

# Memories of my early life in Winter Beach, Florida

By Peggy Jane Hamilton

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Peggy Jane Hamilton, 70 yrs-old, Lived in Winter Beach until 4 years-old - moved to Vero Beach, Florida

Father: Eugene "Sleepy" Hamilton - Winter Beach / Vero Beach -died 2001

Mother: Alice Eva Harlock Wabasso / Vero Beach - died 2002

Grandfather: JJP Hamilton Shady Grove -Winter Beach - died 1967 (when I was 12 yrs-old )

Great Grandfather: Edward Hamilton- Shady Grove / Winter Beach-died in 1936

Great Grandmother: Martha Jane Blanton-Iddo / Shady Grove, Fl died in 1900

Grandmother: Ruth Hinton-Winter Beach-died 1936 (when my father Eugene was 12 years-old )

Step Grandmother: Willie Mae Sheffield- Winter Beach died 1973

My Great-grandfather Edward moved to from Iddo/Shady Grove, Florida to the Narrows on the Indian River near John's Island in 1906. He had lost a 15-year-old son to Yellow Fever and his wife (my Great-grandmother) died in childbirth 6 years before. Great-granddaddy traveled for 30 days with oxen and wagon and his 6 children to reach their new home on the Indian River.

My father, Eugene (Gene) Hamilton, built a small wooden two room house and shed out back, across the street from his father, Jesse Hamilton a few years before I was born in February 1954. The small home was on North Winter Beach Road (69 th Street ) between Old Dixie and US Highway 1. My sister was born in 1952, so I figure the house was built in about 1950. The house still stands. It is painted green and a few rooms have been added on.

Of course, I remember very little of the years I lived in Winter Beach. They are mostly fragmented, hazy memories from pictures that told stories passed down by family memories and photos.

After we moved to Vero Beach I have many memories of visits to Winter Beach especially to Granddaddy Hamilton and Grandma Willa Mae.

So let's begin with my early Winter Beach years.

Granddaddy and Grandma Hamilton would pick me and my sister Linda up for church every Sunday. Mom would dress me up in my white patent leather Sunday shoes, with frilly lace socks and a pretty crinoline dress. I was very forgetful, so Mom tied a lace handkerchief with a nickel or a dime in it around my wrist to offer at Sunday church. Grandpa would honk their horn and we would come running out. Church was right around the corner. We could have walked, but I guess this was more sophisticated.

My cousin, Curtis Hinton was a teenager with a moped. My little tan dog Teddy would chase him and he accidentally hit and killed my little dog. I remember crying my eyes out in the back yard when we buried Teddy there.

I was a sickly, frail child and had constant bronchial infections and lung problems. I would not eat hardly anything except Mom's pancakes with sugar sprinkled on top, her home-made biscuits with syrup on top, bologna sandwiches on white bread with mayonaise and very little else. The doctor told my mother to give me a "one-a-day" vitamin every day. I was a stubborn and strong-willed little girl. It took both Mom and Dad and anyone else around to pin me down on the cold linoleum kitchen floor, hold my nose closed, pop the shiny red "One-a-day" vitamin in my mouth, and force water down my throat. They would yell "Swallow the pill, Peggy!!!" Or after several unsuccessful attempts my father would yell out of frustration, "Swallow the Damn Pill, Peggy!!!" I would sit up and spit the pill out from it's hiding place in my mouth time after time.

We always had fresh fish and seafood because Daddy headed up to Sebastian Inlet just about every day after work. I hated fish and vegetables when I was young. What I would give today to have the fresh seafood and organic vegetables and fruits we had back in the Good Ole Days.

I remember walking to Mr. Sapp's store to buy groceries with my Mom. The bologna I liked came in big rolls and he would slice off what we wanted. I vaguely remember his face, but do remember him being soft

spoken and he always smiled at me. I found a little rubber, green race car there once and he told me to keep it.

We had a home made wooden swing tied to our big Oak Tree on the West side of our house and a Shed in the back with an old hand crank washing machine. I think I remember my sister Linda getting her hand caught in it one time. Old Mrs. Strickland (Mom called her that) lived east of us and the Mixons and their cousins lived west of us. We used to have head-standing contest with the Mixon boys. I always won.

Granddaddy's wooden house looked like a mansion to me! It was just across the street on the northeast corner of Old Dixie Highway and North Winter Beach Road. There were 3 huge Royal Palm Trees planted in front of the 2-story wooden house and an assortment of citrus, fruit trees and flowers on the property. An artesian well was in the back and a huge, detached carriage house/carport. A balcony lined the front of the house with 4 large bedrooms upstairs with high ceilings and a wash bowl and jug in each room. Downstairs a big front porch lining the front of the house. It looked west to Old Dixie Highway and to the railroad tracks.

The front door opened into the living room where Granddaddy was usually found sitting with his brass spittoon on the floor near his easy chair. The Television was in the corner and my Grandparent's bedroom was at the back of the living room.

To the left of the living room front door was a wooden staircase leading to the upstairs bedrooms.

Past the stairs to the left was a huge dining room with a beautiful solid Mahogany dining table and 12 velvet backed fancy wooden chairs to match. There were dark framed family portraits on the walls. I wish I had these family portraits today!! The bathroom was just off to the right from the dining room and had a big ceramic clawfoot bathtub.

The kitchen was to the left off the dining room where I often found Grandma cooking or washing dishes.

There was a screen door leading from the kitchen to the back yard and big wooded property. We were always warned to look out for snakes as we headed out the back door to roam the "jungle" and eat or pick fresh fruit from the mango, orange, tangerine, grapefruit, kumquat, avocado, papaya, banana and lemon trees.

Granddaddy also had an abandoned General Store and gas station on the corner of his lot by the big house. There was a musty smell in there and clothes and supplies just laying around. Fortunately, we have an aerial photo of Granddaddy's old home place and gas station as it was burned down for fire department practice after being abandoned for many years. When Granddaddy had a massive stroke and could no longer communicate, a Will was never found. The property sat in legal probate for over 8 years.

When I was 17 years old, my cousin Bruce Hamilton hitchhiked from California with a surfboard in hand to visit family in Winter Beach/ Vero Beach. We visited the old home place in Winter Beach. It was very, very sad to find the house and property in ruins. The front door falling off the hinges. Graffiti painted all over the walls. Clothes and old black-and-white family photos strewn all over the floor. Old iron beds with stained mattresses in every room. the upstairs balcony wood was rotten and too dangerous to walk on. One bedroom had clothes piled so high we couldn't even walk through the room. We found an old red Victrola record player and intact records. I don't remember what we played, but the record machine worked perfectly!! So we both decided my little Austin Healey car was packed too full with Bruce's surfboard, groceries etc.. Bruce and I agreed to return the next day and pick up the Victrola. We did return the next day to pick up the Vitrola. Low and behold it was gone!! It was really spooky thinking someone had been in the room (probably under the bed) listening to us the whole time. We left in a hurry and didn't return. I wish I had taken the old family photos. What a shame. (Teenagers)

We had a lot of relatives in Winter Beach. I remember Aunt Eunice (Daddy's sister) and Uncle Clinton Walker's house was east of us on North Winter Beach Road headed towards the river. I have a photo of cousin Stanley Walker and my sister Linda sitting in a little red wagon in our underwear on a hot summer day. There were 2 girls and 4 boys in the Walker Family. Cousin Buddy has a lot of great Winter Beach Family and Folk memories and still lives a block away from his old home place.