

Rufus Beaujean was a hardworking, optimistic, skilled, honest, reliable family man, a pioneer who cleared the brush, built houses, built the railway, kept all in repair, successfully planted pineapples, unsuccessfully planted temperate-zoned vegetables, successfully built a Community Chapel, and sailed hundreds of hours up and down a bridgeless Indian River lagoon, although he mainly sailed the two or so miles east-west and back to Crane Creek and to Tillman. On occasion sailboats capsized. More than once contrary winds prevented crossing.

THE DIARIES OF RUFUS W. BEAUJEAN 1888-1895

The Diaries consist of six pocket size, 3 X 5, calendar or time keeping booklets that manufacturers or large merchants or railroads might give away. They are in reasonable good condition. They are in pencil, clearly written, a direct, factual account of daily life in the tiny settlement of Melbourne Beach. Beaujean seems to have known every one on the few dozen people living in South Brevard at this time. Many have lived on in story and in family: Charlie Smith, E.C. Branch, Cyrus Graves, Alfred Wilcox, Henry Whiting, the Cumings family, the Goode's, Joe Hopkins, Sue Hopkins, S.F. Gibbs, John Henry, S.K. King, C.V. Gillis, Eliza Lee, C.J. Hector, the Conklin's, Jacob Fox, Garrett Ryckman, George Gleason, A.A, Stewart-- and of course Adelaide, Claude, and Don Beaujean.

Within days of stepping off the Indian River Steamer *Rockledge* in Melbourne, January 7th, 1888, 45 year old Rufus W. Beaujean, sailed a small vessel east-southeastward across the two mile wide lagoon to hike the rolling, up-and-down trail that was to become Melbourne Beach's Ocean Avenue. The trail, including, time-consuming, tiring "dips", crossed the peninsula for nearly a mile, straight east-west. It had become known as "Graves Trail", after its owner, Major Cyrus E. Graves. The path was exactly halfway between the shallow Indian River cove created by Fish Point and Crab Point. It was the shortest distance across the peninsula for many miles in either direction. Rufus Beaujean had his first Surf Bathe. Afterward he made an enthusiastic report to brother-in-law Alfred Wilcox. These two were to become the first builders along Cyrus Graves' path to the beach.

The second task Rufus Beaujean faced in his new home was helping storeowner E.C. Branch lay out the corpse of Edwin Cumings. Cumings' time in Florida was short. He succumbed to "hectic fever", or tuberculosis, leaving wife Hannah and daughter bereft, but not totally without means. The Diary entry January 25 notes serving as pallbearer at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, the only church in town, just south of Crane Creek. The entry concludes complaining about the "hard work" involved in carrying the coffin 1/2 mile through the sand to become the first grave in the present Melbourne cemetery. Later at the family's request Beaujean would carve a wooden marker and place it.

Rufus Beaujean came to Melbourne at the urging of his brother-in-law, Alfred Wilcox. Wilcox had made a cash-less deal with Major Graves to develop a small part of the several hundred acres Graves bought beginning in 1883 at \$1.25 an acre. This is what became known as Ocean Avenue. Wilcox had interested eight Buffalo, N.Y. area businessmen into forming a partnership. The partnership proves too inflexible. A corporate form would come 20 years later.

Rufus Beaujean was a carpenter, a boat builder, a photographer, and an all-round man of many trades. He came from Mayville, Chautauqua County, Western New York. His roots go deep there, and one still finds family in the area.

These men knew boats. "Capt" Wilcox had owned and operated a number of popular excursion boats on Lake Chautauqua in the summer, as well as trade boats as winter allowed. He apparently dreamed of bringing this business to the brackish mid-reaches of the Indian River, unaware of the fouling effects of warmer, unfresh water on boat bottoms. He may have envisioned a languid excursion boat business. Here in this salubrious climate, free of miasmatic vapors, a community featuring both the beautiful Indian River and a shell-strewn Atlantic beach with healthy Surf Bathing, fresh salt air, and good sulphur water! A place for young lovers! Where the old can become young again, where gentle Atlantic breezes softly sway palm tree branches, where the hum and buzz of perfect afternoons never cease.

Rufus Beaujean's six day virgin journey to Melbourne via railroad began in Jamestown, N.Y., and continued on to Cincinnati, Chattanooga, Atlanta, Jacksonville, Orange Park, Sanford, and finally, Titusville, the terminus for the Jacksonville, Tampa, and Key West Railroad. Here he boarded the steamboat *Rockledge* for the climactic relief that came at journey's end. He stayed at the unfinished Carleton Hotel, and indeed worked on it, and then began searching for a suitable dwelling for wife Adelaide and sons Claude and Don, ages eight and six. Alfred Wilcox likewise brought his young family to Melbourne. Another Union veteran, Henry Whiting from Indiana, was interested in the a-borning beach community, and sent for his family. Cyrus E. Graves remained a bachelor all his life. These four, Graves, Wilcox, Beaujean, and Whiting, made significant contributions to our nascent community. Each is named on town plat maps

It is interesting to note that decorated officer Graves (for wounds and bravery), also led the others in age and in battle experience. However, it is these three enlisted men of the Grand Army of the Republic who actually moved to Melbourne Beach and struggled to make it "a paying proposition." However, Wilcox and Whiting has the means to escape the worst of the summer heat and insects. The Beaujean family could not. For 51 years, from 1888 until his death in 1939 at the grand old age of 94, Rufus Beaujean lived in and worked for the betterment of this settlement. He leads the list of our founding fathers.

On May 16, 1888, Beaujean, Graves, and newly arrived construction engineer/builder from Jamestown, N.Y., S.R. Smith “sounded” the precise location where today’s “wharf” stretches 450 ft. into the Indian River. When Rufus returned in December from a season of photographing tintypes of tourists at Lake Chautauqua, he found a well built dock. By February 7th 1889, hard by the wharf’s south side, with brother-in-law Wilcox’s help, Rufus completed the 15X32 ft. “shanty” that was to be his family’s home for the next 20 years. Town history efforts replicated the original structure in 1991. It sits further back in the park today.

These diaries provide insight into the value of the few black settlers living south of Crane Creek. The names of Wright, Brothers, Lipscomb, and especially Balaam Allen come up. Allen’s larger vessel was borrowed to haul the Beaujean family’s household goods, February 12, 1889, preceding completion of Hannah and Grace Cumings Myrtle Cottage by several months.

(Incidentally, “Cumings” is not a misspelling. The family spelled it that way.)

In the next dozen years Rufus kept a detailed record of every structure he built on Ocean Avenue—which was just about all of them. These include much of the Cumings’s Myrtle Cottage, Jacob Fox’s house in the Park during January-March 1890 (which became known as the Ryckman House), Wilcox’s house, 522 Ocean Avenue, (today Djon’s Steak and Lobster Restaurant, and a portion of Magnolia Cottage, 508 Ocean Ave, just west of our present post office, originally owned by Ferren Glenn, later bought and enlarged by Miss Eliza Lee.

Heat and mosquitoes made construction of the Company- built Bathhouse at the Atlantic Ocean beach a grueling experience. In addition to the actual construction during the hottest months of 1889, Beaujean and hired laborers had to grub, cut, and wrangle up a substantial clearing of deep-rooted saw palmetto. Tough as these men were, conditions drove several to quit. But finally the needed facility was completed.

For a time, the strenuous effort seemed to pay off. More visitors were attracted to enjoy a “surf bath” Also shell hunting, or simply enjoying the salty atmosphere. Some camped on the beach.

Others rented at Myrtle Cottage or perhaps at one of the other houses. Optimism prevailed. February 15, 1890 is described as a “Red Letter Day: Forty visitors “from Melbourne came over to surf bathe and to see the place.” They could have arrived in the *Maude F.*, the *Arrow*, the *Annie H.*, *Capt. Watson*, or the little steamer *Romania* or Nesbet’s “little steamer”. Other vessels mentioned during these years are Canova’s naphtha-powered vessel, the trade boat *Sparkle*, the steamer *White*, the workboat *Kathleen* (which towed the pilings for the wharf), and the famous 136 ft. side-wheeler *Rockledge* delivering steel rails or the generic “Frost Line”, which delivered lumber and supplies. Larger steamboats did not make regular stops at Melbourne Beach, though the Queen of Indian River

steamers, the two stacker, three deck, *St Lucie* on one occasion deigned to grace our waters by disembarking the Cumings ladies after their northern sojourn. That was an occasion to remember. But the only remembrance recorded anywhere is in Rufus Beaujean's diary entry October 26, 1889.

From its beginning, Melbourne Beach was never prosperous. Within a few years matters turned even worse. The Partnership foundered. As official overseer Beaujean conscientiously made quarterly reports to the Company Headquarters in Buffalo, N.Y. He met every visitor coming to the beach.

His "shanty", couldn't be missed. One of the Partners, Mr. Ruhl, traveled south for an inspection, staying in his host's crowded home several days. Apparently unimpressed, the Overseer's salary did not increase, and as his son, Don Beaujean told me in a 1966 interview, the family continued to barely "eke out a living." The most imaginative income-generating venture is recorded on January 21, 1895 when he and his boys traded nine ducks they had managed to shotgun, for 17 yards of flannel cloth to make and rent "bathing costumes" to visitors. People simply "surf bathed" in their clothes, or perhaps less, or without clothes if in more private surroundings. A humorous occurrence is recorded Christmas Day, 1889: Jacob Fox, one of the original partners, along with his family, were touring the settlement preparatory to building a house. This is today's Ryckman House, which Fox sold to another partner, Garrett E. Ryckman, when the Partnership reorganized as the incorporated Melbourne Beach Improvement Company in 1909. As Beaujean records, after what must have been a Community Dinner, (at about noon):

Mr. Fox and family and all Melbourne Beach turned out and we all went Surf Bathing. Mr. Fox lost his pants in the water. They washed up on the shore and I had to help him put them back on.

Perhaps partial *dishabille* was an ordinary practice once fully-clothed Surf Bathers entered the water. One imagines the embarrassment suffered when losing control of the shed garment.

Pineapple growing was early focused on. We were just about their northern limit. "Plantations" of pineapples lined both sides of the Indian River. Everyone had at least a few acres. Diary entries in July and August, 1889, tell the voyage of C.J Hector, Ray McFadden, and John Henry sailing the sloop *Queen* south to the Florida Keys to bring back 53,000 pineapple slips and 16 sets of 50 pineapple crowns. They docked at our wharf. The term "wharf", a commercial, businesslike word, is always used. "Pier" does not appear, and "dock" is usually a verb.

Pineapples were a terrible crop to cultivate. Not only were the plants sharp and spiny, but stagnant, mosquito-breeding rainwater settled inside the upward

thrusting spines, meaning the worker in the scorching Florida sun had to keep all surfaces clothed as he hoed the "pines." Rats were attracted to the new crop. And with rats came snakes. Especially feared was the diamondback rattler. Workers wore thick leggings. Growers who could afford it constructed a kind of latticework to keep the sun from scorching the plants--and, unfortunately, providing an ideal setting for mosquitoes. Pineapples were a more temperamental and work-intensive crop than growers had been led to believe. They required fertilizer, watering, and weeding. Even tough Rufus Beaujean was occasionally driven to quit his day's work because of heat and mosquitoes.

In addition to pineapples and citrus, virtually all settlers attempted gardens. Those planted in fertile, rich hammocks thrived. Unfortunately, soil at the western end of Ocean Avenue contained little nourishment, being high dry, sandy and porous. Beaujean used a bit of commercial pineapple fertilizer to start a garden. He also used seaweed.. He built a fence to keep out varmints. Planted were watermelon, cabbage, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, squash, 30 tomato plants, strawberries, parsley, turnips, peas, corn, cucumbers, kale, radishes, and lettuce. Apple trees, eucalyptus and hibiscus were attempted. Also, most exotically, grape vines from Ryckman's famous western New York, Chautauqua County, vineyard.

Nothing did well. Subsistence farming didn't work, and with the Company failing, the family came to rely more and more fishing and oystering, hunting wild hogs and ducks, killing turtles and gathering their eggs, and whatever they could gather from nature's bounty. Fortunately, Rufus Beaujean was a skilled carpenter and commanded 25 cents an hour--when he found work. The steamboat *Rockledge* landed rails, and between February 27 and April 21, 1889, he oversaw and also worked 26 hours "spiking" the heavy rails of the Melbourne Beach and Atlantic Railroad from the western end of the wharf eastward down Ocean Avenue to the beach.

During the early months of 1890, Beaujean built Jacob Fox's house. Each day's labor and cost of supplies is scrupulously recorded. Additionally, he either built or had a leading part in construction of the homes of Grace Cumings, Alfred Wilcox, Ferren Glenn, the Bathhouse, The Chapel, the tiny 14 X 16 foot laborer's shack that soon became a schoolhouse, his own 15 X 32 foot "Shanty" (replicated in our river park), as well as digging and building just about every outhouse and privy in the community.

Except the winter months, the saltwater marsh mosquito was ever present. They stung fiercely, but did not carry malaria or Yellow Fever, as in the Jacksonville epidemic of 1888. On May 30 1890 he records "mosquitoes so thick we couldn't work."

Health concerns appear occasionally. At different times Beaujean is struck by "camp fever, dysentery, diarrhea, sick headache, and bone ache." He calls it "not

feeling too buncomb." Remedy consists of pills and quinine. The only accident recorded was "sawing" his thumb while building Jacob Fox's house. Adelaide's four day illness in late January, 1890, was of great concern. Her sister, Claire Wilcox, nursed her. In September that year she has her "bad teeth" filled by Dr. Lyman in Melbourne.

Curiously, sons Claude and Don are either spectacularly healthy, or their problems not worth noting. Little is said about the boys in the seven years covered by these diaries. Once sailing north from Charlie Smith's into a hard north wind little Don becomes seasick. The boys are named when their father builds school desks following the overnight visit of county school superintendent J.H. Sams, who arranged for Grace Cumings to serve as teacher. School includes the three Hopkins children from the House of Refuge. Another mention comes when the barely-adolescent boys shoot ducks and sell them for a good price. We can assume helping their parents in daily work tasks.

On December 16, 1892, Rufus and Adelaide sail over to Melbourne to buy something for their son's Christmas.

That December 24th Eve the tiny community gathered in the newly completed Chapel. Around the freshly cut cedar tree, they sang carols and reminisced of Christmas's past. Then darkness came, and they opened presents by lamplight, and sang some more, as if not wanting the evening to end, and then trekked through the sand to their homes.

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