately 1922 when a two-story brick school building replaced it. Until the 1970s, the school building served as the social center of the Knights community. This structure operated as a school building until 1976, when the county built a larger school about a mile west.^{vii}

The community continued to grow throughout the 1920s. In December, 1904, Rev. A.M. Gardner founded the Knights Methodist Church with 13 charter members. M.M. Owen, one of Rev. Gardner's congregation, began the community in 1905. It was completed in 1908. However, the Methodists were not alone in Knights. The Baptists held Sunday School services in Knights' School around the turn of the century. They officially organized in January 1902, and their church was built in 1903. This wood frame building remained in operation until 1965 when it was replaced by a concrete block structure. It was not uncommon for residents to attend both churches.^{viii}

Along side the churches, businesses also operated. In 1911 D.V. Coleman owned a naval stores operation and P.A. Varnes operated the general store. The community had telephone connections and was located on the Seaboard Air Line Railroad line. Knights' population slowly continued to grow. For example, the Hayward family moved from Springdale, Arkansas, to Knights in 1914, buying 65-acres of land with a citrus grove and new house for \$3000. By 1918 Knights had three general stores and a turpentine still. Most people made a living from their orange groves. Three general stores, a turpentine still, and the Hillsborough Naval Stores Company continued to operate in Knights through 1925. Additionally, during this era of prosperity Knights obtained a packing house for all of its citrus. In 1929 Mr. E. Parolini owned a general store and filling station, remaining in business until the 1960s. The Hayward brothers joined Knights business community in 1930 when they opened a garage and blacksmith shop which operated until 1947.^{ix}

After its 1920s peak, Knights began a slow, steady decline. The Great Depression struck a severe blow to Knights. A 1930s description of the community painted a dismal picture:

Knights...is located at the intersection of State 23 and Knights road. It is a small rural town having little more than a post office and a general store....For about seven miles the road west of Knights passes through a desolate territory composed of cut and burned over lands, with here and there a chinaberry tree marking an abandoned farm.^x

It is assumed that this desiccated land was a result of the Naval Stores and turpentine industry. According to Chester Carlton, member of Knights Methodist Church, Knights never reattained its former status because the area was settled so early and the property remained in the hands of a few families. The post office was discontinued on February

28, 1957, with mail being delivered from Plant City. In 1966, consultants recommended the closure of Knight's school which was achieved ten years later. Today, Knights is still quite rural, with only a few businesses operating in the area.^{xi}

i. Archaeological Consultants Incorporated, *A Cultural Resources Survey of State Road 39 From I-4 to US 301 in Hillsborough and Pasco Counties* (Sarasota, FL: Archaeological Consultants Incorporated, 1992), 17-19; Bruton and Bailey, *Plant City*, 27; U.S. Department of the Interior, "General Land Office, Automated Records Project, Pre-1908 Homestead and Cash Entry Patents." There is conflicting information as to the exact location of Rigden Brown and Stephen Hollingsworth's homestead. Bruton and Bailey, *Plant City*, 27, and Archaeological Consultants Incorporated, *A Cultural Resources Survey of State Road 39 from I-4 to US 301 in Hillsborough and Pasco Counties*, 18, both state that Hollingsworth settled in Section 2 and Brown settled in Section 9. However, the U.S. Department of the Interior, "General Land Office, Automated Records Project, Pre-1908 Homestead and Cash Entry Patents," put Hollingsworth in Section 12 and Brown as owning property in Section 10 and Section 4. I have chosen the U.S. Department of the Interior's listings because it is a primary source.

ii. Bailey, "A Study of Hillsborough County's History, Legend, and Folk Lore, with Implications for the Curriculum," 117-118; Bruton and Bailey, *Plant City*, 30,38; *Hillsborough County, Florida, 1850 Census*, 17-19; U.S. Department of the Interior, "General Land Office, Automated Records Project, Pre-1908 Homestead and Cash Entry Patents."

iii. Archaeological Consultants Incorporated, *A Cultural Resources Survey of State Road 39 from I-4 to US 301 in Hillsborough and Pasco Counties*, 20-21; Bailey, "A Study of Hillsborough County's History, Legend, and Folk Lore, with Implications for the Curriculum," 117,149; Bruton and Bailey, *Plant City*, 45; Dennis, *Flickering Flames Along the Alafia, Circa 1850-1900*, 11; Jesse E. Knight, Jr., "History of Knight's Community," (unpublished manuscript, Knights Station Miscellaneous File, QGBA, Plant City, Fla, 1974), 1-4.

iv. Archaeological Consultants Incorporated, *A Cultural Resources Survey of State Road 39 from I-4 to US 301 in Hillsborough and Pasco Counties*, 21,23; Bailey, "A Study of Hillsborough County's History, Legend, and Folk Lore, with Implications for the Curriculum," 263; Bradbury and Hallock, *A Chronology of Florida Post Offices*, 44; Clarke, *The Gate-to-the-Gulf (Tampa) City Directory, and Hillsboro County Guide, 1893*, 207-208; Plat Book 1, page 53, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Hillsborough County, Tampa, FL.

v. Knight, Jr., "History of Knight's Community," 5-6; "Knight's Station," *Tampa Weekly Tribune* August 25, 1898, 8; "Knight's Station News," *Tampa Weekly Tribune* September 8, 1898, 3.

vi. "Knight's Station News," *Tampa Weekly Tribune* September 8, 1898, 3.

vii. Archaeological Consultants Incorporated, *A Cultural Resources Survey of State Road 39 from I-4 to US 301 in Hillsborough and Pasco Counties*, 23,26; *Hillsborough County, Florida, Public Schools: A Survey Report* (Nashville, Tn: Division of Surveys and Field Services, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1966), 179; Knight, Jr., "History of Knight's Community," 1,4-5.

viii. Archaeological Consultants Incorporated, *A Cultural Resources Survey of State Road 39 from I-4 to US 301 in Hillsborough and Pasco Counties*, 23; Chester Carlton, "History of Knights Methodist Church, October, 1964," (unpublished manuscript, Knights History file, Planning and Growth Management Department, Tampa, FL).

ix. Archaeological Consultants Incorporated, *A Cultural Resources Survey of State Road 39 from I-4 to US 301 in Hillsborough and Pasco Counties*, 23; Bruton and Bailey, *Plant City*, 177; *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1911-1912*, 261; *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1918*, 324-325; *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1925*, 457; "Moments from the Past," *Community Connections* November 6, 1997.

x. Federal Writers' Project, *Seeing Tampa*, 140-141.

xi. Bailey, "A Study of Hillsborough County's History, Legend, and Folk Lore, with Implications for the Curriculum," 263; Bradbury and Hallock, *A Chronology of Florida Post Offices*, 44; Carlton, "History of Knights Methodist Church," 3; *Hillsborough County, Florida, Public Schools: A Survey Report*, 179.