

Dec. 22, 2009 by Kevin Hooper

The town of Garey's Ferry quietly evolved from a humble origin. Samuel Y. Garey originally from Eaton, Maryland first stepped foot in Florida arriving in St. Augustine. Garey, appointed by governor William Duval on November 24, 1824, found himself employed by the United State government as an Indian Agent to the Seminoles living south of St. Augustine along the St. Johns River. Working diligently Garey soon found himself entangled in a political feud over his accounting for distributing rations to the Seminoles. Growing tired of having to defend himself for disturbing the proper amount of rations to the Seminoles in need, he left his duties and traveled north to the town of Whitesville located on the south fork of Black Creek.

Whitesville had not yet been formally created when Garey arrived however the area around Black Creek had been cultivated for many years prior. In 1826 under the guidance of Captain Daniel E. Burch the military construct a road through Whitesville and two years later the town was recognized with the first post office. Garey by then had been able to acquire several acres of land along the north prong of Black Creek that Malachi Hagan did not claim under his rightful pre-emption claim. In 1831 Garey was authorized by the Florida Legislative Council to establish a ferry on the north fork of Black Creek for a period of ten years and in 1833 he purchased John M. Hanson Clark's Ferry and renamed it to Garey's Ferry.

Prior to Garey's purchase of the ferry he had established a small inn for those traveling into the interior of the state. On April 20, 1829, Isaac Boring, a Methodist preacher whose circuit included the area stopped and "was kindly entertained by the family" of Garey. Garey's home was furnished with nice mahogany furniture, eight beds, along with fancy dishes and silver tea spoons for entertaining.

Although several families resided around the ferry crossing the town of Whitesville remained the central location for business until the military established a supply depot at Garey's Ferry which on July 4, 1836 was named Fort Heileman.

Fort Heileman's origins were humble and many never expected the site to grow into a thriving military community with hundreds of civilians finding employment and relief. The Florida Militia had initially established a small outpost at Whitesville in December 1835. In March 1836 General Winfield Scott arrived when he proceeded with his force to the interior of Florida to fight the Seminole. Scott must have saw the strategic benefit Garey's Ferry offered and by March wagons filled with supplies were arrived from Garey's Ferry at Fort Drane where General Scott had marched.

In May 1836 Captain Charles S. Merchant under orders from Major Julius Heileman built quarters for the men and officers under Heileman's command. For the next several months Fort Heileman expanded to keep pace with the military growing involvement against the Seminoles. By the time Fort Heileman was abandoned in June 1841 the military had constructed almost two dozen buildings, small wharves and a large ordnance depot enclosed by a palisade wall.

Garey's Ferry grew into a small thriving town that had a "downtown" filled with abundance of grog shops, tin-pin allies and several grocery and dry goods stores. The military had one sutler who was authorized to sell goods to the troops and for a time Ozias Budington was also authorized. Others who had stores in the area selling goods were Martin Bourson, Charles Willey and possibly A.W. Walker.

Garey's Ferry was an established town that had some charm and character to. It was not the typical Florida cracker town that sprang up on the Florida frontier. In 1839 Lieutenant John T. Sprague described the town as

The citizens of the town observe the day more rigidly than in most towns of the South. The stores are closed, and the whites and negroes walk the streets well dressed, shewing by their deportment that though they have no evidence of Christianity, such as preaching and churches, they have it in their education.

Surgeon J.R. Mott said of the town

It presented a more civilized aspect than scenes I had been accustomed to for the last twelve months. There were frame houses with glass in window sashes; steam-boats were moored to the banks of the stream; and a stirring business-like air prevailed everywhere; which impressed me with a consciousness of my proximity to the haunts of civilized man. This consciousness produced a smoothing effect upon my spirits, after my long sojourn in the wilderness.

Although the town had many shops and the military had established a large central supply depot, roads were still a challenge. Surgeon Mott said the roads “were so bad from the deep sand, we made but slow progress.” Down in Palatka the military employed twenty men to constantly repair the roads once the military shifted the main supply depot to Fort Shannon and away from Garey’s Ferry. The military even had to reduce the weight the wagons could carry so a steady train of supplies could safely reach their destination. This reduction of weight caused even more problems because it put even more carts and wagons on the road and the quartermaster’s office was in constant need of carts, mules and horses to keep the supplies flowing.

Lieutenant M. M. Clark during the summer of 1837 wrote the quartermaster general outlining his plans on how to maintain the flow of supplies to the interior of Florida. Clark estimated that the average size of each post Ft. Heileman was supplying was 600 men and that it would take 40 wagon teams to supply them. The weight of the necessary supplies weighed an estimated 180,000 pounds. When the army was in the field supporting 3,000 the additional supplies would require 455 wagons. These supplies would weigh an estimated 697,500 pounds.

Even with diligent tracking and calculating Lt. Clark was always in need of carts, wagon, horses and mules. Without them the military would stop. The excessive use caused many of the articles to simply wear out and many of the pack animals wore out so fast that the military routinely held sales that grossed upwards of \$10,000. The wore out carts and wagons were used for parts and several officers and civilians hired the wheelwright and blacksmiths to make carts that could haul small loads of wood, typically a chord, and sell to the steamships that were moored to the banks of the creek near the quartermaster stores.

It is unknown if the military used brick to help bolster the foundation of roads in established towns or if town folks used bricks to outline sidewalks. Clearly the deep sand in the area caused delays to the wagon teams while other descriptions vividly describe huge dust clouds enveloping all while working near the quartermaster office. In the early twentieth century bricks were manufactured nearby at the brickyard located along Black Creek just east of the fork. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> Seminole bricks purchased by the military were shipped from Savannah. The majority of the bricks were used for building chimneys, a smith forge and steamboat furnace. However during the fourth quarter of 1839 the quartermaster reported that 7,950 bricks were used for building a “chimney for the officer’s quarters & various other public purpose at the Depot.” Records were only found for the years from 1837 to 1839 and the amount of bricks per year is broken down as follows:

1837 – 14,600

1838 – 8,100

1839 – 22,600

Fort Heilman continued to be used as a military depot until the war progressed further south. In 1840 the army began a slow remove of supplies to Fort Shannon in Palatka and on June 18, 1841 the soldier at Ft. Heileman struck the colors and marched south to Ft. Wheelock. The 8<sup>th</sup> US. Infantry briefly occupied Garey's Ferry in 1842 but the scant records suggest this only last a few months and Ft. Heileman became a distant memory. The civilian population that remained quickly occupied the remaining government buildings and the area surrounding the old fort site quickly increased in population. By the summer of 1843 the post office had moved from Whitesville to Garey's Ferry and in 1851 it was renamed to Middleburg.

The postwar economy of Garey's Ferry languished behind Jacksonville and St .Augustine although the town's population was larger and more important to the military during the war. Once the war was over the majority of the population moved leaving Garey's Ferry to struggle on its own. The later half of the 1840s found the town growing with the establishment of three churches (Methodist, Catholic and Black Creek Anti-Missionary Baptist).

During the next decade the town appears to have recovered but it was still isolated. However because the climate of the area was popular to northern invalids Middleburg had a small tourist population during the winter months. A large house was converted into a hotel in 1855 by Franklin Payson who enjoyed several year of good business. The town could boast of dry good store, a grocery, a tavern, one comfortable dwelling and a Methodist meeting house. Four steamboats made weekly trips up Black Creek to transport passengers and pick up large quantities of cotton as well as animal hides.



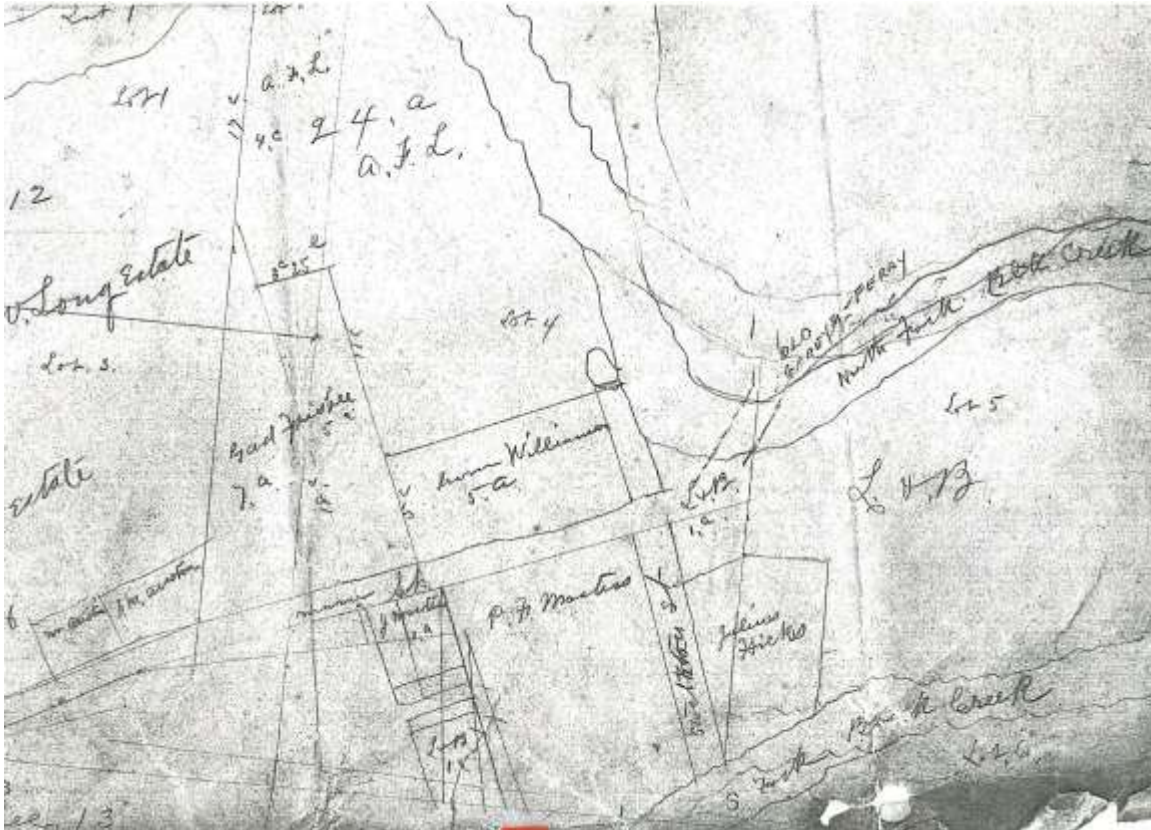
Circa 1850 survey showing the post office and town of Garey's Ferry.

In the mid 1850s Samuel B. Thompson arrived and started to establish a new central business district. Thompson was successful and it is surmised that his stores were located further from the creek nearer the center of town that had moved slightly to the west away from the location of Ft. Heileman. It is here that the center of Middleburg remain until the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Possibly the “new” business district created by Samuel B. Thompson in the 1850s. This is the current intersection of Palmetto and Main Street.

The property in which the rows of bricks are located was used by the military as Ft Heileman and the town of Garery’s Ferry. In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the property was sold several times after leaving the Varn family via Varn’s daughter Rebecca Haas. One undated survey shows that five acres belonged to Williams whose first name is illegible.



Map Showing Williams owning property currently occupied by Main Street Park. Map is from G. R. Frisbee papers courtesy of Judy Mahoney.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Black River Phosphate Company acquired the land but no mining was ever performed on the property in question. The land sat idle except for farming in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century until the 1950s when a fish camp was constructed. The exact date of the fish camp is unknown. The cinder block buildings stood until the main house caught fire in the 1980s and was torn down and removed.

### **Military use of bricks at Ft. Heileman**

2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 1837 – 2300 used in marking Smith forge

Oct 18, 1837 – Lt. Clark received from Maj. Thomas F. Hunt in Savannah 8,000

4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 1837 – 5000 used in building chimneys and smith's forges, etc.

Jan 18, 1838 - 200 fire brick from Savannah

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 1838 4,000 used in building furnace on board steam boats

July 31, 1838 – 8,000 bricks sent from Savannah by Maj Thomas F. Hunt to Lt. Clark

3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 1838 – 4,100 used from making steamboat and smith's furnaces

Nov 15, 1839 – Maj Hunt purchased 8,300 bricks at \$10 per 1,000 from George Worthey

Nov 18, 1839 – Maj hunt purchased 12,900 bricks at \$8 per 1,000 from Maurice Gandy

2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 1839 – 5,000 purchased at \$8 per 1,000 from Joseph Shepard

2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 1839 – 10,272 purchased from Henry P. Parkes for \$123.26

2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 1839 – 7,950 used for Chimneys for officer's quarters & various other public purpose at the Depot.

2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 1839 – disposed of 3,772 worn out bricks.

4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 1839 – 14,650 used from laying hearth for hospital kitchen, forge for blacksmith shop and chimneys for public quarters.

4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 1839 – Lt Penrose 3,250 used Oct 6<sup>th</sup> for bake house oven.