

THE WALKERS AT TAMPA BAY

by FRANK B. HADDLETON

author of

WALKER'S KEY

(rev. 11/29/2022)



Egmont Key light, February 7, 1926¹

1. How this Story Dragged Me In

My grandfather, Frederick Barzillai Walker, the junior of that name, died in 1960, two years before I was born, so I knew nothing about this story from him. My grandmother, Constance F. Walker, with whom I was very close, told me very little about the Walkers' experiences at Tampa Bay. She told me that my grandfather had spent several years of his childhood in Florida, and that my grandfather's grandfather was one of the first ship captains to navigate Tampa Bay. I also remember my grandmother telling me that my grandfather was on the verge of receiving a small fortune (about \$200,000, which would be about \$3.2 million in 2022 dollars) for a sale of Florida land he had inherited, but then that deal fell through as the Florida real estate boom of the 1920s crashed.

Along with many other historical treasures, my grandmother gave me three photographs taken at Tampa Bay in 1900, a handful of photos she took during her own Florida trip in 1926, and a letter she had written to her mother-in-law in 1926, which is reproduced at the end of this piece. This letter evidently came back to her after her mother-in-law's death.

Unfortunately, I didn't ask my grandmother many questions about this period of time in our family's history – I was only 19 when my grandmother died, and my curiosity had not fully matured before then. However, I'm not sure how much she would have revealed if I *had* asked.

I would probably never have taken the time to put any of the pieces of this story together were it not for one very strange fact: in all of the information reported anywhere about my great-grandfather, Fred Walker, including his gravestone, no actual date is provided for his death. The month is indicated. The place is indicated. But the day of the month is not indicated. It also seemed unusual that my great-grandfather died within just a few months of his father's death.

Fred Walker died in 1900 at the age of 37 at a place then called Indian Hill, Florida. This was during a period when accurate records of births, marriages, and deaths in this country were almost universally created and maintained, at least in the absence of highly unusual circumstances. Fred died at his home, right here in the United States. He did not die in a war. He was not lost at sea or killed during some expedition over land. He did not die during some epidemic when there might have been too many deaths to keep track of properly. To me, the absence of a date of death, at least for those who lived in recent times, could not be accepted without a really good reason, and I knew of none.

149	✓	Constance	wife	17	5	Apr	1873	03	00	Georgia	Massachusetts	Massachusetts						
149		Moody Benjamin	Head	17	11	Dec	1855	04	00	Alabama	Georgia	Georgia						Manufacture
150	✓	Abigail	Wife	17	7	Dec	1860	29	00	New York	Germany	Germany						
148		Walker Frederick	Head	17	11	May	1860	10	00	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts						Light House Super
		Clara	Wife	17	7	Feb	1865	35	00	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts						
		Frederick	Son	17	11	Apr	1860	13	00	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts						at school
		Benjamin	Son	17	11	Apr	1860	11	00	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts						at school
		John	Son	17	11	Aug	1860	9	00	Florida	Massachusetts	Massachusetts						at school
		Bill	Son	17	11	Jan	1894	6	00	Florida	Massachusetts	Massachusetts						
		Clara	Daughter	17	7	May	1897	3	00	Florida	Massachusetts	Massachusetts						

[The preceding image is from the 1900 U.S. Census for Gulf City (near Indian Hill) in Hillsborough County, Florida. This is a good example of a census taker getting things wrong. The birth years for all seven of the Walkers are incorrect. The names of three of the children are incorrect (no children were named John, William, or Clara). The orders of birth are also incorrect – The eldest child was Ben, and the youngest child was a male, not a female. This incorrect information has been copied, in its entirety, into several trees on Ancestry.com, and over time it will continue to be copied despite the fact that other official records clearly establish that this information is incorrect. Once the incorrect information gets planted in the internet, it becomes impossible to eradicate it.]

It did *not* seem strange, really, that nobody in the family knew *how* my great-grandfather died, but how on earth could it be that nobody knew *what day* he died? Well, as the reader will see, nobody knows what day he died, and nobody will ever know.

The story of what happened to Fred and to his father was never told to my mother, nor to her siblings, nor to her cousins. It may not even have been told to my mother's father or uncles (Fred's own children), although my guess is that they must have learned of it at some point, and then promptly agreed not to share it with anyone else. This was a story covered up in a conspiracy of silence. If there were good reasons to cover this story up in 1900 -- and I suppose that the family believed this to be so -- those reasons have been erased by the passage of time.

In 2013, I went to the John F. Germany library in Tampa in search of answers. I was directed to the microfiche collection of articles from The Tampa Tribune. This was years before articles from this period were widely available on the internet. I was genuinely shocked to find an unusually graphic front page article (reproduced later in this piece) about the death of my great-great grandfather (Fred's father) at Egmont Key, and then a short time later another unusually graphic front page article about the death of his son, Fred (also reproduced), this article explaining why Fred's date of death cannot be known.

6	Walker, William M	Head	W	M	Apr	1871	29	S	So. Carolina	So. Carolina	So. Carolina			Carpenter
	Moore, Charles	Head	W	M	Sept	1838	61	M	Connecticut	Connecticut	Massachusetts			Right-Hand Keeper
	Emily R	Wife	W	F	Dec	1870	29	M	Alabama	Maryland	Alabama			
	Agatha M	Son	W	M	Oct	1876	23	S	Alabama	Connecticut	Alabama			Ship Carpenter
7	Moady, Thomas A	Head	W	M	Apr	1866	34	M	Florida	Florida	Georgia			Right-Hand Keeper
	Minnie L	Wife	W	F	Sept	1870	26	M	North Carolina	North Carolina	North Carolina			
	Auna	Daughter	W	F	Mar	1891	9	S	Florida	Florida	North Carolina			
	Ella	Daughter	W	F	Oct	1894	5	S	Florida	Florida	North Carolina			
8	Walker, Henry M	Head	W	M	Jan	1843	57	M	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts			Pilot
	Louisa	Wife	W	F	Dec	1844	55	M	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts			
	Baird, William	Boarder	W	M	May	1880	20	S	Denmark	Denmark	England			Boatman
	Linstedt, Edward	Boarder	W	M	Jul	1872	28	S	Russia	Russia	Russia	1890	10	Cook

Part of the 1900 U.S. census for Egmont Key, showing Henry M. Walker (Pilot) and his wife, Louisa, living with two boarders, William Baird, a boatman, and Edward Linstedt, a cook.



My grandfather, Frederick Walker, crouching with dog, at Indian Hill, February 4, 1926. The man on the right is probably Mr. Boone, who then lived on the island. Photo by C. F. Walker.



Frank Haddleton, at Indian Hill, February 21, 2015. Roughly the same spot, but from the opposite direction and 89 years later. St. Petersburg in the distance. Photo by Greg Thornburg

2. Henry M. Walker (1843-1900) and Louisa (Eldridge) Walker (1844 – 1918)

My great-great grandfather, Henry Marshall Walker, often identified in newspaper reports of his time as “Captain H. M. Walker”, was born in Harwich Port, Massachusetts in 1843, the tenth of the eleven children of Marshall and Rebecca Walker.



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Henry M Walker". To the right of the signature, the word "SEAL" is written in a small, rectangular box.

Henry M. Walker, about 1880, and his signature from an 1898 Florida deed

Given his family’s history of seafaring, and given the large proportion of Harwich men who chose to be mariners in those days², it was not at all unusual that Henry chose, very early on, a life on the sea. The 1860 U.S. census report for the family indicates that by the age of 17, Henry had already become a mariner. Evidently Henry was not deterred in his choice of career by the extraordinarily large number of his extended family members who were lost at sea. He should have been. But if he believed that he was not destined to die at sea, he was correct. Sort of.

On November 16, 1862, at the age of only 19, Henry married Louisa Eldridge³, then only 18, in Harwich. Louisa was from a family as connected to the sea as was Henry’s family. Louisa’s father, David Eldridge, of South Chatham, was a sea captain.⁴ Louisa’s uncle, Barzillai Eldridge, was lost at sea in 1831, apparently on a whaling voyage⁵, and Louisa’s parents named their first son (Louisa’s brother) Barzillai, presumably in his honor.



Louisa (Eldridge) Walker, probably about 1900

Henry and Louisa had two sons, Frederick Barzillai Walker, born in Harwich in 1863, and Henry Marshall Walker, Jr., born in Harwich in 1866. Frederick Barzillai was presumably named to honor Louisa's brothers, Frederick and Barzillai. Both sons became mariners like their father and their grandfathers. Fred married Clarissa (a/k/a Clara) Doane Nickerson in Harwich on August 23, 1888. Henry married Annie J. Sullivan in Chatham on November 18, 1889.



Salt Water Pond in Harwich Port, Massachusetts, with the home built by Jeremiah Walker, Captain Walker's grandfather, overlooking it, about 1900. All of the land on the far (north and east) side of the pond belonged to Jeremiah Walker. Captain Walker was born and raised here. The Salt Pond is now Wychmere Harbor. Photo courtesy of the Harwich Historical Society.



Above: The Eldridge home on Pleasant Street in South Chatham, probably in the 1870s⁶. Louisa is very likely one of these women, but the women are not identified. Nor are the three cats. Below: The same home in 2016, beautifully restored by the current owner and currently available as a vacation rental⁷. Louisa (Eldridge) Walker was born in this home in 1844 and died in this home in 1918⁸. Photo by Frank Haddleton





3. The Steamer *Valley City*

By 1878, Captain Walker had become a ship captain with recognized experience. That year, Captain Walker and two partners, including a steamship company by the name of Miller & Henderson (later called Tampa Steamship Company), purchased the steamship *Valley City* in Connecticut and brought it to Tampa for commercial use, Captain Walker serving as its commander.¹⁰

Captain Walker owned a one-quarter interest in the *Valley City*, the total value of which was reported as \$12,000 in 1879. Note that Captain Walker was not the only captain to serve aboard the *Valley City* from its port in Tampa. Others who shared that duty included Captain James McKay¹¹ and Captain William Parker Jackson¹², both of whom also worked for Miller & Henderson and later became very noteworthy and successful Tampa entrepreneurs. “Captain Bill Jackson” was in charge of the Steamship Hiram Cool in the 1880s when it ran aground in night time fog and sank almost immediately, the passengers being rowed to Tampa by the crew.¹³

Presumably, the reason Captain Walker decided to get involved in an enterprise in Florida was that the opportunities for ship captains along the New England coast were rapidly declining. With the huge spread of rail lines in the late nineteenth century, more and more goods were being shipped by land rather than by sea, and many Cape Cod mariners were being forced to find other employment.

At the same time, Florida was just about to enter a period of unprecedented growth, and Henry was apparently among the visionaries who saw a bright future there. In 1880, the population of Tampa was less than 800, but many factors were about to cause that figure to balloon to over 15,000 by 1900.

These factors included the growth of the cattle and citrus industries in Florida, the discovery of large quantities of phosphate on Florida’s west coast and the resulting phosphate industry (this chemical compound, used for fertilizer, today still accounts for 90% of Tampa’s outbound exports¹⁴), the arrival of Henry B. Plant’s rail line in Tampa in 1884, the arrival of the cigar industry in Tampa in 1885, and the building of Henry B. Plant’s lavish Tampa Bay Hotel in 1891, by which time wealthy winter tourists had begun flocking to Tampa from the north.

St. Petersburg was not in existence in 1880, being first surveyed and platted in 1888. The first train rolled into St. Petersburg on June 8, 1888. Its population in 1900 was 1,575.



*Above: Henry B. Plant's Tampa Bay Hotel, from a very early 20th century postcard.
Below: Port Tampa, about 1900. From Shorpy.com*



The *Valley City*, built in Philadelphia in 1859, was a wooden-hulled, propeller-driven steamship. It was 127 ½ feet long and had a beam of 21 feet 10 inches. It was purchased by the Union Navy in 1861, was used actively in the Civil War, and was then sold back into private service in 1865.¹⁵ I have found no images of the *Valley City*, other than the photo of the propeller, reproduced later in this article.

cattle. Her cost was \$60,000. Next comes the propeller *Valley City*, brought from Connecticut for work in the cattle trade by her three owners in December, 1878. She is of 318 64-100 tons, and carries 260 head of cattle. Her value is about \$12,000. She is owned, one-half by Miller & Henderson, one-fourth by her commander, Captain H. M. Walker, and one-fourth by her chief engineer, Mr. J. R. Davis. The *Chase* was purchas-

Excerpt from an article originally published in the Savannah Morning News on October 15, 1879, and reprinted in the December 15, 1915 issue of the Tampa Daily Times

Steamship for Pensacola.

WHITING, ALA., November 25.—

The steamship *Valley City* reached Pensacola to-day on her trial trip. She belongs to a weekly line which is to ply between Pensacola and Tampa, calling at Cedar Key.

MARINE NEWS.

PICAYUNE OFFICE, May 23.

CLEARED YESTERDAY.

Steamship *Valley City*, Walker, for Cedar Keys.
 R B Post & Son
 Steamship *Lone Star*, Freeman, for New York,
 O A Whitney & Co
 Sch H Brash, Pickett, for Cedar Keys, Master

ARRIVED.

The notice on the left is from the Columbus Daily Enquirer (Columbus, GA) of November 26, 1878. The notice on the right is from the Times-Picayune (New Orleans, LA) of 5/23/1879



Birds Eye View of Cedar Key, FL, 1884

HAVANA AND FLORIDA PORTS.
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**HAVANA AND FLORIDA PORTS,  
UNITED STATES MAIL LINE.  
FOR CEDAR KEYS, KEY WEST  
and Havana—The new steamship  
VALLEY CITY,  
H. M. Walker, master,  
will leave her wharf, foot of Calliope street  
on THURSDAY, May 22, at 8 P. M.  
Superior passenger accommodations, and  
through tickets to all points in Florida and  
Havana.  
For freight or passage apply to  
R. B. POST & SON,  
91 and 93 Magazine street.**  
d6—11

*A notice from the Times-Picayune (New Orleans, LA), probably June, 1879*

Captain Walker and the steamship company used the *Valley City* to transport cattle, produce, and passengers along the Gulf Coast and down to Key West and Havana. A reporter for the Savannah Morning news boarded the *Valley City* in October, 1879, and made this report of his experience<sup>16</sup>:

*A most fortunate circumstance enabled your correspondent to take passage at Cedar Key on board the steamship Valley City, Walker master, of Miller & Henderson's line of splendid gulf steamers. On board we found an old and valued friend, Mr. Jno. R. Swingley, formerly of Savannah and Tallahassee, acting as purser, and the pleasure and comfort of the trip, and the many courtesies received at the hands of the officers of the vessel, will long be remembered. The voyage was a very quick one [14 hours, he later reports], and the weather exceedingly fine. As we steamed up the bay, famous in song and story, and history, formerly known as the Espiritu Santo Bay of De Soto, and later as Tampa Bay, under the bright rays of the October sun, the scene was as fair a one as can be found on the continent. The eastern shore, after leaving Manatee, which is near the entrance, appeared low and uninviting in the distance, but the western shore, from Piney Point, as the charts have it, or 'Point Pinellis', as the later settlers are fond of calling it, is lined with numerous settlements, with good sized dwellings, and an occasional orange or cattle wharf, the visible evidences of a desirable and productive country interior, and a climate whose advantages and attractions have not been by any means overrated, and the half of whose sources of enjoyment and benefit to persons suffering from ill health have never yet been written. ...The Valley City and Lizzie Henderson are making regular trips between Tampa, Cedar Key, and Key West. ... The fare from Key West to Tampa is \$7; from Cedar Key to Key West \$15.*

On the A.C.L. Dock, St. Petersburg, Fla.

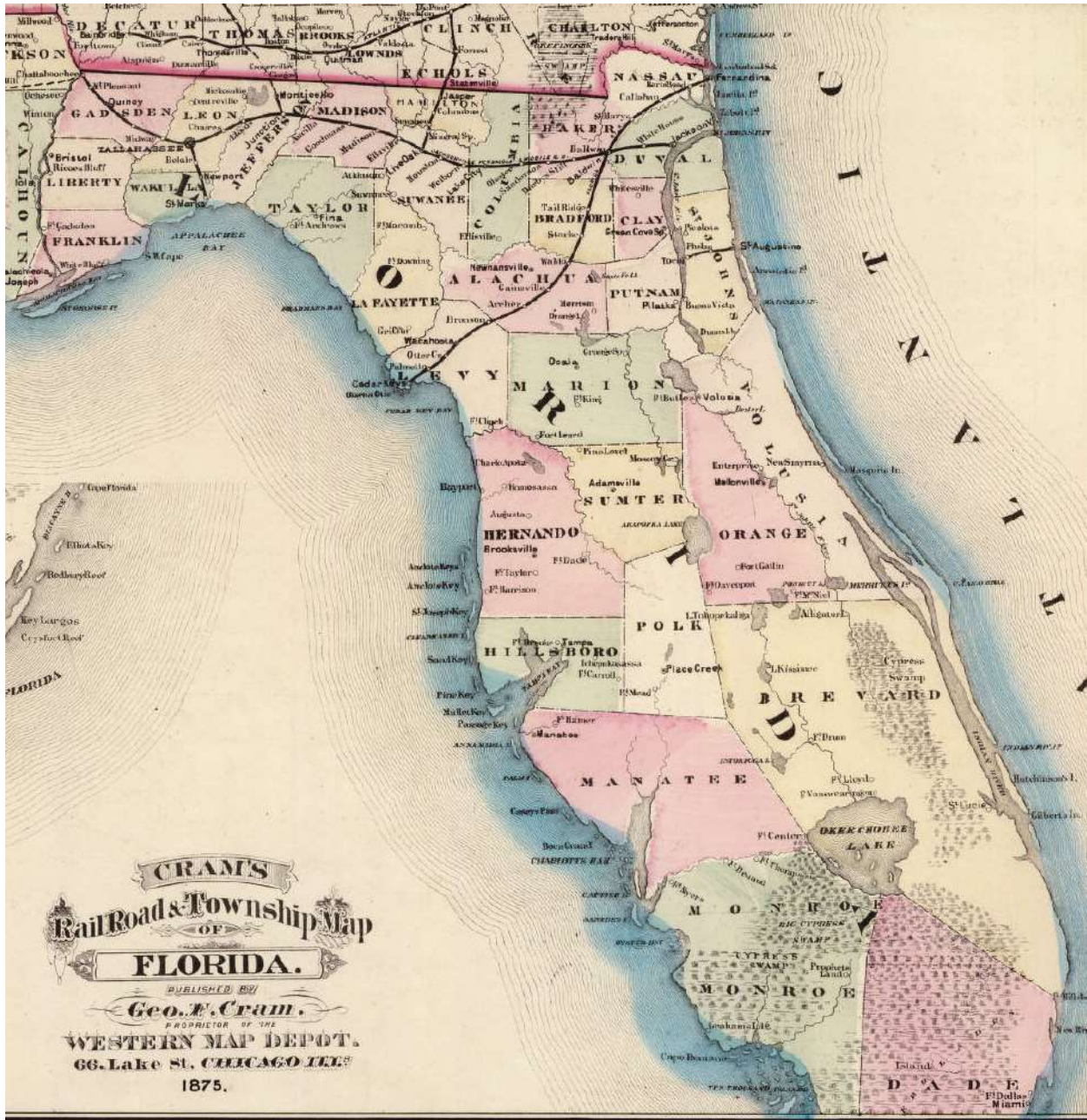


*Postcard showing the Atlantic Coastal Lines dock, St. Petersburg, just after 1900*

Sadly, the *Valley City* foundered off Cape San Blas, Florida (along the coast of the Florida panhandle, east of Pensacola) in a gale on January 30, 1882, while transporting a load of oranges.<sup>17</sup> Fortunately, the entire crew of the *Valley City* made it off the ship and landed safely in Pensacola.<sup>18</sup> I do not know whether or not Captain Walker was in charge of the *Valley City* on its final voyage. Michael C. Barnette and divers from the Association of Underwater Explorers identified the wreck of the vessel in 2009.<sup>19</sup>



*Propeller of the Valley City, missing one blade, identified by Michael C. Barnette and divers from the Association of Underwater Explorers in 2009.<sup>20</sup>*




*Prior to 1884, the fastest way from northern locales to Tampa was by rail to Cedar Key, which for a long time was the southern-most point reachable by rail, and then by steamship (such as the Valley City) from Cedar Key*




*An image of the tin type from which Captain Walker's photo, reproduced earlier, was cropped. The date and place are not identified, nor is the associate standing next to Captain Walker<sup>21</sup>.*

RAILROADS.



TAMPA  
STEAMSHIP COMPANY.



MILLER & HENDERSON, MANAGERS,  
TAMPA, FLORIDA.

\* STEAMERS OF THIS LINE \*

| LEAVE                                | ARRIVE                                  |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| TAMPA, every Tuesday and Friday.     | TAMPA, every Monday and Friday.         |
| KEY WEST, every Thursday and Sunday. | KEY WEST, every Wednesday and Saturday. |

—CONNECT AT—

KEY WEST, with Steamer "Cochran" for Havana.  
TAMPA, with South Florida Railroad for points North.  
TAMPA, with Steamer "Safford" for Cedar Key.

APPLY TO

MILLER & HENDERSON,  
OWNERS AND MANAGERS,  
TAMPA, - - FLORIDA.

A. C. WUERPEL, Auditor. J. J. PHILBRICK, Agent, KEY WEST, FLORIDA.

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Advertisement from *Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory*, 1883, page 484

4. The Schooner *Wateska*

Captain Walker continued to work along the Gulf Coast after the loss of the *Valley City* in 1882. His employment with Miller & Henderson continued into 1886. In 1887 he purchased the schooner *Wateska* in Massachusetts<sup>22</sup>. The *Wateska* was built in Bristol, Maine, in 1884, and was 46.6 feet long and had a beam of 14.8 feet<sup>23</sup>. In 1888, a crew of six, which presumably included its owner, Captain Walker, were on the *Wateska* fishing for Red Snapper off Florida's gulf coast. An article in *Forest and Stream* from 1889 says:

*...the schooner Wateska, of Chatham, Mass., in the latter part of 1888, fished forty miles southwest from Egmont Key... The crew of six men averaged about 9,000 lbs of red snappers per week in this locality.*<sup>24</sup>

Other men who worked alongside Captain Walker on the *Wateska* at various times included his sons, Fred Walker and Henry M. Walker, Jr., and Albert M. Nickerson, who was the brother of Fred Walker's wife.<sup>25</sup>



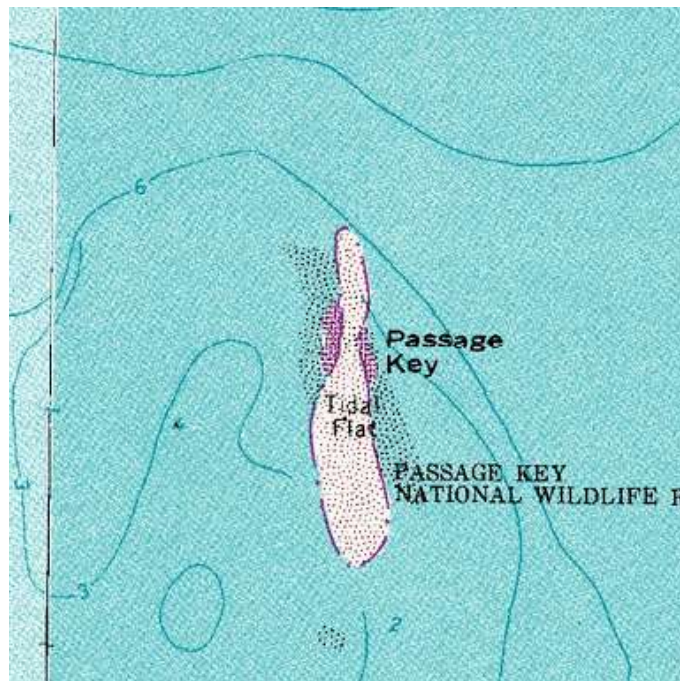
*The Pilot Boat "Belle" from Egmont Key – one of the photos given to me by my grandmother. I had initially thought this might have been the *Wateska*, but other photos make it clear that it is the *Belle*.*

For several years, Captain Walker took the *Wateska* on fishing trips in New England during the summer, returning to the gulf coast of Florida for the winter. Short reports in the local Harwich newspaper include the following:

*The Wateska, Capt. H.M. Walker, landed 8,000 lbs of cod fish in Boston last week and arrived home Sunday.*<sup>26</sup> *Capt. Henry M. Walker, sch. Wateska, arrived last Saturday from Tampa, Fla, via Key West. Capt. Walker has been engaged during the winter in snapper fishing off the Florida coast, and reports a fairly successful season's catch, with a passage of ten days from Key West.*<sup>27</sup> *Capt. H.M. Walker, schr. Wateska, arrived home from Boothbay last Tuesday and sailed again for the fishing grounds Saturday.*<sup>28</sup> *Capt. H.M. Walker has taken his vessel, the Wateska, to New Bedford for repairs, preparatory for her usual winter cruise to Florida.*<sup>29</sup>

In 1890, according to a news report, Captain Walker took charge of the Schooner "Albert Woodbury", owned by a William Stopford, which schooner was chartered for red snapper fishing and based in Tampa<sup>30</sup>. Captain Walker had apparently turned the *Wateska* over to the command of his son, Henry M. Walker, Jr.

On January, 13, 1891, while in the command of his son, the *Wateska* became grounded on Passage Key bar, not far from Egmont Key. Captain Walker, who was apparently also onboard the *Wateska* that day, wrote to the Harwich Independent about this event, explaining that he rowed 24 miles to Port Tampa to secure the assistance of a steamship, but efforts to pull the *Wateska* off the bar were unsuccessful. Everything movable was removed from the schooner, which later sank. The vessel was partly insured.<sup>31</sup>



Later in 1891, the *Albert Woodbury* was sold to other parties in Massachusetts, and, quite tragically, was lost with ten men aboard in September, 1891, during a gale off Nova Scotia. The lost crew included Henry and Louisa's younger son, Henry M. Walker, Jr., a devastating blow to the Walker family.

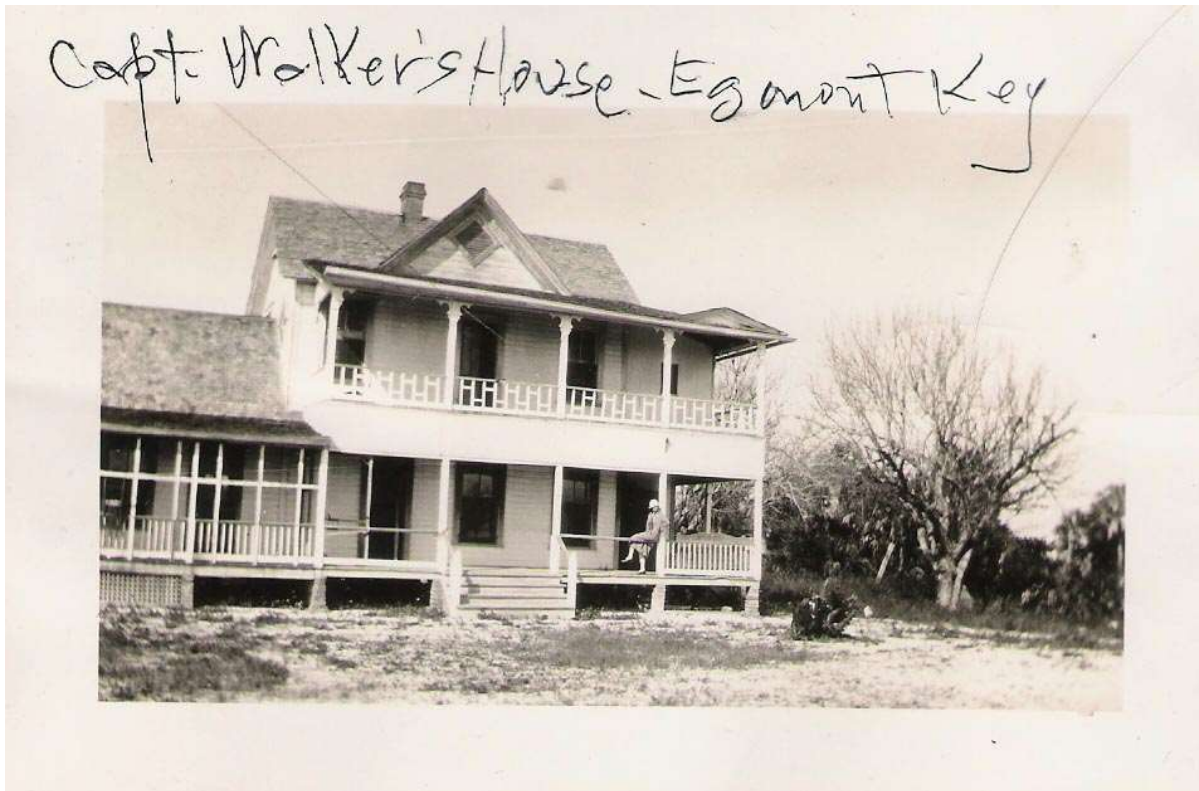
Grave fears are entertained for the safety of schr. *Albert Woodbury*, Capt. Wallace, that sailed from Marblehead on August 16th for a fishing cruise to the coast of Nova Scotia for codfish, and on board of which were John G. Doane of South Chatham and Thomas Sullivan and **Henry M. Walker, Jr.**, of South Harwich. The last heard from her she visited Halifax, N. S., for bait on the 5th ult., two days before the heavy storm off that coast, which occurred the 7th, and as they were due some time ago and no tidings, there is great cause for anxiety.—*Harwich Independent*.

*From the Harwich Independent, September, 1891*

Following the loss of the *Wateska* and the loss of his younger son, Captain Walker continued to spend his winters fishing in Florida. In the fall of 1892, he sailed from Harwich to Tampa Bay on the schooner *Village Belle*, from which he and his crew spent the winter fishing for red snapper.<sup>32</sup>



*A Red Snapper*



*The house in which Captain Walker and his wife resided in the 1890s on Egmont Key<sup>33</sup>*

## 5. Egmont Key

Egmont Key, which was then also called “Pilot’s Island”, is the narrow barrier island at the mouth of Tampa Bay (see the map reproduced several pages earlier). The first lighthouse on Egmont Key was built in 1848 and later destroyed by a hurricane. The present lighthouse was built in 1858. One can see the island and its lighthouse just off to the west when crossing the Sunshine Skyway between Bradenton and St. Petersburg. For an excellent introduction to Egmont Key, I recommend a 2012 book by Carol and Donald Thompson, *Egmont Key: A History*. I also recommend *Dedication to Service: The History of Piloting on Tampa Bay through Three Centuries*, another 2012 book researched and written by Carrie Caignet for the Tampa Bay Pilot’s Association.<sup>34</sup>

A ship pilot, also known as a maritime pilot, a harbor pilot, or just “pilot”, is a sailor who boards a ship from another port and guides the ship through the local waters, usually a harbor or river mouth, waters unfamiliar to the captain that would be too dangerous for the ship captain to navigate without guidance. In 1969, Captain John D. Ware of the Tampa Bay Pilots Association described the duties of a 20<sup>th</sup> century Tampa Bay pilot as follows:

*“The pilotage route from sea to Tampa is forty nautical miles – almost twice as long as Jacksonville, the next longest route in Florida. The shortest route – Port Everglades – is less than two miles. Reduced to its simplest terms the duties of a Tampa Bay Pilot are to board a vessel at Egmont sea buoy, nine miles offshore and provide the local knowledge, skill and ship-handling ability necessary to safely conduct or “con” the vessel over the bar, through the channels, and in most cases to dock the vessel with or without tugs as indicated... Only rarely does the pilot actually steer or operate the engine order telegraph. In short, the pilot is merely an advisor who gives the necessary information and orders to safely navigate the ship into and out of greater Tampa Harbor.”<sup>35</sup>*



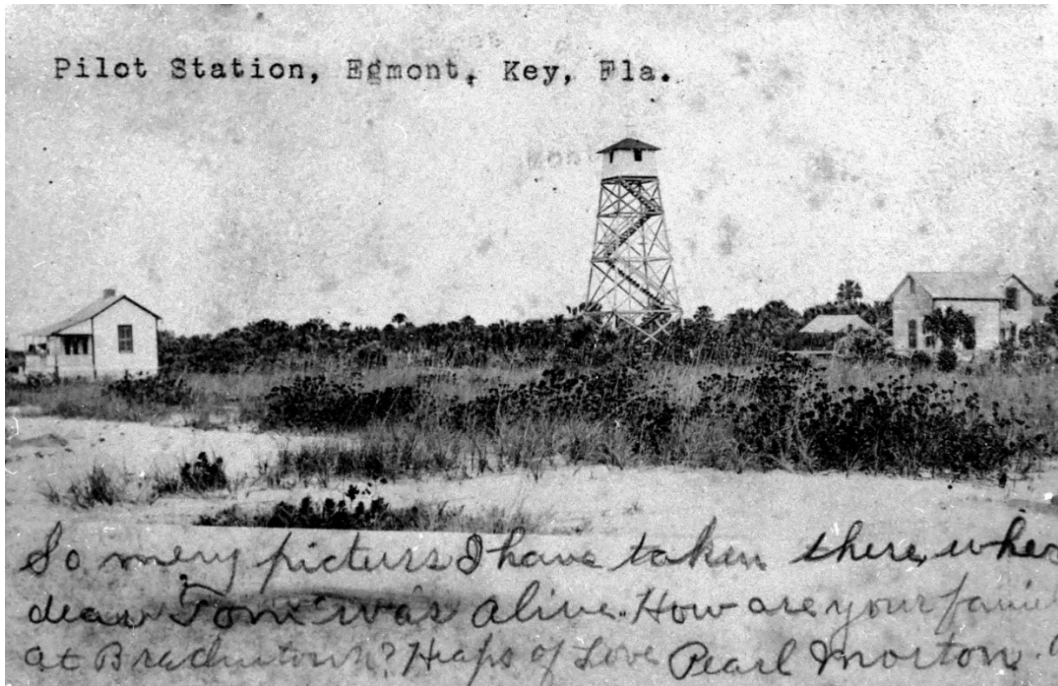
*Egmont Key from the air in recent times, looking south*

Though there were other Tampa Bay pilots before them, the Tampa Bay Pilots Association began about 1888 when two Tampa Bay Captains, Harry G. Warner and W. A. Switzer, joined forces to provide piloting services to vessels from other ports. Captain Arthur C. Bahrt, a Tampa Bay Pilot in the 1930s, wrote the following notes based on his conversation with his older brother, Carl W. Bahrt, who served as a general helper or “cabin boy” for the pilots, including Captain Walker, when he was a boy in the 1890s, and later became a pilot himself<sup>36</sup>:

*“Captain H.G. Warner and W.A. Switzer were the two who established a bona fide station at the present site in Egmont Key, having for their first boat a small sailing sloop “Gulnare”. A lookout tower was built, fifty feet high and Captain Switzer built a home and lived on Egmont Key. Captain Warner lived at Port Tampa and brought all the ships out which Switzer had taken in. The writer at that time, being about ten years of age, lived at the station*

*and my duties were to keep a lookout from the tower for the ships approaching that required the services of a local pilot and a handy boy for everybody. Our nearest and only neighbors were Mr. and Mrs. Charles Moore. Mr. Moore was the light keeper at the Egmont Key Lighthouse.*

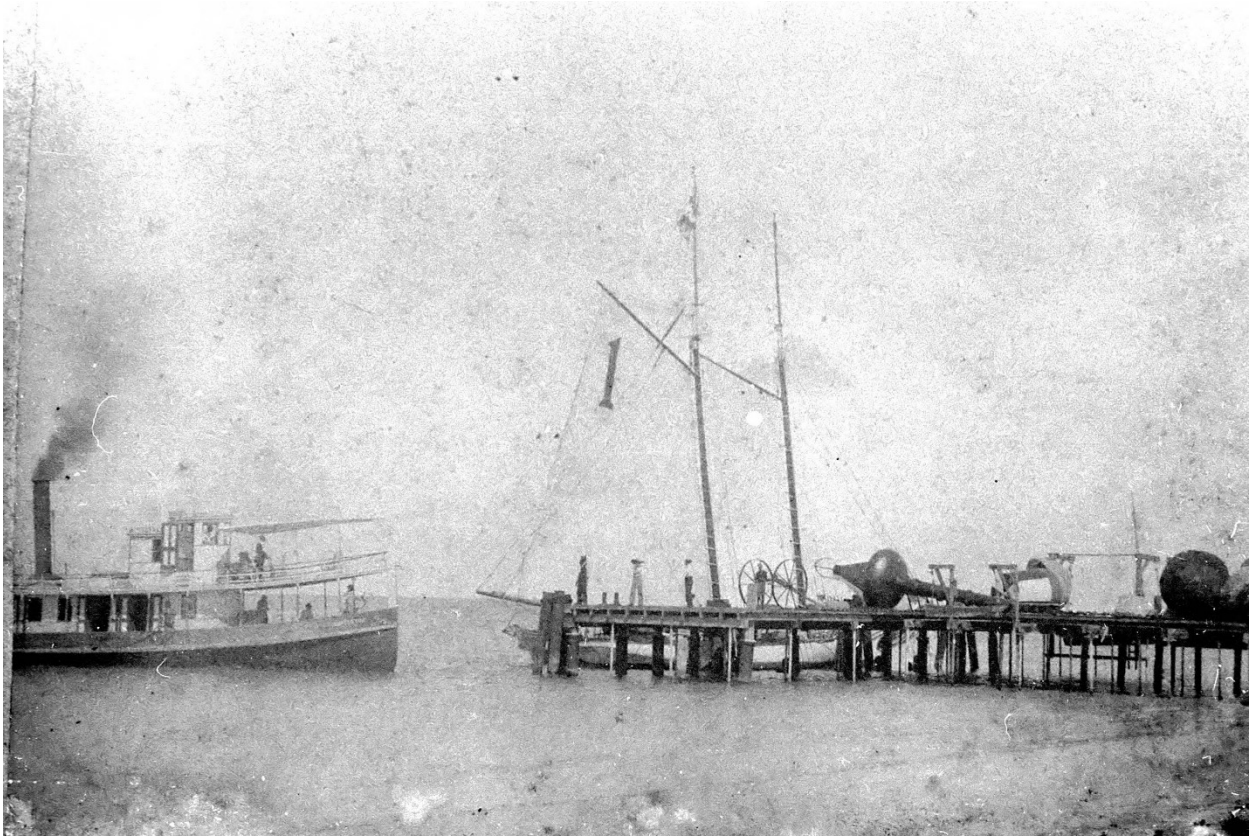
*After a year, we needed a larger boat. Captain Warner brought his very fast sailing sloop, "Mischief", and was she a beauty but [a] fisherman from Cape Cod and steamship master who had run to Tampa years before as a captain of the steamers of the Miller & Henderson Line [Captain Henry M. Walker] then joined our association and soon came the much larger schooner, "Belle", from Savannah, she being built there for a pilot boat and indeed she was a beauty. "Belle" was a fast sailer, good seaboat and fixed up like a yacht."<sup>37</sup>*



*Preceding image: Postcard of the Pilot Station on Egmont Key, about 1900  
Courtesy of Manatee County Public Library Historical Digital Collections*

It was probably in late 1893 that Captain Walker joined the Tampa Bay pilots, and according to Carl W. Bahrt's recollection, above, he was one of the very earliest pilots. A report in the Harwich Independent in early 1894 indicates that Captain Walker had sent the newspaper editor a letter from which it was learned that "the grippe is prevalent down there – as much of an epidemic as it has been in South Chatham. By the way, the Capt. Is a successful pilot on one of the Edgemont (sic) Keys..."<sup>38</sup> Louisa Walker lived at Egmont Key with her husband, returning each summer to South Chatham on her own.<sup>39</sup>

Toward the end of Captain Walker's time there, Egmont Key was also the home of Fort Dade, which had been established after the start of the Spanish-American war (1898) as part of the country's coastal defense. Today, Egmont Key is a National Wildlife Refuge and a state park, accessible by ferry from Fort DeSoto State Park, just to the east.



*In this image from the 1890s, the “Belle”, a pilot boat used by Captain Walker and his fellow pilots to rendezvous with vessels entering Tampa Bay, sits at the end of the dock at Egmont Key. Aids to navigation, for which the pilots were responsible, are seen lying on the dock. The steamer “Mistletoe” approaches from the left. It’s not impossible that Captain Walker is one of the men on the dock. Courtesy of Manatee County Public Library Historical Digital Collections*

As a ship pilot for Tampa Bay (I believe that he was one of three or four pilots at least during his initial time there), Captain Walker would board vessels when they entered Tampa Bay and guide them up the bay to St. Petersburg or further up to Tampa. “The early pilots used a compass, a timepiece, navigational markers and their senses to traverse the channel from Egmont to the ports within Tampa Bay. ... The earliest pilots on Tampa Bay were required to set and maintain their own aids to navigation as well as stand ready to rendezvous with any vessels needing the services of a pilot to enter the bay.”<sup>40</sup> With his many years of experience navigating vessels up Tampa Bay, he was definitely well-suited for this job.

Captain Walker and his wife lived in a house on Egmont Key which they shared with two boarders. (See 1900 census report, reproduced earlier, and 1926 photograph, also reproduced earlier). I don't know whether or not Captain Walker built the house in which he and his wife lived or whether or not the Walkers owned it. I believe that it was built between 1895 (when the first private home was built by a Tampa Bay Pilot on Egmont Key<sup>41</sup>) and 1900.

**The Snapper Banks.**

Tomorrow the last excursion to the snapper banks will be given by the Plant System on the steamer Florida, under the expert guidance of Capt. Walker, the star pilot of Port Tampa, who has been retained for the express purpose of locating the fishing grounds. Bait will be furnished in abundance on the steamer, and the Target store will furnish the fishing tackle. A great crowd is expected, as the fare has been fixed at the very reasonable rate of \$1.50. The steamer will leave the dock at 8:10 a. m., and it is expected that the landing on the return trip will be made at 8 p. m.

Captain Walker also performed services for other entities, including the Plant System, a network of hotels, rail lines, and steamship lines operated on Florida's west coast by Henry B. Plant. This advertisement from July of 1897, in which it is indicated that Captain Walker would be guiding the Plant System steamship "Florida" for a fishing excursion, calls Captain Walker "the star pilot of Port Tampa." Captain Walker was presumably acquainted with the more famous Henry, who died in June, 1899. (The steamship Florida was a 230-foot steel screw steamer built in Glasgow in 1887 and originally named "Hondo".)

# ATTRactions

OF





ON THE  
**WEST COAST**  
OF  
**FLORIDA**

*TAMPA BAY HOTEL, TAMPA BAY, FLA.*

D.P. HATHAWAY, MANAGER.



THE CASINO, ← AT TAMPA BAY HOTEL.

*PLANT SYSTEM HOTELS:*  
*TAMPA BAY HOTEL, TAMPA, FLA.*  
*HOTEL BELLEVUE, BELLAIRE, FLA.*  
*THE SEMINOLE, WINTER PARK, FLA.*  
*THE KISSIMMEE, KISSIMMEE, FLA.*  
*THE INN, PORT TAMPA, FLA.*  
*THE OCALA HOUSE, OCALA, FLA.*  
*THE PUNTA GORDA, PUNTA GORDA, FLA.*





THEATRICAL AUDITORIUM, TAMPA BAY HOTEL.



SWIMMING POOL, TAMPA BAY HOTEL.

THE WEST COAST OF FLORIDA  
THE HEALTH & PLEASURE SEEKERS PARADISE.

Through Trains from all Points, via-

## PLANT SYSTEM.

Beautifully illustrated descriptive literature, sent upon application.

**H.B. PLANT.**  
PRESIDENT.

**B.W. WRENN.**  
PASS. TRAFFIC M'G'R.  
SAVANNAH - GA.

**J.J. FARNSWORTH.**  
EASTERN PASS. AGENT.,  
261 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

6. Frederick Barzillai Walker (1863 – 1900), Clarissa (Nickerson) Walker (1861 – 1950), and Indian Hill (a/k/a Cockroach Key)



*Frederick Barzillai Walker ("Fred"), probably about 1880  
He married Clara Nickerson in 1888*

Sixteen miles to the northeast of Egmont Key, on the eastern shore of Tampa Bay, there is a small island called Indian Hill, also known as "Big Cockroach Mound" or "Cockroach Key" -- it is difficult to imagine a name less likely to attract visitors. The website for Cockroach Bay Preserve State Park states: "Horseshoe crabs were once so abundant along the shores of Florida's west coast that early Spanish explorers called them cockroaches, believing them to be seagoing cousins of insects. Many people believe that is how Cockroach Bay received its unlikely name."

The island, located about three miles southwest of the mouth of the Little Manatee River, in Hillsborough County, is actually an ancient Indian shell mound, or midden, a very large collection of shells discarded by the local native American residents over nearly a thousand



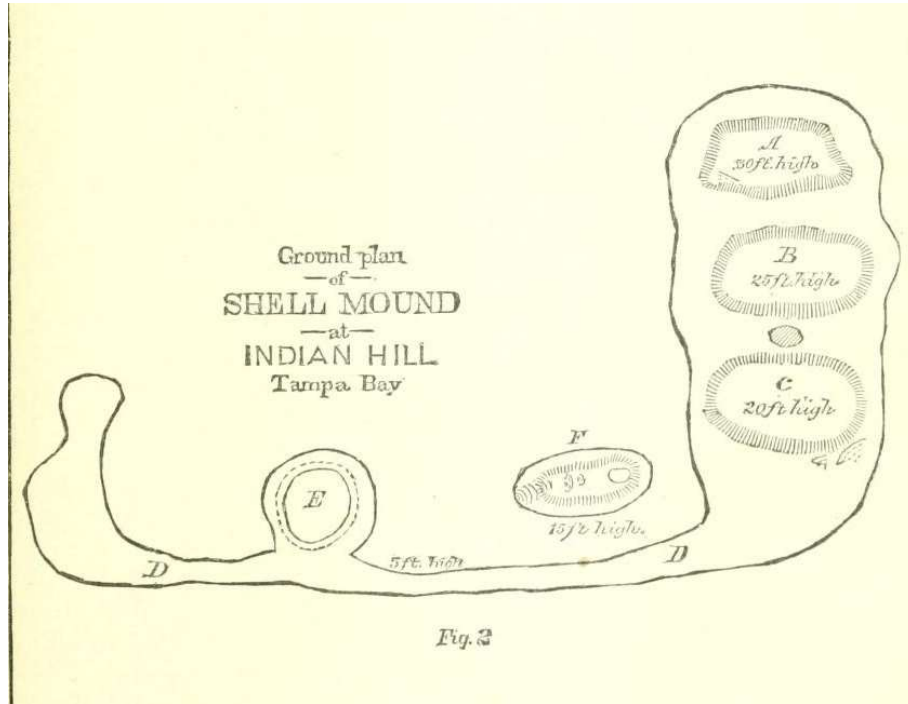
years.

*Clarissa ("Clara") Doane Nickerson<sup>43</sup>, probably about 1880, several years before marrying Fred Walker*

A newspaper article from 1936, describing Works Progress Administration (a New Deal agency of the U.S. government) research into the Indian mounds of Hillsborough County, says about the mound at Indian Hill:

*This mound is known as the kitchen midden type, built up through generations of primitive life by refuse from a great eating place, perhaps the banqueting hall of a nation; perhaps it was a ceremonial gathering place. It was also a burial ground.*<sup>44</sup>

A 2014 news article from the Tampa Tribune reports that scientists have found portions of some 224 human skeletons, primitive tools and pottery in the mound at Indian Hill.<sup>45</sup>



*A sketch of Indian Hill by Archaeologist Sylvanus T. Walker (unrelated), who visited and studied shell mounds in the area in 1879<sup>46</sup>.*



*Frederick Walker (at right) at Indian Hill in 1926. The man at the left is probably Mr. Boone, who then lived on the island, and the man in the middle is probably Captain Carpenter.*



FIG. 4.—Principal shell heaps, Indian Hill, Tampa Bay.

*Indian Hill in 1900, with the home of the Walkers at the right<sup>A7</sup>*

Indian Hill is now considered a site of significant value for its Native American history and artifacts, and in 1973 it was added to the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. For some fascinating ancient history of Indian Hill and the Native Americans who lived there, see the recent work of Thomas Pluckhahn, Kendal Jackson, and Jamie Rogers, of the University of South Florida.<sup>48</sup> In 1895, however, Indian Hill was just a tiny coastal island in the middle of nowhere, significant only because it was the highest point on the eastern shore of Tampa Bay and, in fact, the highest point in all of Hillsborough County<sup>49</sup>. It was also halfway up the bay between Egmont Key and Tampa. Somebody made the decision that it was a good location for a small lighthouse as an aid to navigation in Tampa Bay.

Fred Walker purchased Indian Hill from the State of Florida on August 28, 1895 for the sum of ten dollars. The deed, a copy of which is reproduced below, estimates the land area, which was not actually surveyed, as approximately ten acres. A separate receipt dated August 28, 1895 confirms that the consideration paid was ten dollars. A house was constructed on the island (see photo on the cover page), and Fred relocated his family there. Fred's family then consisted of his wife, Clara, and his three young sons, Ben (born in 1889), Fred (born in 1891), and Henry (born in 1894).

Other than the fact that his parents were across Tampa Bay on Egmont Key, one wonders why Fred chose to move his family to Indian Hill, giving up everything the family knew on Cape Cod. Indian Hill was, and is, an isolated place, accessible only by boat and not near any real centers of civilization. The nearest village, Gulf City, was about three miles to the north near the mouth of the Little Manatee River, and it had a population of only 76 residents in 1895. This was in the days before radio and television, and there were no telephones anywhere nearby.

On the positive side, there was an endless supply of fish to be had at Indian Hill. And Fred did have some employment there. The 1900 census indicates that he was a lighthouse keeper. Fred was paid \$550 per year by the U.S. Government to operate and maintain a lighthouse for the safety of mariners on Tampa Bay<sup>50</sup>. Where was the lighthouse? A 1900 news article indicates that the lighthouse was on Indian Hill, but I am inclined to believe that it was actually located on Beacon Key, a barrier island not far to the south and west of Indian Hill. A 2007 article in the Tampa Tribune says “Walker’s job was to maintain a shipping light on nearby Beacon Key.”<sup>51</sup> I have been unable to find any images of the lighthouse, and no lighthouse can be seen in the two images of the Walker house on Indian Hill that are reproduced here.



A report of the United States Light-House Board dated November 9, 1895, indicates that six “lens-lantern” lights were installed at different locations around Tampa Bay in January, 1895, one of the locations being Indian Hill. I suspect that Indian Hill was identified as the location because it was the only named island in the vicinity at that time and that Beacon Key did not acquire its name until after the light was installed on it. According to Wikipedia, “a lens lantern is a small, self-contained lamp structure which may sometimes be used to serve as a lighthouse. Unlike a regular Fresnel lens, the lantern requires no housing to protect it from the weather; its glass sides would refract and magnify the light in the same fashion as would the lens. Lens lanterns were popular alternatives to lighthouses in the nineteenth century; they required less care, were cheaper to erect, and could be fairly easily placed.”



*The boy in the center of this photograph, dated June 18, 1900, is identified as Fred Walker (my grandfather), grandson of Captain H.M. Walker. The others in the photograph are his father, Fred (born 1863), and his brother, Henry (born 1894). The letter of Constance Walker of February 8, 1926, at the end of this article, seems to indicate that this photograph was taken on “Little Island”, just across the water from Indian Hill.*

Internal Improvement Fund, State of Florida.

Deed No. 15,083

Know all Men by these Presents, That the undersigned, the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of the State of Florida, under the provisions of Section 429 of the Revised Statutes of the State of Florida, for and in consideration of the sum of One Dollar per acre, to them in hand paid by Fred B. Walker of the county of Hillsborough State of Florida, have granted, bargained and sold, and do by these presents grant, bargain, sell and convey unto the said Fred B. Walker and his heirs and assigns, forever, the following described lands, to-wit:

The Island Numbered One of Section Twenty in Township Thirty-two South of Range Eighteen, East, Unsurveyed.

containing an Estimated Area of, Seven and a half acres, and lying and being in the county of Hillsborough, in said State of Florida: TO HAVE AND TO HOLD unto the said Fred B. Walker and his heirs and assigns, forever.

In Testimony Whereof, The said Trustees have hereunto subscribed their names and affixed their seals, and have caused the seal of "The Department of Agriculture of the State of Florida" to be hereunto affixed, at the Capitol, in the City of Tallahassee, on this, the Twenty Eighth day of August A. D., eighteen hundred and ninety - Five.



H. H. Hitchcock [L. S.] Governor.
W. D. Spelman [L. S.] Comptroller.
C. P. Collins [L. S.] Treasurer.
T. B. Lawar [L. S.] Attorney-General.
L. B. Howell [L. S.] Commissioner of Agriculture.



*Little Fred Walker (my grandfather) and Ben Walker (eldest of the children), about 1893, shortly before the family's relocation to Florida*

Two more children were born to Fred and Clara, daughter Rebecca Mirella (known as “Mirella”), born in 1897, and son Albert, born in 1899. According to his own report<sup>52</sup>, Albert was born on Indian Hill. Presumably, Mirella was born on Indian Hill as well. Sadly, Mirella would die of scarlet fever in January, 1912, another devastating tragedy for a family which had, by then, endured much more than a fair share of tragedies.

The young Walker family lived in their modest home on Indian Hill for several years. Clara Walker and the children, unlike the Captain’s wife, did not return each summer to the Cape.<sup>53</sup>



*This is the kitchen of the home built by John Webb at Spanish Point, in Osprey, Florida, in the late nineteenth century, restored and now part of a museum. The kitchen of the Walker house on Indian Hill could have looked something like this. I don't think the fruit would have looked so fresh.*

In early 1900, Clarence B. Moore, a wealthy owner of a Philadelphia paper company who had by that time become a noteworthy archaeologist and expert on Indian mounds, visited Indian Hill. (The two photos of June 18, 1900, may have been taken by him on the day of his visit.) He wrote:

*About 3 miles down Tampa Bay from the mouth of the Little Manatee river is an island known as Indian Hill, probably eight acres in extent, almost covered by an aboriginal deposit of shells, including oyster, clam, conch (Fulgur), cockle (Cardium), Pecten, Strombas gigas, Strombus pguilis, Fasciolaria gigantean, Fasciolaria tulipa. ... The largest of these heaps has a height of 30 feet above the surrounding shell deposit and 36 feet 7 inches above water level. We believe, after personal inspection of the majority of Florida shell heaps and careful inquiry as to the rest, that the shell deposit at Indian Hill exceeds in height any in the State, though considerably greater altitudes for other sites have been given by writers who base their assertions upon estimate. In Fig. 4 we give a photograph showing the great deposit at Indian Hill, extending completely across the background of the picture, with the house of the owner of the island, Mr. F.B. Walker, occupying the westernmost extremity of the heap.<sup>54</sup>*



*A postcard from the 1920s or 1930s of an excursion boat from St. Petersburg to Indian Hill, also known as Cockroach Key, and also, (possibly only to this tour boat operator) La Cucaracha Key.*

## 7. Tragedy at Egmont Key

Back on Egmont Key, Captain Walker was paid well for his services as a ship pilot and had apparently done well for himself as a private captain and ship owner. He also invested in real estate in the Tampa area, including an 80-acre parcel of land which, when the last part of it was finally sold to the City of St. Petersburg 65 years after his death (it is now Lake Vista), was a helpful addition to the retirement accounts of his grandchildren.<sup>55</sup> In the summer of 1900 there was no indication that Captain Walker was anything but happy with his life.

Capt. W. H. Walker, pilot left here yesterday morning for Egmont Key, his home, in a small sail boat, and when off Point Pinellas the boat capsized and Captain Walker drifted about the bay for nine hours. He landed on Hospital Key, opposite Mullet Key, righted his boat, baled her out and sailed across to Mullet Key, borrowed the Quarantine boat and reached home safely.

*An article from the Tampa Tribune, October 4, 1899. Evidently it was not unusual for Captain Walker to sail on his own from Tampa to Egmont Key. On this occasion he would have been better off going by steamer.*



*The Steamer H.B. Plant at the Atlantic Coast Lines Dock in St. Petersburg. It was launched 10/25/1899. Captain and Mrs. Walker traveled on this steamer many times.*



*Mullet Key, with Egmont Key in the background. Shortly after 1900.*



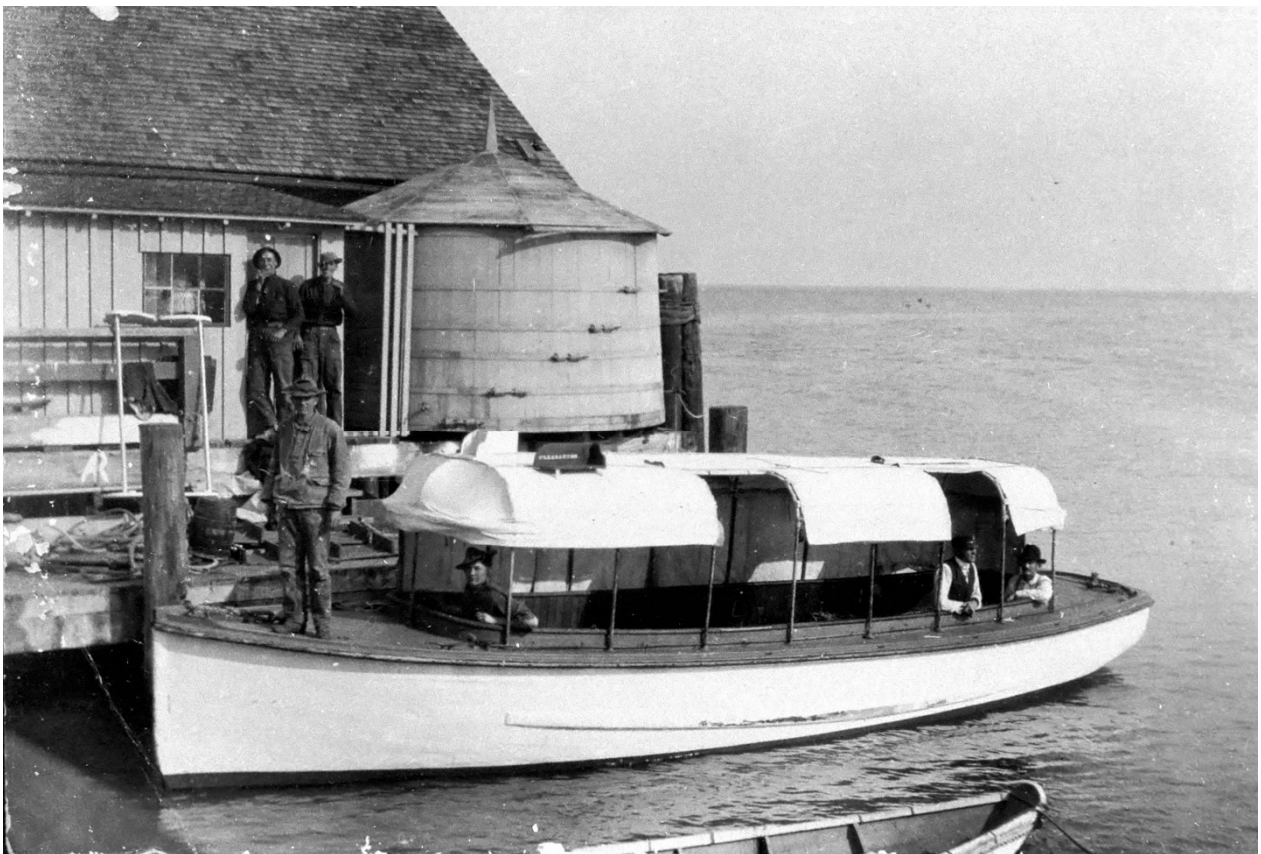
*Port Tampa, shortly after 1900.*



In June, 1900, Captain Walker's wife, Louisa, returned to Massachusetts to visit relatives<sup>56</sup>, just as she had been doing every summer. Fred's wife and children had also returned to Massachusetts, although this was not something that they had done in prior summers and it's possible that they had left for good.<sup>57</sup>

All of these family members were still in Massachusetts on Thursday, July 5, 1900. Late that afternoon, colleagues of Captain Walker at Egmont Key noticed that he had not left his room all day. They broke open the door and found him lying on the floor in a pool of blood. The report of the apparent suicide on the front page of *The Morning Tribune* (of Tampa) on July 7 (reproduced on a following page) describes in graphic detail how he allegedly shot himself through the head in his home on Egmont Key:

*His hand still clutched the revolver with which the fatal shot was fired. The bullet had entered the head under the chin, and had ranged upward to the brain. Death must have been instantaneous.*



*Quartermaster's dock at Egmont Key, circa 1895 – 1905. Courtesy of Manatee County Public Library Historical Digital Collections*

# THE MORNING TRIBUNE.

TRIBUNE IS THE ONLY MORNING PAPER PUBLISHED IN TAMPA AND ITS TELEGRAPHIC SERVICE COVERS THE FIELD THOR

TAMPA, FLORIDA, SATURDAY, JULY 7, 1900.

## PILOT WALKER SLEW HIMSELF

Anxious Friends Found Him Dead  
In His Room.

### HAD NO APPARENT CAUSE

The Popular Captain Shot Himself  
Through the Head With a Pistol.  
His Wife and Son Had Just  
Gone North.

Well endowed with this world's goods, popular with all who knew him, with a loving wife and bright 12-year-old son to make life worth the living, Captain H. M. Walker, one of the best-known pilots on the Gulf coast, shot himself through the head at Egmont Key Thursday afternoon.

There is no known motive for the suicide. Captain Walker derived a handsome revenue from his work as pilot, and was the soul of good nature and affability wherever he went. He had many friends in the city, where he was invariably esteemed. When some of his associates at the Key noted, Thursday afternoon late, that he had not left his room for the entire day, they forced an entrance, and found the captain lying on the floor in a pool of blood.

His hand still clutched the revolver with which the fatal shot was fired. The bullet had entered the head under the chin, and had ranged upward to the brain. Death must have been instantaneous.

The pilot's wife and his bright young son left a few weeks ago for Massachusetts, to spend the summer with relatives. Captain Walker's domestic life was said to be a model. The sad news was telegraphed to Mrs. Walker yesterday, and friends are awaiting directions from her before proceeding with the funeral arrangements.

Every acquaintance of the genial pilot, and he had legions of them, will be shocked to learn of his self-inflicted death. All of his friends are absolutely at a loss to account for his suicide.

The Morning Tribune article states that Captain Walker “derived a handsome revenue” from his work as a pilot” and was “the soul of affability wherever he went”, having “many friends in the city, where he was invariably esteemed”. There was no known motive for the suicide (if that’s what it was), and his friends were “at a loss” to account for it.

Did Captain Walker really commit suicide? A short report in the Tampa Morning Tribune of July 11, 1900, under the caption “Talk About Alleged Suicide of Walker,” says: “Many expressions of surprise are heard at the proceedings over the remains of the late Captain Walker. His friends believe foul play has been practiced. It is understood here that the remains were interred on the Key, without even an inquest, or without first consulting his relatives. If this is true it certainly is to be regretted, and should be investigated.”

THE TAMPA MORNING TRIBUNE, WEDNESDAY, JULY 11, 1900.

## Tea, finest goods on the market for the mo

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
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| <p><b>FRIENDS FEAR FOUL PLAY</b></p> <p>TALK ABOUT ALLEGED SUICIDE OF WALKER.</p> <p>St. Petersburg to Have a New Cigar Factory—Open Air Concerts are Wanted—Other Notes.</p> <p>St. Petersburg, Fla., July 10—(Special).—E. J. Castillo has gone out of the cigar manufacturing business here.</p> <p>Ed Durant will open a new factory as soon as the legal requirements can be complied with.</p> <p>Many expressions of surprise are heard at the proceedings over the remains of the late Captain Walker. His friends believe foul play has been practiced. It is understood here that the remains were interred on the Key, without even an inquest, or without first consulting his relatives. If this is true it certainly is to be regretted, and should be investigated.</p> | <p><b>CHIEFS OF THE SEABOARD</b></p> <p>ST. JOHN AND PARTY IN TOWN YESTERDAY.</p> <p>They are Carrying Out the Reorganization of the System—Other Railroad Notes.</p> <p>A party of prominent officials of the Seaboard Air Line arrived in Tampa yesterday morning at 5 o'clock, on a special train of private cars. The party left Jacksonville Monday afternoon.</p> <p>The members of the party were E. St. John, vice-president and general manager; V. E. McBee, general superintendent; H. W. B. Glover, traffic manager; G. P. Johnson, superintendent of transportation; D. E. Maxwell, superintendent Florida division; O. B. Bidwell, Jr., freight claim agent; W. F. Williams, superintendent of telegraph; John A. Henderson, general counsel; W. W. Mackall, division counsel, and C. E. Flournoy, general manager's secretary, all of the Sea-</p> | <p><b>TO OCALA AND ST. AUGUSTINE.</b></p> <p>Plant System Advertising Two Big Excursions.</p> <p>Division Passenger Agent Lifsey, of the Plant System, is getting out a lot of attractive advertising matter from the Tribune job office, for two big excursions which are to be run the latter part of this month.</p> <p>The first excursion will be from all points in Florida to Ocala, July 24. On that date the people of Ocala will hold "open house," and they invite all Floridians to come and see them. Very low rates are offered.</p> <p>On July 30, the Plant System will run an excursion from all points on its road to St. Augustine. The round-trip rate from Tampa will be \$1.50. This is an exceptionally low rate, and it is certain that many people will go from this city.</p> <p><b>Married Last Night.</b></p> <p>Mr. Joseph Savarese, of Savannah, and Miss Xenia D. Herndon, of this city, were united in marriage last night at 6 o'clock. Mr. Savarese is a prominent young business man of the Georgia city, and his bride is the charming sister of Mrs. J. A. Hansbrough, of</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Note that the article describing Captain Walker’s alleged suicide erroneously mentions a “bright young son”. Captain Walker’s two sons were in their thirties at that time and did not live with Captain and Mrs. Walker. Perhaps there were other inaccuracies.

In describing his early years on Egmont Key, C.W. Bahrt said the following: “The writer put in six happy years and during this time we saw a number of changes, some very unfortunate. Captain Walker boarded out on the last turn for a land beyond.”<sup>58</sup> “To board out” usually means to be discharged from military service on medical grounds. I don’t believe the statement clearly addresses the issue of whether or not Captain Walker took his own life.

Other than the newspaper reports and Captain Bahrt’s description of Captain Walker’s demise, I have found no surviving material relating directly to the death of Captain Walker nor to the investigation that did or did not take place thereafter. The article describing the apparent suicide does not indicate whether or not the door to Captain Walker’s room could have been locked from the outside with a key, and even if that was not the case, it is not difficult to imagine that a murderer could have slipped out of a window to create the appearance that nobody other than Captain Walker had been present at the time of his death.

One could argue that Captain Walker’s death was a murder rather than a suicide. Consider the following:

1) Captain Walker, a man who bought and sold real estate, who bought, commanded, and managed ships, and who dealt with other business people regularly, died intestate (without a will). If Captain Walker planned to take his own life, one might expect him to put his final affairs in proper order, but he did not do that.

2) Only 9 months before his death, Captain Walker’s sailboat capsized in Tampa Bay, and he clung valiantly to the overturned boat for nine hours before washing up on a beach. If Captain Walker had any long-standing reason to end his life, this would have been the perfect opportunity. He could have just let go of the boat and slipped under the waves, and then everyone would have believed his death to have been accidental, sparing his family and friends the extra anguish which a suicide generates. But he did not do that.

3) There is no report of any suicide note.

4) Captain Walker was reported to have been happy, fulfilled, and successful in every way, and the newspaper report indicated that “all of his friends are absolutely at a loss to account for his suicide.”

5) It appears that there was no real investigation into the cause of his death.

6) Several days after his death, it was reported that Captain Walker’s “friends believe foul play was practiced.”

I offer no names as possible murder suspects, but Captain Walker may have kept money or other valuables in his home, and in 1900 there were many people on Egmont Key who could have been in sufficiently desperate financial straits to consider stealing some of it. Perhaps the murder was part of a theft gone wrong and the perpetrator staged the scene to look like a suicide to cover his tracks.

I’m not in complete denial, however. Captain Walker may have taken his own life. If I had to guess, I’d guess that he did, but we will never know with certainty.

Captain Walker's remains, or at least most of them, were buried in a grave on Egmont Key<sup>59</sup>. On the headstone was engraved "H.M. Walker", "Civilian". According to family tradition, Captain Walker's heart was returned to Massachusetts and is buried in the South Chatham cemetery, underneath the headstone for Captain Walker and his wife, Louisa. In more recent years, all of the human remains that were in the cemetery on Egmont Key were removed to a cemetery elsewhere in Florida.



*Captain Walker's grave on Egmont Key, 2/7/1926<sup>60</sup> "H.M. Walker Civilian"*

## 8. Tragedy at Indian Hill

After Captain Walker's death, it appears that Fred's wife and children remained on Cape Cod<sup>61</sup>. It is not clear whether they had initially planned to stay so long there, or even whether they already decided that they weren't going to return, but they were still on the Cape as of October 26.

Fred's mother, Louisa Walker, had returned to St. Petersburg and quickly began taking care of the financial matters of her late husband.

On October 21, the residents of Gulf City<sup>62</sup>, the village nearest Indian Hill, noticed that the light was not burning. On the morning of October 25, becoming concerned that Fred Walker had become ill, a party of Gulf City residents, led by their deputy sheriff, went to the lighthouse to investigate.

When the group reached Indian Hill on October 25, they found Fred's body, according to the article appearing in The Morning Tribune on October 26:

*erect on a chair in his cabin, the head thrown back, a ghastly hole in the forehead. The right hand grasped a shotgun, of which one barrel had been exploded. The position of the gun indicated that the deceased had rested the stock of the gun on the floor, pressed his forehead against the muzzle and pulled the trigger.*<sup>63</sup>

The Morning Tribune article stated that Fred "literally blew out his brains" and that Fred's body was in a bad state of decomposition, "the flesh beginning to fall from the bones". It went on to state:

*Nothing about the house had been disturbed. No one had wandered that way since the tragedy occurred.*

The light at Indian Hill was constructed such that it was able to keep burning for eight days without refueling. That meant that the tragedy could have occurred well before the residents of the village noticed, on October 21, that the light was no longer burning. In fact, the Morning Tribune article states that Fred had been dead "at least ten days" when his body was discovered on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October.

Fred Walker's body was so badly decomposed when it was discovered that it could not be sent back to Massachusetts for burial, so the authorities apparently buried it at Indian Hill. A letter<sup>64</sup> dated October 1, 1908 from St. Petersburg attorney Walter Robertson Howard, who handled the sale of the island for the family, indicates that Fred's remains, presumably only skeletal by then, were to be removed from the island at that time.

# DIED AS HIS FATHER DIED

Fred Walker Committed Suicide At Indian Hill.

FOUND AFTER TEN DAYS

He Was the Keeper of the Light, and Lived Alone—Did the Work With a Shotgun—Family Is in Massachusetts.

Alone, in his little cabin at Indian Hill, near the mouth of the Little Manatee river, Fred Walker, keeper of the Indian Hill light, about ten days ago pressed the muzzle of a shotgun to his forehead, and literally blew out his brains.

The body, still erect in a chair, remained undisturbed until yesterday, when a party of residents of Gulf City, headed by Deputy Sheriff Ben. F. Moody, found it. The body was in a bad state of decomposition, the flesh beginning to fall from the bones.

Walker was in the government service, as the keeper of the lighthouse at that point. He was about 35 years of age. He was the son of Capt. H. B. Walker, the well-known pilot, who committed suicide in much the same manner at Egmont Key several months ago.

Walker's family, consisting of a wife and five children, are now in Massachusetts, where they have been visiting relatives for some time. During their absence the light keeper has lived alone at his little house.

The light at Indian Hill is of a patent that keeps burning eight days without attention. The residents of Gulf City, which is the nearest settlement to the light, noticed that the light had not been burning for four nights. They surmised that the lone keeper had fallen ill, and they went to Indian Hill yesterday morning to investigate.

They found the body of the keeper erect on a chair in his cabin, the head thrown back, a ghastly hole in the forehead. The right hand grasped a shotgun, of which one barrel had been exploded. The position of the gun indicated that the deceased had rested the stock of the gun on the floor, pressed his forehead against the muzzle and pulled the trigger.

The man had been dead at least ten days. Nothing about the house had been disturbed. No one had wandered that way since the tragedy occurred.

Deputy Sheriff Moody came up to the city at once and reported the facts to Sheriff Spencer. The dead man's wife in Massachusetts and his mother, who is at St. Petersburg, will be notified.

Walker leaves no property other than the little cabin and its surroundings at Indian Hill. He had spoke several times of taking his own life.

OUR NOBLE COUNCIL:

# THE MORNING TRIBUNE.

TRIBUNE IS THE ONLY MORNING PAPER PUBLISHED IN TAMPA, AND ITS TELEGRAPHIC SERVICE COVERS THE FIELD THOROUGHLY

TAMPA, FLORIDA, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1900.



*View looking to the northwest from the boat landing in front of the Walkers' house on Indian Hill. "Little Island", apparently, is at the right. 1926 photograph.<sup>65</sup>*



*Indian Hill in 1926 –  
Photo by Constance Walker*

Did Fred Walker commit suicide? Perhaps he did. His friends, however, didn't believe it. They believed he was murdered: "The sheriff said it was suicide. Local folks said it was murder. The gun was never found, and the house was later burned down." – Clarence Harding, as quoted in a September 4, 1970 article in The Tampa Times.

2-A THE TAMPA TIMES, Friday, September 4, 1970

Old men know

# Cockroach Bay lore is hidden



**Palmetto marks the spot**  
Overgrowth hides Indian mound

By SHARON GRABFELDER  
Times Staff Writer

SUN CITY — The lore of Cockroach Bay. Only a few can spin those tales. Just the old-time fishermen who still hang around, poling their gray boats through the waters in the channel and cat-leaping from dock to dock.

They're the only ones who really know the legends of the cockroaches, the Indian mound and the suicide (or was it murder?).

Listen to the old timers — Clarence Harding and Braskie Buzbee. They know.

**BUZBEE:** "THE NAME Cockroach Bay? There were too many cockroaches around, I guess. Naw, legend says somebody came up here and camped out, and the cockroaches ran them off, but it's just always been Cockroach."

Harding: "Nobody seems to know how it got that name. Now the Indian mound over there — it's about 10 acres and 70 feet high — is the only large one left in this area. In the 1930s the WPA dug it away, took out all the skeletons and artifacts and

then put all the shells back just the same way. It's overgrown with bushes now. I don't know how long it's been there."

Buzbee: "I do. That mound was put there during the days of Noah and the Flood. There're no skeletons there. No Indians are buried on that mound. Man didn't put it there. The Good Lord did."

**HARDING:** "ABOUT the turn of the century a man lived in a house on the mound — fellow by the name of Walker, we didn't know his first name. He had about 500 chickens up there, and he tended the range light in the bay for the government."

Buzbee: "Walker was either murdered or killed himself. He was killed with a shotgun. His brains were all blown up on top of the house. And the chickens were stolen."

Harding: "The sheriff said it was suicide. Local folks said it was murder. The gun was never found, and the house was later burned down."

**BUZBEE:** "I USED to live on Paradise Key out yonder. Paradise was the only key where there were no mosquitoes or sand flies to bother you at night."

Harding: "One time — I'd say about 1934 — there was a tidal wave that covered Camp Key and had Paradise under a foot of water. It destroyed a house on Camp Key and two men living there barely escaped. They managed to grab a boat that came floating by. One man had only one leg. All the fishing nets were destroyed and boats were sunk. It was the roughest time we've had down here."

**BUZBEE:** "STRANGELY enough we didn't eat very much fish in those days, but we ate lots of clams and oysters. We used to say it was dangerous to shoot your gun in the morning, 'cause you might hit your neighbor out on the oyster bar eating breakfast."

The old fishermen say "There's no new blood coming into the fishing industry Cockroach Bay, no young people are trying to learn the fishing trade here."

That makes them wonder who'll be around someday to tell the tales.

As in the case of the death of Captain Walker, the death of Fred Walker is a bit of a mystery. We will never know with certainty whether he took his own life or was murdered.

## 9. Life after the Tragedies

The family members who were living in 1900 never told Fred's grandchildren (including my mother) about how Captain Walker and his son died. In fact, in at least one branch of the family<sup>66</sup>, the great-grandchildren were told that Captain Walker was lost at sea, a clearly false story. Any survivors who may have known the whole truth about how Henry and Fred lost their lives are long gone. Likewise, no information about the death of Henry M. Walker, Jr., has been passed down.

It isn't even clear whether or not the five *children* of Fred Walker or the one child of his brother, Henry M. Walker, Jr., were ever told of the suicides (or murder and suicide), or of the fate of Henry M. Walker, Jr. However, it is probably safe to assume that adult members of the local community on the Cape did learn, through other mariners with connections to Florida, how the Walkers lost their lives, and it seems highly likely that Fred's children would have been given this information somehow or another, if not by their own family, then perhaps by schoolmates who had heard it from their own parents. And it's all but impossible to imagine that the truth about Fred's death was not discussed during my grandparents Florida trip in 1925-1926.

For those who did not receive the facts from other sources, the reports in the local paper would not have enlightened them as to the cause of either death, and in the case of Captain Walker, one could have easily inferred that his death was from natural causes:

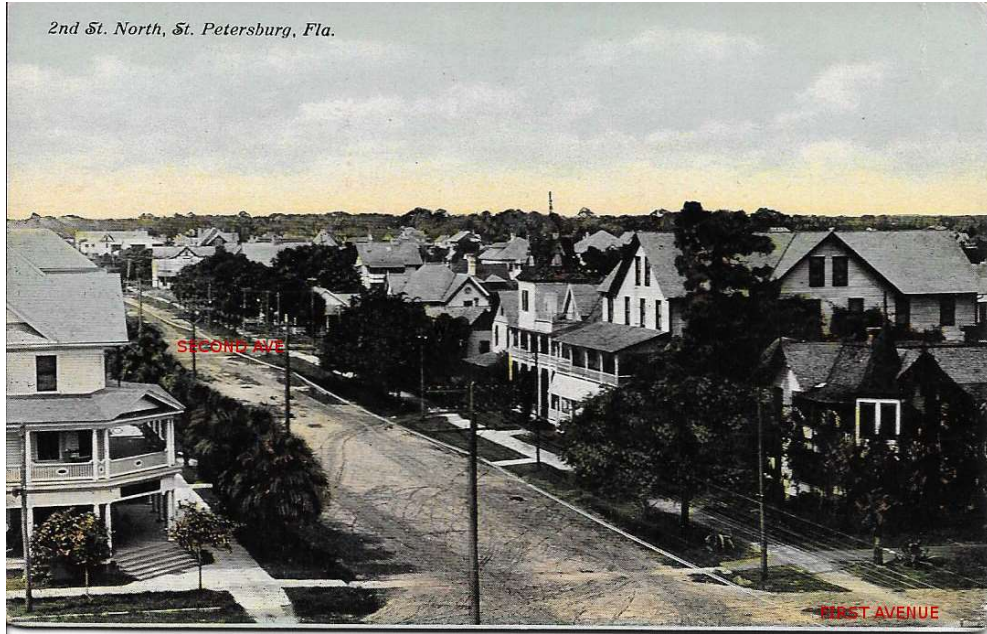
*The sad news came Saturday afternoon by Telegram of the sudden death of Capt. Henry M. Walker at Egmont Key, Fla. His wife, who is summering here, is stricken with grief at the news which came so sudden and unexpected, she having left him in good health a few weeks ago. Capt. Walker was born in Harwich Port, but has made his home here for many years when on the Cape. He has many friends here who feel very much grieved at the sad intelligence. No particulars have come to hand as to the cause of his death.*<sup>67</sup>

*The sad news of the death of Mr. Fred B. Walker on Indian Hill Island, Fla., was a great shock to his relatives and friends here, and following so soon the death of his father, it seems doubly sad. The bereaved widow and children and the mother have the sympathy of the entire community. Only meagre news has come to hand of the circumstances, but rumors are rife of murder, accident and suicide. In either case it is hard for his friends. All are anxiously awaiting particulars.*<sup>68</sup>

The tragedy of the two deaths must have been devastating beyond description for the Walker family. Clara Walker, widowed at a young age just as her mother and grandmother had been, was left to raise five children, ages 1 to 11, on her own. Clara and the children did not return to Florida, choosing instead to try to put their lives back together on Cape Cod<sup>69</sup> where they had the support of Clara's mother and the many members of their extended family.

The greatest loss was suffered by Louisa Walker, who lost her husband and both of her sons in a very short time. How Louisa found the strength to continue on with her life is hard to imagine. However, Louisa Walker, somehow did find a way to go on with her life, and she had apparently grown to love her winters in Florida<sup>70</sup>. After the loss of her husband, and before her





*2<sup>nd</sup> Street North, St. Petersburg, about 1905. The home of Louisa Walker is barely visible – a window of the house is directly above the top of the pole in the center of the image.*



*The Morgan Stanley Tower (formerly Wells Fargo Plaza) now occupies the site of Louisa Walker's house (2015). Photo by Frank Haddleton*

**FOLLOWED HIS FATHER.**

Jacksonville, Fla., Oct. 27.—Fred B. Walker, keeper of the lighthouse on Cockroach mound, near the mouth of the Little Manatee river, committed suicide in a sensational manner. For several nights mariners have noticed the light at the station has been out, and yesterday a party from Tampa was sent out to investigate.

In a little room the body of Walker was found, with the head blown off and a gun by his side. He left a note saying he had employed the same methods used by his father, Captain H. B. Walker, who committed suicide in the same room with the same gun, sitting in the same chair, and presumably at the same hour.

*This article appeared in the Denver Post on 10/28/1900. It is an excellent example of a newspaper getting it wrong, and it is another reminder that in looking into the past, all evidence must be considered carefully. The errors in this article are so numerous that it's impossible to tell which falsehoods were mistakes and which were crafted intentionally to make the story more sensational than it already was.*

### SOUTH CHATHAM.

#### Memorial to Mrs. Louise R. Walker.

Mrs. Louise R. Walker passed away at the home of her sister, Mrs. Edgar E. Ellis, Sunday evening, April 14th, at the age of 74 years, 8 months, after an illness of a year, which she bore with fortitude.

She was the daughter of the late David and Hulda Eldredge of this place. In early life she married Capt. Henry Walker, whose early death left her a widow for several years. She was the mother of two boys, Frederick B. and Henry Walker, now deceased.

She is survived by one sister, Mrs. Edgar E. Ellis of this place, and one brother, Frederick A. Eldredge of Mattapoisett; two daughters-in-law, Mrs. Clara Walker of Brookline, Mrs. Annie Walker of South Harwich, and five grandchildren—Miss Louise Walker of South Harwich, Messrs. Benjamin, Frederick, Henry B. and Albert Walker of Brookline.

Mrs. Walker was a woman of pleasing personality and held in high esteem by her neighbors and friends. She visited many cities, and for a number of years lived in Tampa, Florida, afterwards in St. Petersburg, Fla., where she was the possessor of another home, which she sold during her late illness.

The funeral services were held at her home Wednesday, April 17th, at 1 p. m., Rev. Mr. Noyes of Harwich Port officiating. Singing by Harwich Male Quartette. The flowers were beautiful and of many designs. The pall bearers were the grandsons. Interment in South Chatham cemetery.

Those from out of town at the funeral were Mrs. Clara Walker, Messrs. Benjamin, Frederick B. and Henry Walker, Brookline; Mrs. Annie Walker, Miss Louise Walker, South Harwich; Mrs. Herbert Hulse, New Bedford; Mrs. Robert Robbins, Chatham; Mr. and Mrs. Ford, Mr. Walter Eldredge and Mrs. Herbert Ellis, Harwich Port; Mrs. Bethia Wixon, Dennis Port.

WALKER, in Hyannis, February 22, Clarissa Doane (Nickerson) widow of the late Frederick B. of South Harwich. Funeral services will be held at the South Harwich Methodist Church, Sunday, February 25 at 1:30 p.m. Friends may call at the Doane and Beal Funeral Chapel, Harwichport.

#### Mrs. Clarissa Walker

SOUTH HARWICH, Feb. 23—Mrs. Clarissa Doane (Nickerson) Walker, 89, native and lifelong resident of this village, died yesterday in Cape Cod Hospital. She was the widow of Frederick B. Walker. Her parents were Captain Albert and Rebecca (Nickerson) Nickerson.

Mrs. Walker was chaplain of Harwich American Legion Auxiliary, president of the Community Sewing Circle and also held membership in Harwich Grange, South Harwich Methodist Church, Satucket Rebekah Lodge and the Harwich Visiting Nurse Association.

Surviving are three sons, Frederick B. Walker of Chestnut Hill, Henry M. Walker of Brookline and Albert N. Walker of Newton Highlands; eight grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

*Louisa Walker's obituary (1918) and Clara Walker's funeral notice and obituary (1950)*

WALTER ROBERTSON HOWARD  
ATTORNEY-AT-LAW  
OFFICE WITH AVERY REAL ESTATE CO.  
153 CENTRAL AVE.

ST. PETERSBURG, FLA., 1 October 1908

A. L. Weeks Esq.

Dear Sir,

Herewith I enclose you cashier's  
check for \$910<sup>25</sup> payable to Mr. Walker in  
settlement of the sale of Island.

1908 } Purchase price \$1000.00 1908 } Paid Cont. Cots 9.75  
Oct. 1 }

|                                                                                    |                                                              |                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>200.<br/>150<br/><hr/>350<br/>910.25<br/><hr/>560.25<br/>20<br/><hr/>540.25</p> | <p>910.25<br/>350<br/><hr/>560.25<br/>20<br/><hr/>540.25</p> | <p>" Moody 25.00<br/>" W. R. Howard 50.00<br/>" Printer for ads. 5.00<br/>Check to Mr. Walker 910.25<br/><hr/><u>1000.00</u></p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

\$ 1000.00

Has Moody removed Mr. Walker's remains or has  
he something more to do before the \$25<sup>00</sup> is payable.  
The Bank will hold his money till I hear from you.

Trusting this settlement is satisfactory,

believe me

Very truly yours

Walter Robertson Howard

10. The Return Visit to Tampa Bay

Fred's second son, Fred (my grandfather), was in Florida for several weeks in early 1926 with his wife, Constance. On the fourth of February, 1926, towards the end of their trip, they visited Indian Hill, where Fred had spent several years of his childhood with his parents and siblings, and on two subsequent days they visited Egmont Key, the home of his grandparents, Captain Walker and Louisa Walker.



*Fred Walker (right) and an unidentified associate at St. Petersburg, 1926.*

*Hotel Dennis, where Fred and Constance Walker stayed while in St. Petersburg, February, 1926, not far from the home of the late Louisa Walker.*

HOTEL DENNIS AND GRILL AND PARK CAFETERIA OPPOSITE WILLIAMS PARK AND

**HOTEL DENNIS**

FIREPROOF MODERN

EVERY ROOM WITH PRIVATE TUB AND SHOWER BATH

UNDER THE SAME MANAGEMENT

THE FAMOUS PARK CAFETERIA AND CAFE GRILL

FOUNDED 1914 BY NICHOLAS L. DENNIS

EUROPEAN PLAN RATES ON APPLICATION

WITHIN ONE BLOCK OF TAMPA BAY. ST. PETERSBURG, FLA.



*Constance F. Walker in front of the Soreno Hotel, February, 1926  
The Soreno was demolished in 1992*



*February, 1926. Frederick B. Walker at the entrance to Million Dollar Pier (then under construction), the Vinoy Park Hotel in the background. The Vinoy's grand opening was a few weeks earlier, on 12/31/1925*

# Warranty Deed.

FROM

Milton A. McCoy

TO

H. M. Walker & B. Hall

Dated 6th - May 1884

RECORDED.

Filed in the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court  
of the County of Hillsborough  
State of Florida, on the seventeenth day of  
May A. D. 1884.

and recorded in Book 4 on page 576577

Reexamined 20th day of July 1884

Wm. C. Brown  
Clerk of Circuit Court.

The cover of an 1884 deed of 80 acres of land in St. Petersburg from Milton A. McCoy to Captain Walker and Benjamin Frank Hall. They also purchased 80 acres in Brandon, Florida, in 1886. Frederick Walker, Captain Walker's grandson was on the verge of selling the family's 40 acre share of this property in February, 1926, for \$190,000 (About \$3.2 million in 2022 dollars), but that deal collapsed. The land remained in the family until 1965, when it was sold to the City of St. Petersburg for \$150,000. Lake Vista Park now occupies the property.

This Indenture, Made the 6th day of May  
 in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eighty four (1884) Between  
William A. Mc Coy and Ada S.  
Mc Coy his wife of the County of  
Mobile and State of Alabama of the first part,  
 and Henry M. Walker and Benjamin Frank Hall  
 of Hillsborough County State of Florida of the second part:

Witnesseth, That the said part ies of the first part, for and in consideration of the  
 sum of ( \$100<sup>00</sup> ) One hundred dollars Dollars,  
 to them in hand paid by the said part ies of the second part, the receipt whereof is hereby  
 acknowledged, have granted, bargained, sold, aliened, remised, released, conveyed and confirmed,  
 and by these presents do grant, bargain, sell, alien, remise, release, convey and confirm  
 unto the said part ies of the second part, and their heirs and assigns forever, all  
~~that certain lot, tract or parcel of land~~ lying and being in the County of  
Hillsborough and State of Florida described as follows:—

- 1 to-wit as the South half (S. 1/2)
- 2 of the North East-Quarter (N.E. 1/4)
- 3 of Section Twelve (12)
- 4 in Township No. Thirtytwo (32)
- 5 South of Range No. Sixteen (16)
- 6 East containing Eighty (80)

Part of the 1884 deed to Captain Walker and Benjamin Frank Hall

2050 11B

2152 163

T1-1596

THIS INSTRUMENT made this third day of May, A.D. 1965, between Constance F. Walker, ancillary executrix of the will of Frederick Barzillai Walker, deceased, of the County of Norfolk and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, party of the first part, and the CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA, a municipal corporation, of the County of Pinellas and State of Florida, party of the second part.

WITNESSETH, that the said party of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of one dollar and other valuable consideration to her in hand paid, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, has granted, bargained, sold, and transferred, and by these presents does grant, bargain, sell and transfer unto the said party of the second part and its successors and assigns forever, all that certain parcel of land lying and being in the County of Pinellas, and State of Florida, more particularly described as follows:

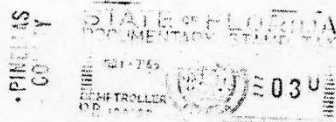
A tract of land known as the Walker Estate bounded on the north side of 62nd Avenue South for a distance of approximately 1320 feet between 12th Street So. on the east and 16th Street So. on the west, being a distance of approximately 1320 feet along each street and between the aforementioned streets for a distance of 1320 feet along the south side of 58th Avenue South, all of the foregoing tract containing forty (40) acres less rights of way, all of the said property as described hereinbefore located in the City of St. Petersburg, Florida, said property being legally described as the SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of NE $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 12, Township 32 South Range 16 East, less rights of way.

TOGETHER with all of the tenements, hereditaments and appurtenances, with every privilege, right, title, interest and estate, dower and right of dower, reversion, remainder and easement thereto belonging or in anywise appertaining:

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the same in fee simple forever.

And the said party of the first part does covenant with the said party of the second part that she is lawfully seized of the said premises, that they are free from all incumbrances and that she has good right and lawful authority to sell the same; and the said party of the first part does hereby warrant the title to said land, and will defend the same against the lawful claims of all persons whomsoever.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the said party of the first part has hereunto set her



2152 - 164

hand and seal the day and year above written.

Signed, Sealed, and Delivered  
in Our Presence:

Constance F. Haddleton  
Russell S. Haddleton

Constance F. Walker  
Constance F. Walker, Executrix

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
COUNTY OF NORFOLK

I HEREBY CERTIFY, That on this third day of May, A.D. 1965, before me, an officer duly authorized in the Commonwealth aforesaid and in the County aforesaid to take acknowledgements, personally appeared Constance F. Walker, to me well known and known to be the person described in and who executed the foregoing conveyance to the CITY OF ST. PETERSEBURG, FLORIDA, a municipal corporation, and she acknowledged the execution thereof to be her free act and deed for the uses and purposes therein mentioned.

WITNESS my signature and official seal at Brookline in the County of Norfolk and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the day and year last aforesaid.

Russell S. Haddleton  
Notary Public  
March 8, 1969  
My Commission Expires

*Page 2 of the 1965 deed. My father, an attorney, coordinated the deal from Massachusetts. My grandmother signed the deed, and my father and mother witnessed her signature. I knew nothing about this until very recently - I was only 2 years old when this was done.*



*Fred Walker at Indian Hill, 2/4/1926*

Constance Walker wrote a letter to her mother-in-law, Clara Walker, widow of the lighthouse keeper, on February 8, 1926. The letter, which is reproduced at the end of this article, describes the visits to Egmont Key and Indian Hill. She writes that at Indian Hill they met a man named Boone who, for the prior five years, had been living in the house in which the Walkers had lived. They were invited into the house, and Fred was very happy to find things “so much as he remembered them”.

*Soon some fishermen came in and we watched them net sheeps head and mullet in front of the house. We ate our lunch with Mr. Boone and Capt. Carpenter on the wharf from the house and then we went over and watched the fishermen prepare theirs by the fishing shack on the small island. They made biscuit and fried fish out doors around a small fire and then made coffee. It was fun to see them. Fred said it was just the way they used to do.*

Mr. Boone told them that many people, including Henry Ford, had visited Indian Hill to see the Indian relics. The Indian burial ground, she writes, “has been dug down quite a little”.



*In this 1926 photograph, Constance Walker is at the stern of the rowboat. She wrote in her photo album: "From beach opposite Indian Hill where Fred and Hen caught big fish".*

At Egmont Key, Fred and Constance visited the house in which Captain and Louisa Walker had lived, which they found "much the same" as it had been when Fred had seen it as a boy. They met Captain Warner, the lighthouse keeper, who remembered Captain Walker and his wife. On a return visit the second day they met Captain Thames, who knew Captain Walker, and Captain Harvey, both Tampa Bay Pilots. Constance writes:

*We found the grave in a lovely white cemetery which had been well kept and there was a nice stone on the grave. Fred & I made a wreath of cedar and placed [it] on it. ... Fred and I had a wonderful dinner with the pilots + then the men had a great time playing golf in front of Grandfather Walker's house where they made a miniature golf course.*

Fred and his wife managed to have a very pleasant visit to the two places where the Walkers, twenty-five years earlier, had suffered two devastating losses of life in rapid succession. The Tampa Bay chapter of the Walkers' life had ended, and the family had survived, moving on to new dreams and aspirations.



*Indian Hill, 1926 and 2015*

- 1) *Looking west towards St. Petersburg from the boat landing*
- 2) *Looking at the house site from the water*



*Staff at Egmont Key playing miniature golf with Frederick Walker (at left), 2/7/1926<sup>73</sup> One of these men was Captain Thames and one was Captain Harvey, both Tampa Bay Pilots.*

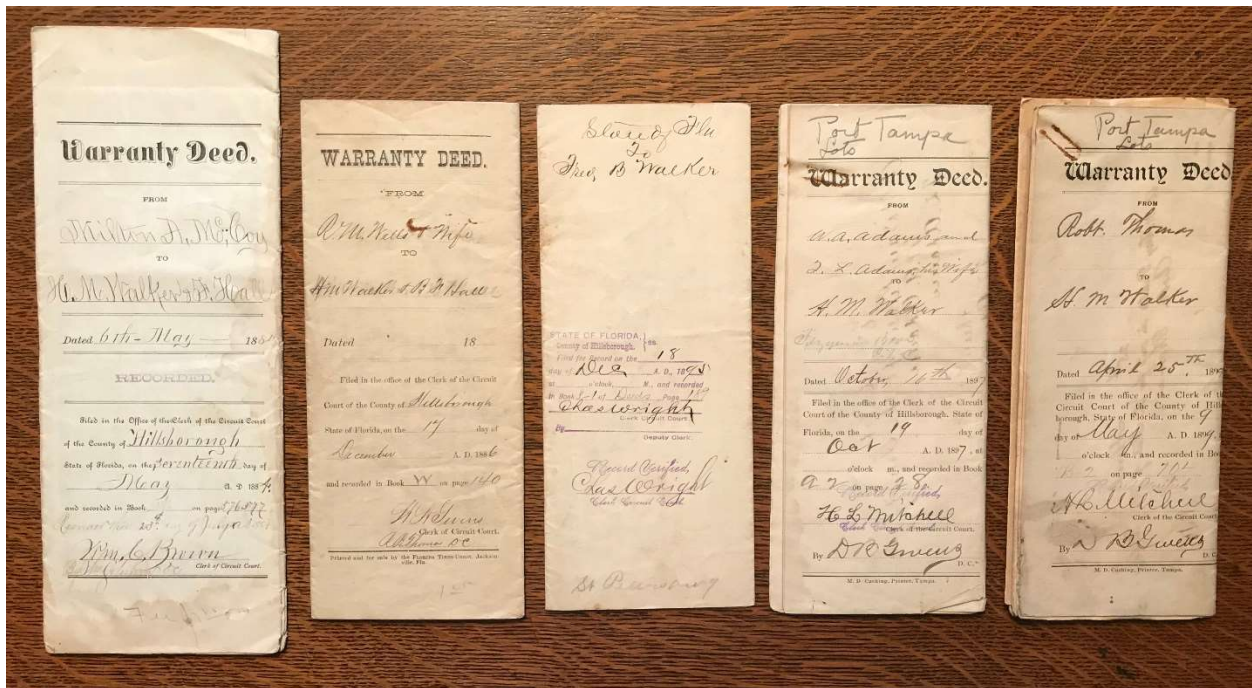


*Carl W. Bahrt and his wife at their Tampa home in 1926 (113 Hyde Park Place, no longer standing). Carl (a/k/a "Willie") worked on Egmont Key with the Tampa Bay Pilots, including Captain Walker, as a boy in the 1890s, and later served as a Tampa Bay Pilot for many years. My grandfather remained in touch with him and, evidently, visited him during their Florida trip.*



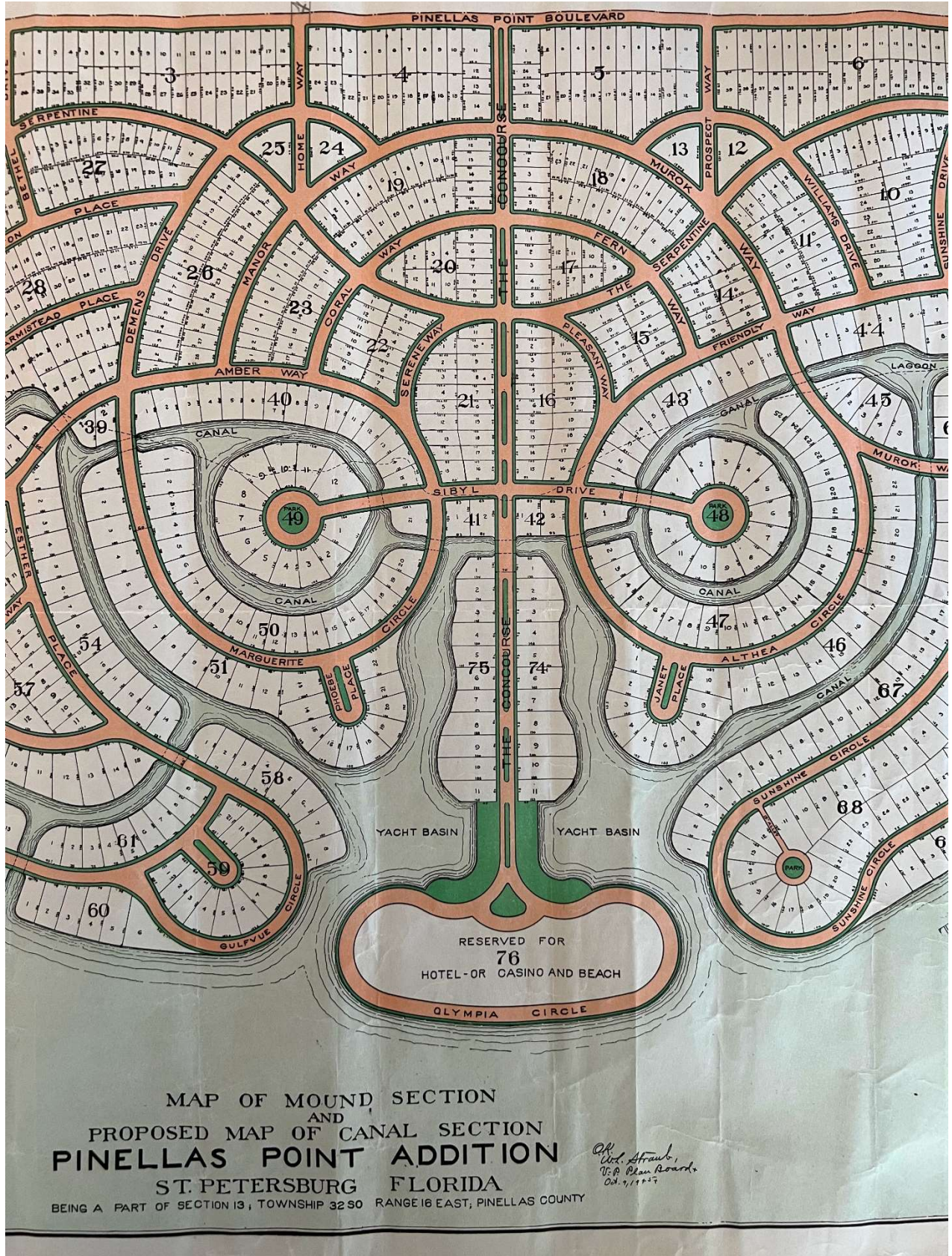
*My grandparents went shopping for building lots in 1926. One of the lots they were considering was in the eastern section of Lakewood Estates. (The names of most of the streets were subsequently changed.)*

In 1884, Captain Walker and an investment partner had purchased 80 acres of land in Hillsborough County (now Pinellas County) south of what would soon become St. Petersburg. While visiting in 1926, my grandfather was in the process of trying to sell the family's half interest in that land, and in 1926 he was on the verge of getting a check to bind a sales contract. The purchase price would have been \$190,000, or about \$3.2 million in 2022 dollars. My grandmother, in her letter to her mother-in-law back in Massachusetts, wrote "It seems too good to be true." It was too good to be true. The deal fell through, and later in 1926 the Florida real estate market crashed. The family did not sell the land until 39 years later, when the City of St. Petersburg purchased it for \$150,000, less than the sum expected in 1926.



*Deeds to some of the real estate purchased by Captain Walker in the 1800s*

Before the land sale deal fell apart, however, my grandparents went shopping for a lot to purchase in St. Petersburg. They were going to use some of the sales proceeds from the land sale to build a winter vacation home. I have some of the subdivision plans they were given by the agents they met with.



11. Walker Haunts in the Present Day

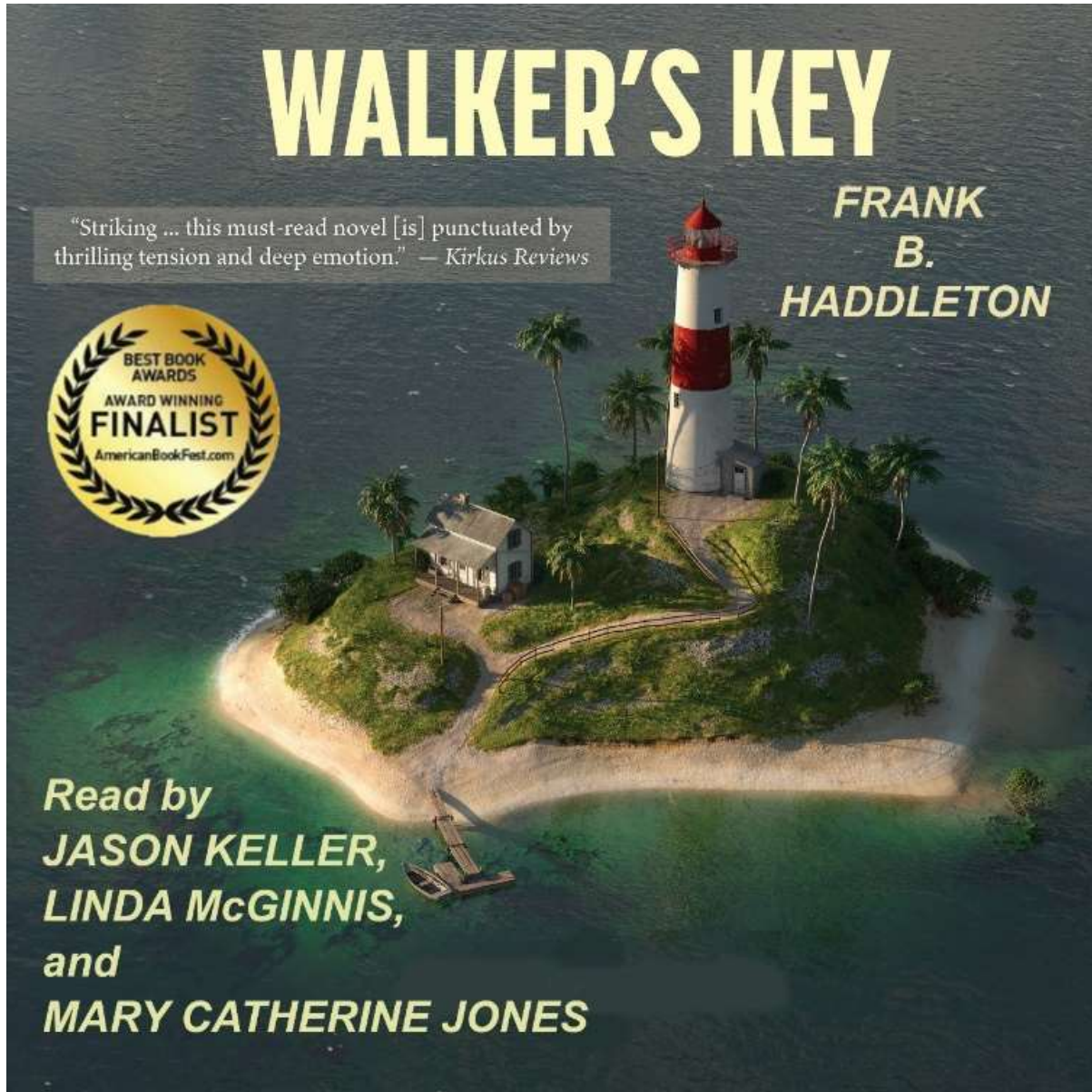
Egmont Key is now a state park and it is on the National Register of Historic Places. It is also a national wildlife refuge, providing an essential habitat for nesting sea turtles, gopher tortoises, birds, and other wildlife. On the southern part of the island, nearly 100 acres have been set aside as a bird sanctuary. The lighthouse still operates and the Tampa Bay pilots still have a base of operations and several structures on the island.

In 2014, Hillsborough County purchased Indian Hill from the Symmes family for \$100,000, ten thousand times the amount Fred Walker paid the State of Florida for it in 1895. The island is now part of the 600-acre Cockroach Bay Preserve State Park, which, together with the 5,000 acres of the Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve which surrounds the islands, offers unlimited opportunities for fishing and exploration by canoe or kayak.<sup>74</sup> Like Egmont Key, Indian Hill is on the National Register of Historic Places, in this case for its significance as a site of Native American history and artifacts.

The largest piece of Tampa Bay area real estate owned by Captain Walker, like Egmont Key and Indian Hill, is now also a park, Lake Vista Park in St. Petersburg.

12. Walker's Key – The Novel

In an attempt to fill in some of the many holes in this story and bring it to life, I wrote the novel, Walker's Key. Walker's Key has gained very favorable reviews (a "must-read novel", according to Kirkus Reviews) and is available at Tombolo Books in St. Petersburg, Phoenix Books in Burlington, and all the usual places one finds books, including your favorite bookseller. The audiobook version was released in November, 2022, and is available wherever one finds audiobooks.



Hotel Dennis  
St Petersburg Florida

Dear Mother Walker:-

Last Thursday we went to Indian Hill and we surely had a glorious day - It was beautiful - We anchored from our boat about a mile and a half from the shore for it was so shallow we couldn't get in any nearer - Just as soon as we came near the little island with our skiff Fred had his shoes and stockings off and waded up to the island - Then, there was a fish shanty in a clump of palmetoes and a man by the name of Mr. Boone - He told us he had lived on Indian Hill for five years in your house and that we were

welcome to go through the house just as if it were our own - Fred was very happy to find things so much as he remembered them - It surely is a beauty spot there and we took a good many pictures and mailed them to you with some lemons that Fred picked from the tree his father planted.

We walked all over the flats but could find no panama shells as there have been none there for several years - Soon some fishermen came in and we watched them net sheeps head and mullet in front of the house - We ate our lunch with Mr Boone and Capt. Carpenter on the wharf from the house and then we went over and watched the fishermen prepare theirs by the fishing shack on the small island -

They made biscuit and fried fish  
out doors around a small fire and  
then made coffee. It was fun to  
see them - Fred said it was just  
the way they used to do -

Mr Boone told us that a great  
many people had been to visit  
Indian Hill who were interested in the  
Indian relics among them Henry  
Ford. The burial ground has been  
dug down quite a little - Mr Boone  
gave us some souvenirs of the place  
also a towel rack for you which  
he thought you must have owned -  
also a lamp - I hope we are able  
to get home with all our things -

The next day we went to  
Edmont Key with Louise & her  
mother - We had a wonderful day  
on the beaches picking up shells  
and wading in the Gulf -

No one was on the island ~~so~~ except  
the cook at the pilot station so we  
didn't find grandfather Walker's grave.  
We found the house much the same.  
Later we met Capt Warner the light  
house keeper who remembered the Walker  
but he couldn't help us much about  
the grave.

Sunday we went back to Edmund  
Key and found Capt Thomas who  
knew grandfather Walker and Capt  
Harvey - We found the grave in  
a lovely white fenced cemetery  
which had been well kept and  
there was a nice stone on the grave.  
Fred + I made a wreath of cedar  
+ placed on it - We also took a  
great many pictures which we  
will send you -

Fred asked I had a wonderful  
dinner with the pilots + then the men

had a great time playing golf<sup>3</sup>  
in front of Grandfather Walker's house  
where they made a miniature golf  
course -

From the Coconut tree that  
grandfather Walker planted we took  
some small coconuts for the  
boys so they will have a souvenir -

Louise and her mother are very  
much pleased with the land - They  
have hired an apartment here and  
expect to stay a while - To-morrow  
Fred expects a binder check for  
half interest in the eighty acres from  
a reliable firm - He is selling  
half for four thousand seven  
hundred and fifty dollars an  
acre - It seems too good to be true -  
We have been very busy here  
and we hope to come here again

in the future and stay at least  
two whole weeks and play -

I should never like to live here  
for I much prefer the north - However  
we've had a good many new  
experiences this winter -

Soon I hope we will be coming  
home - My boys I know have grown  
a great deal and it will be  
wonderful to see them again -

What awful weather you have  
been having -

With a great deal of love  
Constance + Fred -

February 8 - 1926



*Frank B. Haddleton at Fort DeSoto State Park, January 2014  
Photo by Brian Jaffarian*

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<sup>1</sup> Photograph by my grandmother, Constance F. Walker.

<sup>2</sup> It has been estimated that in the nineteenth century the sea supported about two-thirds of local families, through fishing, carrying cargo, or supplying the ships. Maloney, Joan M., & DeChristopher, Carole (2013). *Harwich Through Time*. Fonthill Media, LLC.

<sup>3</sup> The name Eldridge is spelled sometimes with an “i” in the middle and sometimes with an “e” in the middle. Louisa’s father, David, signed his name “Eldredge”, but on his gravestone his name is spelled “Eldridge”.

<sup>4</sup> His death record indicates that he was a mariner, and his headstone, in the South Chatham Cemetery, calls him “Capt. David Eldridge”. A photograph of the headstone is reproduced after the body of the article.

<sup>5</sup> Barzillai was lost at sea on June 20, 1831 in Indonesia, on one of the small sail boats associated with the schooner *Gleaner Packet*. It appears to me that this was during a whaling expedition. See *New-Hampshire Gazette*, October 3, 1831, page 3.

<sup>6</sup> The house was built during the 1760’s on Nantucket and shipped across Nantucket Sound to Chatham after the decline of the whaling industry and after the Revolutionary War, a period that devastated Nantucket’s economy for some surprising reasons, including the fact that Nantucket traded largely with England, not the colonies, and the fact that Nantucket, populated largely by Quakers, remained neutral during the American Revolution (and declared neutrality again in the war of 1812 – those silly Quakers). David was a master mariner. He signed his name “Eldredge”, which is the more common spelling of the name today. Tragically, Huldah died in 1853, at the age of 36, days after the death of her infant son, George.

<sup>7</sup> Website visited on 4/2/2017: <http://www.antiquechathamcottage.com/>

<sup>8</sup> At that time the home was owned and occupied by Louisa’s sister and brother-in-law, Caroline and Edgar Ellis.

- <sup>9</sup> Tampa Bay in 1900. Copied from Moore, Clarence B. (1900) *Certain Antiquities of the Florida West-Coast*. Reprint from the Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, Volume XI. Philadelphia: P.C. Stockhausen.
- <sup>10</sup> The Tampa of 1879; What it Offered to its Visitors in Commerce and Business. (1915, December 15). *Tampa Daily Times*.
- <sup>11</sup> There is at least one marine advertisement in the Times-Picayune indicating that Captain James McKay was in charge of the *Valley City* on its run from New Orleans.
- <sup>12</sup> See article about a trip on the *Valley City* published 12/21/1879 in the Courier-Journal. Like Captain Walker, Captain Jackson worked for the Miller & Henderson Company.
- <sup>13</sup> This is from an article found online about the William Parker Jackson House in Tampa.
- <sup>14</sup> This according to a plaque at the Tampa Bay History Center, 2017.
- <sup>15</sup> USS *Valley City*. (n.d.). Retrieved June 15, 2014, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS\\_Valley\\_City](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Valley_City)
- <sup>16</sup> *Tampa Daily Times*, supra.
- <sup>17</sup> USS *Valley City*, Wikipedia, supra. This writer also read about the loss of the *Valley City* “while carrying a load of oranges”, in a book on Florida shipwrecks, the identification of which is not presently at hand. The fact of the safe evacuation of the passengers is mentioned in an online article by the Association of Underwater Explorers: AUE identifies the *VALLEY CITY* (Formerly the USS *VALLEY CITY*), supra.
- <sup>18</sup> AUE identifies the *VALLEY CITY* (Formerly the USS *VALLEY CITY*), supra.
- <sup>19</sup> USS *Valley City*, Wikipedia, supra
- <sup>20</sup> AUE identifies the *VALLEY CITY* (Formerly the USS *VALLEY CITY*). (n.d.). Retrieved in 2012 from <http://uwex.us/AUEfall09.htm>
- <sup>21</sup> This other man appears to be a contemporary of Captain Walker. Not knowing when or where the photo was taken, it is impossible to say who this individual is. Possibilities may include the chief engineer of the *Valley City*, J. R. Davis, and its purser, John R. Swingley.
- <sup>22</sup> An article dated October 18, 1890 in the Saturday Morning Citizen (Beverly, MA), states: “Mr. Henry M. Walker of South Chatham, who purchased the schooner Wateska three years ago, was in town Tuesday.”
- <sup>23</sup> *Merchant Vessels of the United States* (1888). U.S. Coast Guard. p. 254 (viewed on the internet July 16, 2014)
- <sup>24</sup> Forest and Stream, March 28, 1889, p. 195 (viewed on the internet on July 13, 2014)
- <sup>25</sup> See articles under “South Chatham” and “South Harwich” in The Harwich Independent issues of 11/20/1888, 6/4/1889, 6/11/1889, and 1/13/1891.
- <sup>26</sup> 6/18/1889.
- <sup>27</sup> 5/20/1890.
- <sup>28</sup> 8/9/1890.
- <sup>29</sup> 10/14/1890.
- <sup>30</sup> Saturday Morning Citizen (Beverly, MA), November 8, 1890, page 2.
- <sup>31</sup> The Harwich Independent, 1/13/1891 and 1/20/1891.
- <sup>32</sup> The Barnstable Patriot, 11/29/1892.
- <sup>33</sup> Photograph taken in 1926 by Constance Walker or Fred Walker, now in this writer’s possession.
- <sup>34</sup> It’s a wonderful publication if you can find a copy, but I’m not sure how easy that is to do. I wrote to the Tampa Bay Pilot’s Association and they very graciously sent me a copy of the book after I told them I was researching the story of my great-great-grandfather, one of their pilots.
- <sup>35</sup> Cagnet, Carrie (2012) *Dedication to Service: The History of Piloting on Tampa Bay Through Three Centuries*. Tampa, FL: Tampa Bay Pilots Association. At page 17.
- <sup>36</sup> For a 1926 photo of C.W. Bahrt, see ahead at the end of Chapter 18. Carl (a/k/a “Willie”) remained in contact with Louisa Walker after H.M. Walker’s death, and then remained in contact with my grandfather, Fred, after Louisa’s death.
- <sup>37</sup> Cagnet, Carrie, supra, at pages 66-67.
- <sup>38</sup> The Harwich Independent, 1/30/1894.
- <sup>39</sup> The Harwich Independent, 12/7/1897, 6/26/1900.
- <sup>40</sup> Cagnet, Carrie, supra, at pages 107-108.
- <sup>41</sup> Cagnet, Carrie, supra.
- <sup>42</sup> Advertisement retrieved from the internet. This ad preceded H.B. Plant’s death in June, 1899.
- <sup>43</sup> Clarissa Nickerson was apparently given her middle name in memory of Zemira Doane, the first husband of her grandmother, Jerusha Nickerson. This means that both she and her husband, Fred, had middle names that were in honor of family members lost at sea.

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<sup>44</sup> Newspaper article mailed to Fred Walker in April, 1936, from Carl W. Bahrt, of Tampa Florida entitled *Bones From Mounds Near Here Indicate Massacre of Kids*. Newspaper and date of publication not indicated. Carl W. Bahrt (“Willie”) had been a cabin boy for Captain Walker, according to the notation by Constance Walker on a photograph of Carl and his wife. Actually, he worked for all of the pilots on Egmont Key as a child, and then from 1907 to 1937 he was himself a pilot.

<sup>45</sup> Hammett, Yvette C. (2014, April 10). *Hillsborough adds Island Gem in Land Buy*. The Tampa Tribune. Retrieved 6/15/14 from <http://tbo.com/news/breaking-news/hillsborough-county-buys-big-cockroach-mound-20140410/>

<sup>46</sup> Report on the Shell Heaps of Tampa Bay, Florida, by S.T. Walker of Clearwater.

<sup>47</sup> Copied from Moore, Clarence B. (1900) *Certain Antiquities of the Florida West-Coast*. Reprint from the Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, Volume XI. Philadelphia: P.C. Stockhausen.

<sup>48</sup> One of their recent papers: Hidden in Plain Sight: Digital Documentation of Cockroach Key (8HI2), a First Millennium Native American Mound Complex on the Western Coast of Florida, USA. <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/sdh/article/view/33536>

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<sup>49</sup> Hammett, supra.

<sup>50</sup> Hurley, Neil E. (1990) *Keepers of Florida Lighthouses 1820 – 1939*, Third Edition. Historic Lighthouse Publishers. Also see the Tampa Tribune article, reproduced later, describing Fred’s alleged suicide.

<sup>51</sup> Helgeson, Baird (2007, September 16). Brush Shrouds Burial Mounds. The Tampa Tribune. Retrieved 2/6/17 from <http://www.tbo.com/ap/offbeat/brush-shrouds-burial-mounds-187277>

<sup>52</sup> As indicated on his Masonic membership card, found on Ancestry.com.

<sup>53</sup> From the Harwich Independent of 6/26/1900: “We are glad to see Mrs. Fred Walker of Florida, with her five children, at her mother’s Mrs. Rebecca Nickerson’s, it having been several years since she visited here.”

<sup>54</sup> Moore, Clarence B. (1900) *Certain Antiquities of the Florida West-Coast*. Reprint from the Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, Volume XI. Philadelphia: P.C. Stockhausen.

<sup>55</sup> The letter from Constance Walker, reproduced at the end of the article, mentions that this property was about to be sold in 1926 for a great deal of money. “It seems too good to be true”, she wrote. She was right – it was too good to be true. That deal fell apart. I believe (but haven’t fully confirmed) that half of the 80-acre parcel was sold in the 1950s. The remaining 40 acres were not sold until 1965 after nearly being lost to the taxing authorities.

<sup>56</sup> The Morning Tribune article reporting this fact indicates that Captain Walker had a 12-year old son who had returned to Massachusetts with the captain’s wife. This detail is an error, since H.M. Walker and Louisa Walker had only the two sons reported earlier, Fred and Henry. It is possible that their grandson, Ben Walker, who was then nearly 12 years old, had been a visitor at Egmont Key, and that this was miscommunicated to the reporter.

<sup>57</sup> The Harwich Independent, 6/26/1900.

<sup>58</sup> Cagnet, Carrie (2012) *Dedication to Service: The History of Piloting on Tampa Bay Through Three Centuries*. Tampa, FL: Tampa Bay Pilots Association. At page 67.

<sup>59</sup> *Pilot Walker Slew Himself*. The Morning Tribune (Tampa), 7/8/1900, p.1.

<sup>60</sup> Photograph by Constance Walker or Fred Walker, now in the possession of this writer.

<sup>61</sup> It seems highly unlikely that in 1900 the Walker family would have all traveled to Florida after Captain Walker’s death only to turn around and return to Cape Cod. The Morning Tribune article of October 26 states that as of October 26 they had been in Massachusetts visiting relatives “for some time”.

<sup>62</sup> According to internet sources, Gulf City, a village of 76 residents in 1895, was abandoned in the 1920s, is now not reachable without a boat, it’s only bridge across the Little Manatee River no longer in existence, and is a ghost town currently owned by Hillsborough County. See Wikipedia and also see <http://www.ghosttowns.com/states/fl/gulfcity.html>, accessed 7/25/14. Having visited Gulf City, I’m not so sure.

<sup>63</sup> *Died as his Father Died*. The Morning Tribune (Tampa), 10/26/1900, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Now in my possession.

<sup>65</sup> Photograph by Constance Walker or Fred Walker, now in the possession of this writer.

<sup>66</sup> The grandchildren of Henry M. Walker, one of the sons of Fred Walker, were told that Captain Walker had been lost at sea. This is according to a statement made by one of them to Frank Haddleton in November, 2016. This could be a true statement but only in a very philosophical and intentionally misleading sort of way.

<sup>67</sup> The Harwich Independent, 7/10/1900.

<sup>68</sup> The Harwich Independent, 11/7/1900.

<sup>69</sup> Louisa Walker, Captain Walker's widow, is listed in the 1910 census as a St. Petersburg Resident, and in 1914 she made the trip to Brookline, Massachusetts, to attend the wedding of her eldest grandson, Ben Walker. See article in the Boston Herald of 11/22/1914, page 5.

<sup>70</sup> She was a very smart lady, in my opinion, and was a snowbird before the word was ever applied to humans, as was Captain Walker. I am striving to follow them in their snowbird footprints.

<sup>71</sup> Affidavit dated September 26, 1908, Hillsborough County Deeds Book 90, page 551.

<sup>72</sup> Helgeson, *supra*.

<sup>73</sup> Photograph by Constance Walker or Fred Walker, now in the possession of this writer.

<sup>74</sup> Hammett, *supra*.