

Jack B. Horton, Jr., Titusville, Florida: The First
50 Years, 1867-1917.

IV

COLONEL HENRY T. TITUS, 1822-1881

Late in 1867 (1) Colonel Henry Theodora Titus arrived at Sand Point, Florida, where he founded the city that was to bear his name. This event marked a significant change in the life of Colonel Titus.

Henry T. Titus was born in Trenton, New Jersey, on February 13, 1822 (2). At the age of twenty-eight, in August of 1850, Henry Titus achieved nation-wide notice when he joined the revolutionist Narciso Lopez to form an expedition to help free Cuba from Spanish control. Titus was assigned the responsibility of enlisting recruits in the Southern states from a headquarters in Jacksonville, Florida. (3)

A year later Lopez and some of his followers arrived in Cuba from New Orleans on the ship Pampero. The Pampero then sailed to Jacksonville to load the recruits, arms, and supplies. As Colonel Titus trained his men near Fernandina, word was received that Lopez and some of his men had been captured and executed in Cuba. The Pampero rushed back to Jacksonville but was seized by Federal ships and men in Dunn's Lake, a tributary of the St. John's River. Colonel Titus was arrested for violating the neutrality laws of the United States. He was later tried, but no evidence was found of any punishment.

Following his release, Colonel Titus became a merchant in Jacksonville. It was during this time that Henry T. Titus married Evalina Hopkins, the daughter of the prominent General Edward Stephen Hopkins. On April 2, 1856, the Jacksonville Florida Republican announced that Colonel and Mrs. Titus

were to leave for Kansas and stated that Colonel Titus' "adaptation by experience, as well as by physical proportions, for a frontier life, warrant us in predicting for him a successful career in that new territory."

The Tituses joined with other Southerners in supporting the pro-slavery cause in Kansas. It was not long before open combat with the abolitionists ensued, and the entire nation became inflamed over the situation. Colonel Titus' activity in "Bleeding Kansas" is surrounded with controversy. Some newspaper reports stated that Titus was a coward, but Mrs. Titus wrote that ".....Titus's bravery commands the admiration of everyone--the enemy say they never saw such a man." Colonel Titus was captured by the abolitionists and faced the possibility of being executed; however, he was released in a prisoner exchange. Not long after this event, peace came to Kansas, and in December 1856 Colonel Titus left the area.

The Kansas episode is vividly recalled in the early recollections of Mary Evelina Titus, known to her family as Minnie, the younger daughter of Henry and Evelina:

"Daddy was a Northern man and never owned a slave in his life, but he espoused the Southern cause and went to Kansas with a number of Southern men. Mother went also, and they were in the thick of things there. I remember my father telling of having John Brown's sons as prisoners and of feeling sorry for them and letting them ride mules unbound upon their promise not to try to escape, but the first chance they got they were off.

Father was wounded by a minie ball, which came out just before he died in large abscess. It was while he was in Kansas his rheumatic condition made its first appearance, which finally was to cripple him and cause his death....." (4)

The "Blunder Ruffian," as Titus was then called, gathered a group of men to join the Nicaraguan Army under the "President" of Nicaragua, William Walker. The troops arrived in Nicaragua on February 4, 1857. All accounts indicated that Colonel Titus showed no bravery in his commands in Nicaragua. One report stated that the Colonel was dashing madly about with a pistol, fearing attack from his own men. In April Titus fled to San Francisco.

Nothing is known of Colonel Titus' activities from late 1857 until the Civil War. Confederate records showed Titus was paid for delivery of supplies and materials during most of the war. In 1863 while captain of the ship Charm, Colonel Titus was captured on the Indian River. Several of his passengers were trying to avoid the Confederate conscript act. What happened as a result of the capture is not known. It is apparent, however, that Colonel Titus was a Confederate blockade-runner and that he was familiar with the Indian River area.

A graphic account of Henry and Evalina Titus' lives is found in the record of the birthplaces of their children:

Edward Hopkins Titus
Born in Savannah, Georgia
January 15, 1859

Catherine Howell Titus
Born in Jamaica, Long Island
December 2, 1860

Mary Evalina Titus
Born in Jacksonville, Florida
April 29, 1862

Howell Titus
Born in Madison, Florida
August 11, 1865

Henry Theodore Titus, Jr.
Born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania
August 2, 1867

Elliot Livingston Titus
Born in Titusville, Florida
November 25, 1869

Theodore Titus
Born in Titusville, Florida
October 23, 1871

Pierre Soule Titus
Born in Titusville, Florida
August 16, 1873" (5)

The moves from one geographic area to another hint at the great adventure of the Tituses.

After the Civil War Colonel Titus returned to his wife and family. He was now severely afflicted with muscular rheumatism and in order to help his condition determined to move to a warmer climate. Perhaps he remembered the Indian River with its warm climate and great beauty and decided to return to this vicinity to live. Minnie Titus related the events of 1865 to 1867:

"In 1865 (I was three years old at the time) my father and mother and we children made the first trip down from New York on the Indian River, which was the new name of the old blockade-runner. The trip was disastrous, and we had to abandon ship.

For many years at low tide the remains of the ship's hull could be seen; a few years ago the cannons were salvaged and now adorn the Fort Pierce park, supposedly the cannons from a pirate ship, but in reality the only part of the old Indian River ever to reach dry land. They were encrusted with barnacles and rust, but a mute reminder of days of yore when the South sought to break the blockade and when the company's dream of a fortune to be made in 'oysters and green turtle' was buried in the sea.

After reaching land at Fort Capron (Fort Pierce) they

(Solomon Titus and Judge Payne) built a cannery to can oysters, green turtle, etc. to be sold in the north. To finish what might be left of father's dream, the cannery caught fire and went up in smoke, leaving only some cans and burned machinery to attest to his vision of future prosperity. The insurance company they were insured with failed also, so the venture was a total loss.

While there, waiting for my father to become well enough to travel, I have a vivid recollection, though only three years old, of seeing the Indians driving their hogs in for us to buy. It seems that the squaws did this, and I don't know how it always seemed to happen at sundown. The men would come in the dining room while we were eating and sit down on the table. They would eat anything my mother gave them, but their manners left much to be desired. I was very afraid of them.

Early in 1867 we journeyed up the Indian River to Jacksonville on the sailing vessel Live Yankee. We slept on beds of green palmetto fans covered with blankets and under mosquito bars. Father left the family in New York and returned to Florida. The cold of the north was not good for his rheumatism; the warmth and sunshine of Florida attracted him. He was a great sufferer by then

My mother owned a tract of land at what was then Sand Point, now Titusville. Father conceived the idea of founding a town and opening that part of the country. In two years (early 1869) the family joined him. We had no lack of company for we had many friends in New York who came to spend the winters and to hunt and fish as well as enjoy the climate. Lord and Lady Parker, from England were among the visitors." (6)

Colonel point Colonel Titus' life changed. He was determined to build a city of significance in a land he came to love. There is some indication that he ruled his land with an "iron hand"; however, he was always the first to fight for the improvement and the betterment of his town.

Minnie Titus' recollections contain accounts of some of the accomplishments of her father, Colonel Titus:

"Father established a 'mule team' to connect Titusville with the St. Johns river steamer which ran from Enterprise opposite to where Sanford now is on Lake Monroe. This was a great help... He also established a mail route which was carried on horseback. The route by sailboat from Daytona to Jupiter was delivered once a week.

He had a machine to make shingles and also all kinds of fancy canes, cups and saucers, and napkins rings out of native wood. Ligum Vitae, crab wood, palmetto, and black mangrove were among the woods used.

Daddy gave employment to many in clearing out the land and laying out the town buildings. He was a lover of beauty; Titusville still has wide streets which he beautified with shade trees and shrubs, bringing in hibiscus and other plants." (7)

In 1870 the Titus House was completed. It was "...built in what may be called the tropical style--a large main building with two long wings, all one story high, forming three sides of a square neatly laid out in a garden, and with the rooms opening off the wide verandas like a row of houses in a city block. The table at once convinces the guest that he is in a tropical region, the meats being principally oysters, clams,

fish, ~~and~~ ^{with} steaks, etc., with many strange and familiar fruits and vegetables, all tropical, and fresh....." (8)

The Titus House became the "hub of social activity" for the Indian River area. If the dining room did not appeal, Titus' ample saloon would. Guests came from hundreds of miles to purchase the fine liquors, imported wines, and ales. The saloon was even provided with a billiard table.

Colonel Titus entertained many prominent people at the Titus House. One guest, who stayed in the Titus House in 1875, later wrote of the Colonel:

"Notwithstanding the ravages of illness, we could readily note that he had been a man of wonderful proportions and splendid appearance. As he related some incidents of adventurous careers, his dark eyes flashed, and this, associated with a choice selection of vituperative adjectives, disclosed what manner of man he must have been. During our stay of several days the natives whispered mysteriously that the General's (sic) daily habit included several hours of sitting on his veranda with a loaded rifle across his lap waiting to locate one or more of his local enemies, who might carelessly invade the territory covered by the range of his gun. We found him a fine old gentleman, however, interesting and hospitable; and, moreover, the brand of his liquor drove away the remembrance of our long discredited supply." (9)

A somewhat different picture of Colonel Titus' personality and appearance is found in the words of his daughter, Minnie:

"He was very handsome and commanding in appearance, with dark brown eyes and hair, standing well over six foot in height and weighing two hundred and fifty pounds, though very graceful and

~~Mark~~ Men either hated or loved him; many hated him without

cause. He suffered but did not complain. He would say, 'God have mercy on my soul.' His character and courage was such that he carried on daily ... when lesser men would have given up." (10)

In 1873 the name of the Post Office was changed to Titusville.

Clark Rice gives this account of the changing of the name from Sand Point:

"He (Captain Rice) and a Mr. Titus that came about the same time wanted to give the place a name, so they agreed that the winner at a game of dominoes should have the name. Riceville if Rice won, and Titusville if Titus won. The result we know, for Titusville it is." (11)

Colonel Titus worked diligently to have the County Seat located in Titusville. His dream was realized on October 7, 1879, when a vote was taken to relocate the County Seat. The voting totals were: for Eau Gallie, 35; for Rockledge, 39; and for Titusville, 135.

Titusville grew and prospered under the leadership of Colonel Titus. In 1880 there were approximately two hundred people living in the town. Titus made many improvements in the streets and landscape. He was constant in the defense of his town.

On August 3, 1881, Colonel Titus wrote in the Florida Dispatch, "Titusville is the ... grand center of all trade and will so continue to be. No slanderous article from any irresponsible person will change or alter its destiny. Her motto is 'to live and let live.' "

Four days later Colonel Henry T. Titus died. These words appeared in the Titusville Star, "Died at his residence in this place on Sunday morning, August 7th, Colonel Henry Titus, after prolonged illness." The Titus heritage lives on in the city which bears his name. (12)

PRIMARY SOURCES

- (1) There is no definitive account of Colonel Titus' arrival at
Pine Sand Point; however, the eminent historians L. C. Crofton and
W. T. Cash, as well as several other historians, specify that
Titus founded Titusville in 1867. Mary Titus Eusey's recollec-
tions support.
- (2) From a memorial window given by Evalina Titus to St. Gabriel's
Episcopal Church, Titusville.
- (3) I am indebted to Alfred Jackson Hanna and Kathryn Abbey Hanna's
Florida's Golden Sands for much of the historical information
about Colonel Titus' life.
- (4) Early recollections of Mary (Minnie) Titus Eusey, younger
daughter of Colonel Titus, as told to her daughter, Fedora
Eusey Gray.
- (5) Genealogy of Colonel and Mrs. Titus' children compiled by
Margaret Thompson
- (6) Recollections of Minnie Titus Eusey
- (7) Recollections of Minnie Titus Eusey
- (8) George M. Barbour, Florida for Tourists, Invalids, and
Settlers, 1882.
- (9) George B. Christian, My Lost Millions, 1926.
- (10) Recollections of Minnie Titus Eusey
- (11) Anna Pearl Leonard Newman, Stories of Early Life Along
Beautiful Indian River, 1953.
- (12) Much of the information about Colonel Titus was secured from
the Titusville Star-Advocate.