

# Wakulla Beach Hotel

GPS Coordinates:  
84°15.703' W ~ 30° 6.316' N



The third Walker, or Wakulla Beach, Hotel (above) as it appeared around the time the property was acquired for the refuge and (below) part of what remains. (Above: Courtesy State Archives of Florida; below: Courtesy St. Marks Refuge files)



Daisy Walker dreamed of building a town called East Goose Creek at Wakulla Beach. She and her husband, Florida State Senator Henry N. Walker, Sr., built a hotel to attract visitors to the site. Sleeping rooms and a dining room were located off of a long porch to let in cooling sea breezes.

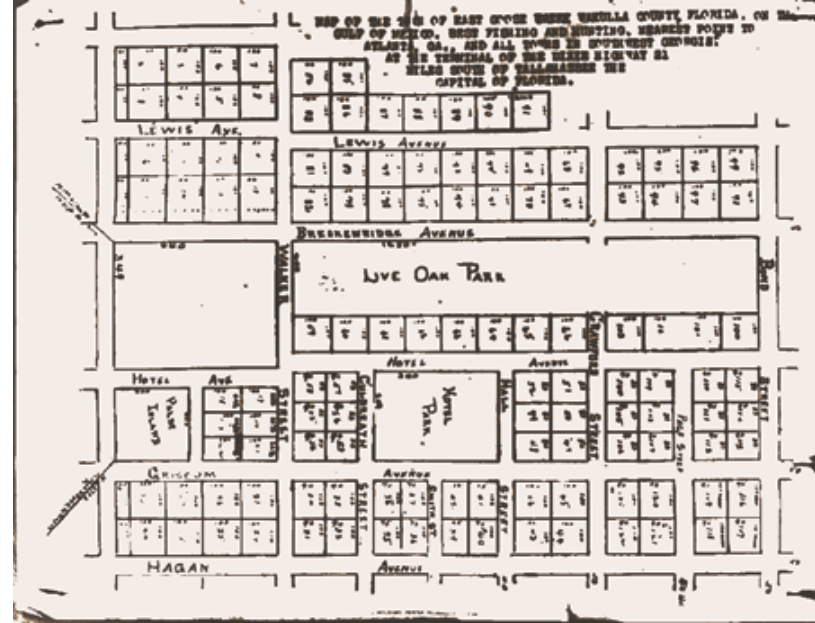
Around 1920 the Walkers converted this hotel into their residence and built a second hotel located closer to the beach. Constructed entirely of cypress, the two-story building was probably destroyed by a strong tropical storm that caused extensive damage in Wakulla County in September 1928.

Undaunted, the Walkers built a third, even larger hotel which had fluted columns formed by pouring concrete into a mold built around



A portion of the foundation and the fluted pillars from the third hotel can be seen near the parking area. (Courtesy St. Marks Refuge files)

# Wakulla Beach Hotel



The town was laid out around 1915. (Courtesy Mays Leroy Gray)

pine timbers. The kitchen and dining room were located on the ground floor with sleeping rooms on the second level. Swimming and fishing in the summer and goose hunting in the winter attracted guests year round.

Daisy Walker died in 1935. Even though the coast still draws visitors, weather seems to have conspired against the success of a permanent town.

Along with the hotel business, Senator Walker ran cattle on his property. The “Fence Law,” passed in 1949, curtailed open range grazing in Florida. Around this time, Senator Walker decided to leave the ranching business and worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to add Wakulla Beach – the lost town of East Goose Creek – to the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge.

The first and second Walker Hotels no longer exist. All that remains of the third hotel is a foundation at the edge of the surrounding forest.

Almost any day will find a few anglers and swimmers enjoying Wakulla Beach just as they did in Daisy’s day. The beach area is quite small, but many kayakers put in there to paddle and explore the shore and bay. (Courtesy St. Marks Refuge files)



The St. Marks Refuge Association, Inc., with a matching grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, produced the signs and brochures for the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge History Trail. The association is a 501(c)(3) organization that supports educational, environmental, and biological programs of St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. Visit [www.stmarksrefuge.org](http://www.stmarksrefuge.org) for more information. 4/2019

# West Goose Creek Seineyard

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People seined for mullet at West Goose Creek until the mid-1980s. (Courtesy St. Marks Refuge files)

Local people and others from as far away as south Georgia – a journey of several days by wagon – came to help catch the fish. With the fall harvest over, there was no need to hurry. The people could relax and barter hams and other farm produce for barrels of salted mullet.

The locale, called a seineyard and usually named for the owner or the geographic location, was based on the need for fairly shallow water with a bottom free of obstacles that could snag the seine net and a beach where the catch, called a “lick,” could be hauled out and processed.

Approximately 16 seineyards once operated between the St. Marks Lighthouse and Turkey Point in Franklin County. Several seineyards operated on or near the refuge including West Goose Creek, St. Marks River, Wakulla Beach, Shell Point, and Skipper Bay. The seineyards were a source of income for the owner as well as a place for people to relax and meet friends, and ownership might pass through the family or be sold.

Fishing with a rod and reel is often a hurry-up-and-wait activity and using a seine net is no exception. Men rowed

# West Goose Creek Seineyard



(Courtesy National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)

their boats into the water and played out nets of up to 600 ft. long. Then they waited. When the striker, who usually scanned the bay from a tower, called, “come ashore!” the men strained at their oars as they rowed for shore, trapping the fish.

Others pitched in to draw the fish-laden net onto the beach. Then all hands began the work of removing the catch and preparing the mullet for smoking or salting. Mullet are best eaten



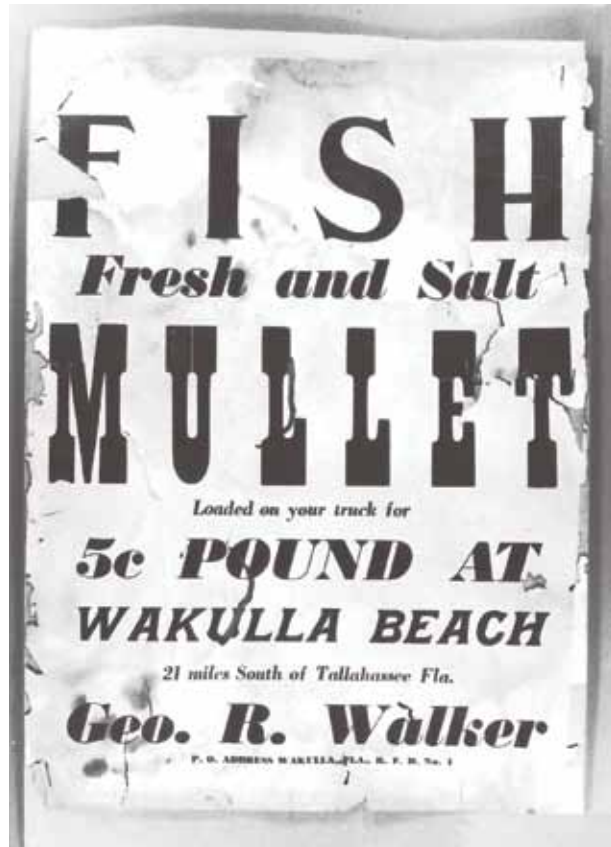
Cleaning the fish as soon as possible was necessary due to the lack of refrigeration. Dogs, birds, and hogs helped clean up, too. (Courtesy State Archives of Florida)



Fall at the seineyard was a time for people to gather. (Courtesy St. Marks Refuge files)

fresh or preserved because the flesh deteriorates rapidly and refrigeration was not available. Many barrels of salted fish were sold and shipped to feed farmhands, turpentine workers, and for home use.

The traditional fall gathering at the seineyards declined as regulations on the fishing industry increased and as the automobile replaced the wagon and other activities competed for people’s time. West Goose Creek is best remembered, perhaps because of the live oak grove that afforded shade and because it operated until the mid-1980s. In November 1985, Hurricane Kate’s winds smashed the last of the shelters at West Goose Creek and brought the era to a close.



(Courtesy Mays Leroy Gray)

Seining for mullet was once a popular pastime and is now almost a lost art. People were drawn to the shallow waters of Apalachee Bay to catch the fat fish using large seine nets.

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