

# Biography of B.B. McCormick is History of Beach

By FRANK A. DOGGETT

During the last years of the Reconstruction Period Duval County was still a pioneer's environment, with the small town of Jacksonville as its center and the ancient settlement of Fulton as one of its outposts. In that day the St. Johns River, broad and shallow, flowed past isolated homes of its hardy pioneer inhabitants who built the foundations of the later greatness of our county from the natural resources they found about them; timber, game, fish, and the soil itself.

On a spring day in 1877 (April 13) Mr. B. B. McCormick was born to a Scotch Irish family near the tradition-filled village of Fulton. He was the next to the oldest of seven children and grew to adulthood at his birthplace, assisting his parents in the operation of a small farm, growing vegetables and calladium bulbs, while supplementing the family income with commercial fishing from the St. Johns River and trapping in the swamps and highlands.

During these early years he was burdened with ill health and the limited educational facilities that were the fault of this older period and its rural environment. He grew up, however, with an awareness of the historical background of his community, of the ancient site of Fort Caroline, and he never lost his intense interest in the dramatic history of our locality. Two enthusiasms that followed him all his life were a love of the stories and traditions peculiar to the history of our county and a desire for the children of our more fortunate later day to have school facilities and opportunities denied the children of his own day.

His boyhood friends have remembered him as being exceedingly generous and staunch in his belief in the principle of fairness. They knew him as one who never retreated from boyhood fights when his own rights were involved but who was also quick to defend others if he saw injustice being practiced. With all his quickness of temper in his boyhood days he was even quicker to forgive. During these years his quality of tenacity of purpose showed itself. He set up goals early in life that he has followed to this day.

In 1894 he received his first appointment: that as U. S. Mail Carrier, carrying the daily mail from Fulton to a point known as Cosmo, Florida, a designated station on the first railroad that operated between

for this work was \$15 a month.

Soon after he obtained his first experience with Jacksonville Beach. He was employed to cut a survey and right of way from Pablo to Mayport, a distance of 9 miles, for the extension of the Florida East Coast Railway which had recently purchased the Jacksonville and Atlantic Railroad operating between Jacksonville and Pablo Beach. For this work he received the top wages of the year, \$1.25 per day. This was in 1898. He never forgot what he learned here of the importance of ample transportation facilities to a community, and he remembered this as he fought a losing battle for the retainment of the Florida East Coast Railroad service to the Beach when in later years its abandonment was considered. The seeds of a desire to return to Jacksonville Beach were planted during this period.

These years of the turn of the century were great ones for the growing lumber industry of Florida. Like other men of vision of his day he foresaw the future of the lumber industry of our state and he gained experience in this field in mill work and soon became one of the most sought after millwrights in this section of the country, traveling from one place to another and building new mills. This was to be his major occupation until 1916.

It was during these busy years that he met Dora Elizabeth Oesterreicher, whom he married on June 1st, 1904, she being the oldest of 9 children.

In 1911 he moved his family to Jacksonville. Immediately he commenced the construction of a home, working at night and on those Sundays when it was not necessary for him to be on duty at the sawmill. When he completed his home he had to pay for it by gardening at night on a small plot of ground adjacent to the house.

Before the first World War began he realized the importance of the oncoming struggle to our country and played his part in its preparedness program by entering one of the shipyards in Jacksonville engaged in building wooden ships in order that he might give his skill and experience to his country.

At the conclusion of the war in 1918 he commenced a business of logging timber for some of the mills he had helped to build. Soon after he purchased a tract of timber just west of Pablo Beach, now Jacksonville Beach. These had been trying years for him and his family. Due to a continuous siege of illness among his children, believing that

the Beach might improve the health of his family, even if a short visit only were made possible, he made plans to take the entire family to Pablo Beach to camp for one month. This family had grown to include 7 children, four boys and three girls.

Everything was packed and in readiness to leave the next morning for the beach when the family arose alarmed by the knowledge that their home was on fire. It was a sad blow to see the home which he had labored so hard to construct destroyed, together with the small amount of money and all the personal belongings that it had taken years to accumulate. However, he did not abandon his original purpose and moved to Pablo Beach destitute save for his indomitable spirit. He camped there with his family for several months before being able to acquire proper living accommodations.

He saw in the future of our beaches a new challenge to him. At that time Pablo was a community of 300. He chose wisely a location for a new home at 225 First Avenue South; this has remained his residence to the present day. It was during construction of this home in

October, 1922 that he lost his ever faithful partner in the death of Mrs. McCormick. He accepted the responsibility of playing both mother and father to seven children until March, 1926 when he married his late wife's sister, Maude Oesterreicher, who was the youngest of the nine children of her family.

A few years later, two more children, one boy and one girl had been added to the other seven.

His first interest in his community was the development of a school system. Remembering the lack of educational facilities of his childhood and having a large family of children he sought for more ambitious accommodations than the three room frame structure rising from a pool of water that went under the name of Schoolhouse for the infant community. In 1920 he gained permission from the County School Board to correct the poor drainage condition of the school by filling and grading the school grounds gratis. He did not relinquish his interest in the children of the community, but presented a petition to the School Board on March 7, 1923 requesting the establishment of a special tax district

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