

From: Dan Styer <Dan.Styer@oberlin.edu>
Date: February 22, 2010 8:25:17 PM CST
To: afbowie@cox.net
Subject: Holman Felix Simmons, Henry Clay Simmons, and John Muir.

Dear Mr. Bowie:

Since you have an interest in Holman Felix Simmons and Henry Clay Simmons, I thought you'd like to know that they both met the conservationist John Muir.

If you have something to add about these two gentlemen (particularly if you know where they lived in October 1867) I'd appreciate your knowledge and insight.

Thanks,
Dan Styer

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John Muir, Captain Simmons, and the "sun-drenched palm garden" of Florida

by Dan Styer (Dan.Styer@oberlin.edu)
22 February 2010

As part of his **"Thousand-mile Walk To the Gulf"** in 1867, **John Muir** spent the nights of 20, 21, and 22 October in the Florida home of **"Captain Simmons, one of the very few scholarly, intelligent men that I have met in Florida. He had been an officer in the Confederate army..."**.

On 20 October, Simmons told Muir about "a palmetto grove on a rich hummock a few miles from here. The grove is about seven miles in length by three in breadth. The ground is covered with long grass, uninterrupted with bushes or other trees. It is the finest grove of palmettos I have ever seen and I have often times thought that it would make a fine subject for an artist." The next day Muir visited for himself, and found a "sun-drenched palm garden ... well starred with flowers".

Who was Captain Simmons, and where was the sunny palmetto hummock?

According to the "Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System" at <http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/> seventy soldiers named "Simmons" from Florida served the Confederate army. Of these, three were captains.

Captain Henry K. Simmons of the Second Florida Cavalry died on 6 March 1865 at the Battle of Natural Bridge, so it couldn't have been him.

It must have been either Captain Felix Simmons or Captain Henry Clay Simmons of Company F, Eighth Florida Infantry. An Internet search shows that these individuals have been investigated

by genealogist Elaine Blackman

[http://www.terry-family-](http://www.terry-family-historian.com/Richmond%20County%20NC/Pages100_199_from_Descendants_Of_Matthew_Raiford.pdf)

[historian.com/Richmond%20County%20NC/Pages100_199_from_Descendants_Of_Matthew_Raiford.pdf](http://www.terry-family-historian.com/Richmond%20County%20NC/Pages100_199_from_Descendants_Of_Matthew_Raiford.pdf)

and by genealogist Arthur Bowie

<http://bookofbowie.net/family/Records/INDIs/II0062.html>

<http://bookofbowie.net/family/Records/INDIs/II0182.html>

The two were brothers who, furthermore, married sisters.

Holman Felix Simmons:

Born 10 January 1824 in Elbert County, Georgia

of Holman Freeman Simmons and Sarah Burns.

Married Mary Theodora Saxon on 20 April 1852.

Mustered into Confederate army 17 May 1862 as Captain.

Left army 17 February 1863 due to gunshot wounds in feet.

Had 6 children, including:

Benjamin Fletcher Simmons born 3 May 1860 in Brooksville, Florida.

Holman Snell Simmons born March 1866 in Levy County, Florida.

Robert Terry Simmons born 28 January 1868 in Levy County, Florida.

By 1870 had moved to Arkansas.

Died 30 March 1893 in Arkansas.

Henry Clay Simmons:

Born 1838 in Millerville, Clay County, Alabama of Holman Freeman Simmons and Sarah Burns.

Mustered into Confederate army 17 May 1862 as 2nd Lieutenant.

Promoted to Captain 17 February 1863 (to replace his brother).

Married Mabel Antoinette Saxon 6 September 1867 in Levy County, Florida.

Died 10 February 1898 in Alabama.

Which Captain Simmons entertained Muir? On 22 October 1867 Muir went hunting with Captain Simmons and an ex-judge, "while a brother of the captain entered the woods to arouse the game from cover." This sounds to me like a job for a younger brother! So I expect Muir's Captain was the 43-year-old Felix rather than the 29-year-old, recently married, Henry.

[According to

<http://bookofbowie.net/family/Records/INDIs/II0049.html>

Benjamin Fletcher Simmons liked to tell bear hunting stories just like his father. So much for persons. What about location?

Muir walked across Florida from Fernandina to Cedar Key along the "Florida Railroad", which had been completed in 1860 but which had been much damaged during the Civil War. (The current highways Florida 24, US 301, and Florida A1A closely parallel the former Florida Railroad.) He spent the night of 18 October in Gainesville, "at a sort of tavern." He walked two days before reaching Captain Simmons's home, and then after one more day of walking reached the

Gulf at Cedar Key.

Two-thirds of the way from Gainesville to Cedar Key, on Florida Route 24, is the town of Otter Creek (where US 19 intersects Florida 24, and within Levy County). This must have been the vicinity of Captain Simmons's home.

There are three named hammocks in the area:

1. RockyHammock and
2. Devils Hammock to the north of Florida Route 24 are both too small.
3. Gulf Hammock to the south seems about the right size(seven by three miles).

You can check out topographic maps yourself at

<http://mapper.acme.com/?ll=29.325,-82.772>

I am sorry to report that D. Bruce Means ("Stalking the Plumed Serpent and Other Adventures in Herpetology" Pineapple Press, Sarasota, Florida, 2008, pages 213-214) mentions "the recent horizon-to-horizon clearcutting of the hardwoods and cabbage palm forests in Gulf Hammock."

It looks as if we have lost the "sun-drenched palm garden".

Subject: Re: Holman Felix Simmons, Henry Clay Simmons, and John Muir.

From: afbowie@cox.net

Date: February 22, 2010 11:26:40 PM CST

To: Dan.Styer@oberlin.edu

Wow! I have never heard that story or any other connection of Simmons and Muir. Thank you very, very much for sharing this with me. I don't know much about location off top of my head, but here is what I do have right now:

Holman Felix Simmons 1824-1893 is probably the one referred to as Captain. His home after the war was in Levy County, Florida, where at least two of his children were born Holman Snell in March 1866 and Robert Terry in Jan 1868.

His military discharge papers in 1862 has residence as Hernando, Florida. His oldest son Benjamin Fletcher was born 1860 in Brooksville, Hernando County. **Notes on the 8th Fla Inf list him as F Simmons of Nassau.**

He served in three different units in the Civil, beginning with a Coast Guard Company at Fernandia 1861 - near the Georgia border- and although several of his military records show **Fernandia**, I don't have indication that he was there after the war.

His father, Holman Freeman Simmons may have been in Brooksville area about the right time also, but no military service and probably dead before 1867.

A much younger brother, **Dr George McIntosh Troup Simmons** lived his whole life after the war in **Bushnell** area. at least 4 of his 6 children were born there and I think descendants are still

there. couple of quotes from packages given to me "he was also a farmer and owned a large farm on east side of Bushnell about two miles from town. He also owned an orange grove and shipped his fruit on cargo boats on the **Withlacoochee River**. There was a lake in front of their house that was called Lake Annie. Now it is called Simmons Pond."

and a story from his youngest child born 1880

"the Simmons family, their aunts, uncles cousins , and grandparents would all go to the beach and rent houses at Bayport, Fla....."

Henry Clay Simmons was a younger brother, born 1838, one of the 4 brothers who were in Fla 8th. He was promoted from 2 Lt to capt when Holman Felix retired after gunshot wound and a stay in Chimborazo Confederate hospital in Richmond. All of his discharge refer to the gunshot wound except for (--I believe I have a copy--) of a muster stating Holman Felix retired on account of old age---signed by his younger brother, Henry Clay!!!

As for the bear hunting story, I'd bet the younger brother was George MT, who came out of war OK and was definitely in the area, but already had children.

Henry Clay was captured at Chancellorsville, Va and was injured with weak lungs and probably in between marriages in 1867. could have been in either Fla or Alabama in 1867.....

I try to do a little more digging to see what I can find on more precise locations in 1867, but may take a few days. I've got to work on my tax return or CPA will be sending a hit man for me...

thanks again, I really appreciate this gift you've passed to me..