

Lowe House and Barn: A Brief Introduction

Construction Information

- The home, a board and batten structure, largely the work of Wesley Lowe, contained pine and cypress. The two-story building certainly stood out along “The Narrows” and in the Anona area after its construction in 1888.
- The barn, constructed in 1912, replaced a smaller barn that once sat on the Lowe property. Some of the wood may have come from an earlier structure.

History of Occupants

- The Lowe family, led by Captain John T. Lowe, came to the area by the late 1850s. A native of the Bahamas born in 1830, John Lowe’s ancestors had previously lived in the Carolinas and other British colonies. As Loyalists during the American Revolution, some probably fled to East Florida, then to the Bahamas. John Lowe came with family members to Key West as a child in 1840. He married Laura Meares, a native of Nassau. Members of the Lowe and Meares families helped to establish the Anona settlement and lived in the Seminole/Largo area near “The Narrows” of Boca Ciega Bay. The families came to the area from Key West. Captain John Lowe had made frequent trips along Florida’s west coast between Key West and Cedar Keys.
- During the Civil War, some members of the Lowe family fought in distant battles for the Confederacy, while those who remained on the homestead suffered the effects of the Union blockade (the “Anaconda” Strategy).
- Lowe and his children (especially Jefferson T. Lowe and Wesley Lowe) played an important role in the development of the Anona settlement. Younger son Asa M. Lowe would later become a business leader in the Tarpon Springs community.
- Wesley Lowe and family lived in the structure until the 1930s.
- By late 1940s, Paul Randolph and Hugh Ford acquired the property. Shortly after this transaction, with Randolph planning to demolish or remove the structure, Maurice and Corinna Lowe Condrick acquired the house. Corinna was a granddaughter of Capt. John T. Lowe and daughter of Wesley. As a young woman, Corinna taught in Tarpon Springs schools and spent a lot of time with her uncle, Asa M. Lowe. She married Maurice Condrick and moved to southern St. Petersburg.
- The Condricks had the Wesley Lowe House dismantled (numbering each piece) and reconstructed on a tract of land at 800-37th Street North in St. Petersburg (a block south of the St. Petersburg Public Library’s main branch).
- After the Condricks died, the structure was given to the St. Petersburg Historical Society. The Society, with limited funds and a tight deadline, was able to have the structure moved (in one piece) to the Haas Museum complex near Central Plaza in 1970. The house remained at that site until moved to Heritage Village.

Moving of the Barn and House to Heritage Village

- The Lowe Barn came directly to Heritage Village (not through St. Petersburg, like the Lowe House) in late 1976. Work on the Lowe Barn’s restoration was nearly finished by the fall of 1977. One of the earlier structures brought to Heritage

Village (along with Seven Gables and Plant-Sumner), the barn arrived as park officials planned to move the McMullen-Coachman log cabin.

- The barn remained on the Randolph site for over twenty years after the Condricks had moved the Lowe House to St. Petersburg. By the early 1970s, plans were made to develop the remaining portion of the original Lowe homestead as part of a condominium complex located at Randolph Farms. The barn was donated to the Largo Historical Society in 1976, and reconstructed at Heritage Village in January 1977 of the following year.
- When the St. Petersburg Historical Society planned to close the Haas Museum complex, that organization offered the Lowe House to the County Historical Commission and Heritage Village. There was some concern that the house might be destroyed if the society did not find a new and secure home. At the time, the park administration had started to pursue the Daniel McMullen house and worried that moving the Lowe House to Heritage Village would take away necessary space. Members of the St. Petersburg Historical Society worked closely with Heritage Village, since members considered that to be the best and most logical place for the structure to move. The County covered the moving costs of the Lowe House from the Haas Museum to Heritage Village.

Lowe House and Barn

Overview

Members of the Lowe family first settled on the central Pinellas Peninsula by the late 1850s. Many branches of the family lived in the Bahamas during the 1700s and early 1800s. Some moved to the upper and lower keys, including Key West, by the mid-1830s. Similar to Joshua Boyer, the Lowes looked to the sea for economic opportunities during the mid-nineteenth century. Led by Captain John Thomas Lowe, a small group arrived at “Lowe’s Landing,” a site along the intracoastal waterway between Indian Rocks Beach and Anona. Family members fought in the Civil War, established citrus groves and farmsteads, and joined other early settlers in developing the west central Pinellas Peninsula. By the time the Orange Belt Railway reached the new settlement of St. Petersburg in 1888, Lowes and affiliated families lived throughout the Tampa Bay region. Captain J. T. Lowe partitioned his original land claim, providing tracts for his children: Jefferson Theodore, Wesley Brownell, Mary Ellen, and Asa Milton Lowe.

The Lowe House, built largely through the efforts of Wesley Lowe, became an important meeting place for many pioneer families of Anona. Friends and relatives, including members of the Meares, Wilcox, Walsingham, Whitehurst, McMullen, Bayly, and Logan families, to name a few, gathered at the Lowe homestead during the formative years of Pinellas County’s history. Young Wesley Lowe went to Key West in the mid-1880s. While there, he met and married Mary Pinder. They returned to Anona circa 1888 to farm on his family’s land. During this period, Wesley and his father built the Lowe House.

A board and batten structure built in the late 1880s, the Lowe House contains vertically placed boards with narrow strips of lumber atop each seam. Cypress wood was used for its original (and replacement) shingles and the foundation, while pine provided the primary building material for the rest of the house. The parlor, dining area, and kitchen occupied the lower floor, while stairs led to three bedrooms and an open hall area. Windows that expose nearly the full length of upper floor rooms provided excellent cross ventilation for hot days. In the early 1900s, Wesley Lowe built an additional room

for his aging father, Captain J. T. Lowe. Later restoration efforts removed this room, along with other modern amenities such as indoor plumbing and electrical wiring.

Wesley lived on this property until the 1930s. By 1912, he constructed a larger barn to replace an earlier and smaller one that had existed since the late 1800s. Meanwhile, other members of the family became commercial and civic leaders in Tarpon Springs, St. Petersburg, and Fogartyville (near present-day Bradenton); other branches of the family remained in Key West and other Monroe County settlements. Wesley's daughter, Corinna Lowe, moved to Tarpon Springs and became a fifth-grade teacher for a few years. She often spent her free time with Wesley's brother (and her uncle), Asa M. Lowe. While in Tarpon, she fell in love with Maurice P. Condrick, a native of Pennsylvania. They married and settled in St. Petersburg. As Wesley grew older, he sold the Lowe House and barn to the Merritt family in the mid-1930s. By the late 1940s, owners of the land had created a ranch on part of the property and decided to demolish the house. Learning of these plans, Maurice Condrick purchased his wife's childhood home, had it disassembled and the pieces numbered, and moved it to the 800 block of 37th Street North in St. Petersburg. The Condricks lived in the house by the early 1950s, and continued to reside there until their deaths. In October 1970, the St. Petersburg Historical Society acquired the property and had it moved to the Haas Museum complex. That organization received a grant in 1988 to refurbish the building and research its history. Meanwhile, the Largo Historical Society received the Lowe's barn as a donation by 1976 and worked with leadership of the newly-established museum at Heritage Village to bring that structure to its new home in early 1977.

The Lowe House rejoined its former neighbor, the barn, in May 1991. By late 1990, the St. Petersburg Historical Society had decided to consolidate its operations and close the buildings at the Haas Museum. After a period of uncertainty, county funds allowed for the firm of Roesch Housemovers to bring the Lowe House to Heritage Village.

The Lowe Family History and Early Years of Settlement

Although members of Captain John T Lowe's family first settled along the Pinellas Peninsula in the 1850s, family tradition notes that some of Lowe's ancestors had

visited Florida nearly seven decades earlier, under difficult circumstances. As Loyalists during the American Revolution, Lowe's progenitors fled the Carolinas for safe haven in other British colonies. Family histories claim that some relatives traveled to East Florida and stayed in St. Augustine before resettling in the Bahamas. A few members of the family arrived in the Bahamas as early as the 1720s, though the exact year that Lowes first ventured to these Caribbean islands remains unclear. Genealogical research at Heritage Village has traced this pioneer family's lives and activities to the early 1700s. According to family records, Gideon Lowe and his brother wrecked their ship along the island of Bermuda. A mariner by trade, Gideon later settled on Harbour Island in the Bahamas and exchanged vows with Nancy Saunders. Their union produced at least six children, the eldest of which was Matthew, born in 1775. In April 1783, Captain Gideon battled against the Spaniards who attempted to capture the Bahamas during the closing days of the American Revolution. Gideon received a land grant for his services from the crown, and by 1807 he occupied 240 acres on Green Turtle Cay in the Abaco Islands. Matthew and some his brothers followed in their father's footsteps by becoming sailors at a young age and assisting their father in the profitable—if dangerous—salvage operations of sunken vessels known as “wrecking.” Matthew married a woman named Sarah and they couple raised seven children. The oldest child, William, entered the world on 6 April 1805.¹

In time, young William Lowe became a sea captain that sailed along the waters of the Caribbean and lower Gulf of Mexico. In her extensive research of the Lowe family, historian Joyce Pickering notes that William—Gideon's grandson—became the progenitor of most of the Lowes residing on the Pinellas Peninsula. William wed Mary Anne Russell, daughter of Joseph and Sarah Russell, an 1806 native of the Bahamas, in 1828. William and Mary Anne Lowe had seven children, six natives of Green Turtle Cay

¹ Joyce Pickering, “The Lowe Family,” undated manuscript, located in Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; “Wesley Lowe House: Cypress Board & Battan Home . . . Endearing and Enduring,” pamphlet created by St. Petersburg Museum of History, 1988, located in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; “Soldier's Pension Claim: J.T. Lowe,” Florida Confederate Pension Application Files, Record Group 137, Series 587, State Archives of Florida, Tallahassee [Available electronically at: <http://fmp.dlis.state.fl.us/fpr/A05782/005.pdf>]. In its obituary of J. T. Lowe, the *Tarpon Springs Leader* claimed his year of birth was 1827, not 1830. This date conflicts with pension records submitted for his services in the Confederacy during the Civil War and other documentary sources. *Tarpon Springs Leader*, 5 August 1921; Genealogical research on Lowe family appears in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.

in the Bahamas, and the youngest a native of Key West, Florida: William C., John Thomas, Amos, Lorenza, Mary Elizabeth, Robert, and Sarah Jane. The second of seven children born to William and Mary Anne Russell Lowe, John entered the world on 15 February 1830 at Green Turtle Cay. He spent much of his childhood in and around Nassau and the islands, though events within the British Empire soon brought members of his family to the Florida Keys.²

Some residents of the Bahamas left the islands after the United Kingdom Emancipation Act took effect in 1834. In August 1833, Parliament had passed this act, one that required either outright manumission or apprenticeship for the former slaves by the summer of 1834. With slavery coming to an end in their homeland, some Bahamian “Conchs” decided to relocate to the Florida Keys to take advantage of new economic opportunities, including “wrecking.” At the age of ten, John T. Lowe joined his family as they left Nassau for Key West in late 1840. Lowe, his parents, and siblings became citizens of the United States in 1845, the year that Florida entered the Union as the twenty-seventh state. During this period, William began running a schooner between Key West and Cedar Keys that carried mail, lumber, and other provisions. As he grew older, John often accompanied his father on these journeys.³

As a young man, John T. Lowe honed his navigational skills and became a sea captain. His travels along the sea would take him to distant locations, such as New Orleans and Honduras. Soon he joined his father, William, in operating schooners along the west coast of Florida, generally between Key West and Cedar Keys. Due to the lack of trails and primitive roads in southwest Florida south of Tampa Bay, their travels served as an important link that connected Key West with the rest of Florida. David Levy

² Ibid.

³ For a discussion of the development of Key West during the mid-nineteenth century, see: Maureen Ogle, *Key West: History of an Island of Dreams* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); see also: “Application for Pension: Alfred Lowe,” Florida Confederate Pension Application Files, Record Group 137, Series 587, State Archives of Florida, Tallahassee [Available electronically at: <http://fmp.dlis.state.fl.us/fpr/A02364/012.pdf>]. John T. Lowe may have lived outside of Florida for a period in the mid-1840s, after his parents were naturalized. According to papers he filed for a pension in 1909, Capt. Lowe claimed he had resided in Florida continuously since 15 January 1847, not the early 1840s. See: “Soldier’s Pension Claim: J.T. Lowe,” Florida Confederate Pension Application Files, Record Group 137, Series 587, State Archives of Florida, Tallahassee [Available electronically at: <http://fmp.dlis.state.fl.us/fpr/A05782/005.pdf>]; Pickering, “The Lowe Family.”

Yulee's selection of the Cedar Keys region as the southern terminus of his cross-state railroad to Fernandina by the late 1850s solidified the importance of this water route by the beginning of the Civil War. Family members also became experts at fishing. Captain J. T. Lowe married the former Laura D. Meares, a Nassau native and daughter of William and Miriam Roberts Meares, in a Key West ceremony on 28 December 1853. During their trips, the Lowes occasionally stopped along the bluffs south of Clearwater Harbor in search of fresh water and a safe place to anchor. In 1858, John T. Lowe transported government surveyors to the region and learned that officials had never completed formal surveys of many areas in southern Florida, including the Pinellas Peninsula. After the surveyors had finished their work, Lowe secured a homestead along the sparsely settled Pinellas Peninsula.⁴

Lowe arrived at a site south of Clearwater harbor, known as "The Narrows," in June 1859. He had homesteaded approximately eighty acres along the intracoastal waterway at a place later known as "Lowe's Landing" for \$1.25 an acre. Lowe and his wife, who was pregnant (with son Wesley B. Lowe) at the time, traveled to this remote location on their schooner *Seadrift* with their three year-old son Jefferson and Captain J. T.'s parents (William and Mary Anne Russell Lowe). An August 1996 *St. Petersburg Times* article on the early history of Anona mentioned that the young family brought all of its belongings on this journey. Also making the voyage were Laura's mother (Miriam Roberts Meares), her two brothers (William and Richard Turtle Horn Meares), other members of the Meares family, and Captain August Archer.⁵

Lowe's remote homestead offered the settlers protection and an abundant supply of food. According to a story passed along by J.T. Lowe's grandchildren, family members saw a mother bear and two cubs near a large oak tree along the shoreline shortly after they arrived. One of the cubs became the first meal for the settlers, who believed that the old, majestic tree must have served as a landmark for the Indians that had once lived in the region. The Lowes and Meares families cleared some of the coastal hammock, cultivated vegetables and citrus, raised livestock, and enjoyed a bounty of fish

⁴ "Wesley Lowe House" pamphlet; Michael Gannon, ed. *The New History of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 223, 225-226; *St. Petersburg Times*, 22 August 1996; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, 5 August 1921.

⁵ *Ibid.*; *St. Petersburg Times*, 9 April 1996, 22 August 1996.

and shellfish in nearby waters. They constructed simple log cabins and a log church. They started a cemetery next to the church after the death of William Lowe on 9 November 1859. Shortly after William's death, the Lowes celebrated the birth of Wesley Brownell Lowe on December 6. Captain Lowe may have been the first settler to construct a frame house along the Pinellas peninsula. Some of the Meares clan settled lands about two miles below the Lowe homestead, in present-day Oakhurst.⁶

Members of the Lowe family participated in the Civil War. On 10 January 1861, the state's General Assembly voted in favor of secession from the Union. Within a month, delegates from Florida traveled to Montgomery, Alabama, to formalize the Confederate government. While the remote settlement at Lowe's Landing seemed distant from Fort Sumter and other battlefields, the Union's "Anaconda" strategy to blockade Florida's coastline threatened to halt schooner trips by the Lowe family. Although no evidence indicates that the Lowes possessed slaves in 1861, one may also speculate that they may have sympathized with the Confederacy as a response to the emancipation order of 1834 that prompted many Bahamians to leave the islands. Indeed, the presence of Union troops and military facilities at Key West may have encouraged them to depart. Before they entered service with the Confederacy, J. T. Lowe and relatives Alfred (born 20 July 1840 in the Bahamas) and William E. (born 1833 in Bahamas) served as members of the state coastal forces who worked as blockade runners. Alfred and William E. Lowe, descendants of Gideon Lowe's third child, John Lowe, probably settled in Manatee County with their parents William A. and Caroline A. Saunders Lowe. A family history notes that in 1862 J. T. Lowe's three year-old son Wesley, while hiding in nearby mangroves, saw Union forces board and commandeer his father's sloop, the *Cayto*. He allegedly ran to his mother and said, "*Cayto* gone!"⁷

⁶ Ibid. The article in the 22 August 1996 *St. Petersburg Times* notes that Capt. August Archer homesteaded near the Anona Heights area and that one of his descendants later married a member of Richard Meares's family.

⁷ "Wesley Lowe House" pamphlet; Proof of enlistment, Adjutant General's Office, War Department, Florida Confederate Pension Application Files, Record Group 137, Series 587, State Archives, Tallahassee. [Available electronically at: <http://fmp.dlis.state.fl.us/fpr/A05782/018.pdf> and <http://fmp.dlis.state.fl.us/fpr/A02364/020.pdf>]. Nota bene: On J. T. Lowe's original application for pension, he claimed that he had enlisted by July 1861. See: <http://fmp.dlis.state.fl.us/fpr/A05782/011.pdf>. Also, Alfred Lowe claimed he had originally entered service by 13 December 1861, as a member of the state coast guard, assigned to the Tampa region. See: <http://fmp.dlis.state.fl.us/fpr/A02364/011.pdf>; Pickering, "Lowe House."

During the war, members of the Lowe and Meares families fought in distant battles. On 25 April 1862, John Thomas and Alfred arrived in Tampa to enlist in Company K, 7th Florida Infantry, of the Confederate States Army. They served under Colonel Madison Starke Perry, leader of the 7th Infantry and former governor of Florida (1857-1861). William E. Lowe enlisted as a private on 1 May 1862 and also served in Company K. John Thomas, Alfred, and William E. Lowe later transferred to service in the Confederate Navy (J. T. joined in Savannah in 1863). Alfred witnessed the capture and occupation of Savannah by Union troops; fought at Fort Fisher in Wilmington, North Carolina, before it fell to Union forces; and went to Richmond, Virginia, where he served in the rear guard as Confederate forces retreated. He claimed that he was with General Robert E. Lee's army at the surrender at Appomattox. According to one source, J. T. Lowe fought in General Braxton Bragg's forces in Tennessee. Richard Turtle Horn Meares served with Confederate forces, while William Brownell Meares fought in a Florida regiment until suffering wounds and losing an eye in battle.⁸

Family members struggled during the war years. The blockade limited their ability to acquire provisions, such as flour. With John away from the home for more than three years, his wife and children spent a lot of time hunting, fishing, growing sugar cane, and harvesting salt from the nearby waters. John and Alfred returned to Lowe's Landing after the war. Though neither suffered wartime wounds, the walk from Virginia to their homestead must have exhausted both of them. According to one family account, when Wesley saw a man with a long beard and ax approach his home, the young child fearfully hid and his mother fainted. That bearded "stranger" was none other than Captain J. T. Lowe returning to his homestead.⁹

During the mid 1860s and 1870s, the Lowes resumed their maritime travels along the west coast of Florida. W. A. "Uncle Billy" O'Quinn, whose family arrived from Taylor County in 1868, recalled seeing his relatives ship their farm products from Lowe's

⁸ Ibid., *St. Petersburg Times*, 22 August 1996; "Wesley Lowe House" pamphlet; Genealogical research appears in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo.

⁹ *St. Petersburg Times*, 22 August 1996; "Wesley Lowe House" pamphlet; *Largo, Florida, Then Til . . .* (Largo: Largo Bicentennial Committee, 1979), 8.

Landing on one of Captain J. T. Lowe's schooners. The O'Quinns provided a genealogical link between the McMullen and Walsingham families. Alfred Lowe exchanged vows with Mary J. Whitehurst, a member of a pioneer family in western Hillsborough County, on 10 October 1867. They soon settled in Key West. Alfred and Mary Lowe lived together until his death on 1 December 1921. Mary filed for a widow's pension claim shortly thereafter, and maintained her residence at 1404 White Street in Key West. Alfred's father, William A. Lowe, settled near Clear Water Harbor by about 1865. Alonzo Lowe, William's son and Alfred's younger brother, later acquired land along present-day Indian Rocks Road north of J. T. Lowe's property and married Julia Whitehurst. Meanwhile, Captain J. T. Lowe traveled between Lowe's Landing and Key West for Laura's health and so the children could attend schools in Monroe County. On 10 March 1867, J. T. and Laura Lowe welcomed a daughter, Mary Ellen, and on 30 November 1872, Laura gave birth to their youngest child, Asa Milton Lowe. During this period, the Captain constructed and ran schooners—including one known as the *Sea Drift*—for mail and freight service between Cedar Keys and Key West.¹⁰

The Development of the Anona Community

The settlements around Lowe's Landing expanded in the years following the Civil War. The Captain constructed a clapboard house and a small general store along the Narrows by the 1870s. According to Milton Logan, one of the Captain's grandsons, the Captain's board and batten home had a shingle roof and cypress stumps as piers for its foundation. Expanded over time to accommodate his children and their families, the home had a living room, dining area, kitchen, parlor and bedroom on the first floor, with two upstairs bedrooms. As the community around the Lowe property grew, it needed a name. Either J. T. Lowe and Captain Hamlin—one-time postmaster at Cedar Key who also trolled the waters between Key West and Florida's big bend—named the place "Anona" for the sweet apples brought to the settlement from Key West. Ironically,

¹⁰ Ibid.; Affidavit of marriage, Florida Confederate Pension Application Files, Record Group 137, Series 587, State Archives of Florida, Tallahassee [Available electronically at: <http://fmp.dlis.state.fl.us/fpr/A02364/021.pdf>]; "Widow's Pension Claim: Alfred Lowe," Florida Confederate Pension Application Files, Record Group 137, Series 587, State Archives of Florida, Tallahassee [Available electronically at: <http://fmp.dlis.state.fl.us/fpr/A05782/002.pdf> and [003.pdf](http://fmp.dlis.state.fl.us/fpr/A05782/003.pdf)]; *Largo Sentinel*, 3 January 1946.

many—if not all—of these apples disappeared from the region after the rough freezes of the early 1890s. Jefferson, John’s oldest son, distributed mail and operated the store for the nascent community by 1883. Jefferson served as the only postmaster at Anona, a mail point that operated between November 1883 and February 1922. By the late 1800s, Jefferson also built a two-story residence.

J. T. Lowe also donated approximately two acres of land to serve as the site of the Anona Methodist Church and cemetery. Services began in 1872 as members organized a community church serving all Christian faiths. Earliest services probably took place in private homes. Captain Lowe, Jefferson, and Wesley joined members of the Meares and Kilgore families and George Hammock in erecting a “rough board house” that served as Anona’s church until 1882 and as the area’s schoolhouse from at least 1874 until 1890. At this time, the Methodist circuit riders who offered services at Anona also led congregations at Clear Water Harbor, Sylvan Abbey, Indian Pass, Bay View, and other locations on the peninsula. Since this early structure lacked heating, parishioners and schoolchildren often met near a large bonfire during winter cold spells. Miriam Meares Wilcox described dramatic plays on the building’s porch, when curtains covered the porch as a stage, and kerosene lamps and torches provided light. People traveled from at least as far as Dunedin to watch these performances. In 1882, settlers built a permanent church made by cypress and other trees felled in the area, sent on J. T. Lowe’s schooner to Cedar Keys for sawing into boards, and brought back to the site. They also moved the remains of those interred at the original cemetery to a new location. A new school opened in 1890 on property provided by Richard A. Meares. In an article appearing in the *St. Petersburg Times*, Miriam Cornelia Meares described candy pullings (boiling molasses or sugar cane, stretching it, and cutting it into hard candies), horseback rides, and numerous swimming parties along the Gulf of Mexico during this period. Milton Logan claimed that Monday and Tuesday were days to wash and iron clothes, while soup became a common meal in many homes.¹¹

¹¹ “Wesley Lowe House” pamphlet; *St. Petersburg Times*, 22 August 1996; “Anona: Ghost Town” [<http://www.ghosttowns.com/states/fl/anona.html>] (3 June 2003); Genealogical research located in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; *Largo, Then Til*, 82, 104-106. The present Anona Elementary School opened by 1916, four years after the creation of Pinellas County. By November 1951, members of the Anona United Methodist Church moved into their new sanctuary, and the 1882 structure became a Sunday school annex. Many reverends who served at the Safety Harbor Methodist Church, also

Florida's 1885 state census indicates the growth in the Anona community. Living with J. T. (age: 54) and Laura (age: 50) were children Wesley (age: 26), Mary Ellen (age: 18), Asa M. (age: 12), and the Captain's eighty year-old mother, Mary Anne Russell. Other family members, including Jefferson T. Lowe, lived nearby. Jefferson, like Alfred and Alonzo Lowe, married a member of the Whitehurst family when he and Josephine Catherine Whitehurst exchanged vows in Hillsborough County on 1 June 1881. A correspondent for the *Sunland Tribune* claimed that the "matrimonial fever [was] getting up a boom in the Clear Water section" after Rev. C. S. Reynolds married Whitehurst and Lowe at Indian Pass. A sailor by profession, Wesley Lowe returned to Key West for about three years, where he worked as a cigar maker and operated a boat line. He married Mary Louise Pinder, daughter of Jabez and Drucilla Pinder, in Key West by January 1889. The Pinder house still stood on Southard Street in Key West as late as the 1970s. Mary Pinder and a woman named Elizabeth Lowe apparently moved from Key West to the Upper Keys at some point before 1885 to work as schoolteachers at one of the small schools along the islands. Wesley probably made many trips by boat between Key West and Anona during this period, as he oversaw construction of the family's new house.¹²

Wesley B. Lowe built a new, two-story home on his family's land in Anona in the mid-1880s. A version of the "Homestead House" popular in the late nineteenth century, this two-story structure had board and batten siding and porches on both ends of its ell-shape frame. The balloon-frame construction with vertical posts that reached from the base to the attic provided a strong foundation to protect the structure from high winds. Large windows provided excellent cross-ventilation. The home had unvarnished floors of

located at Heritage Village, led sermons at the Anona church. Rev. O. C. Howell organized the first bible school in 1934; Robert L. Sumner, one-time owner of the Plant-Sumner House at Heritage Village, also conducted services here between 1934 and 1936. See also: Indian Rocks Area Historical Society, *Indian Rocks: A Pictorial History* (Indian Rocks: Indian Rocks Area Historical Society, 1980), 64-65, 108-109; Transcript of interview with Milton Logan, 17 September 1987, located at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo. Milton Logan claimed that he dismantled Captain Lowe's residence in the 1930s, and used some of the wood for a home he built along Indian Rocks Road.

¹² United States Archives and Records Service, *Schedules of the Florida State Census of 1885: Hillsborough County* (Washington: National Archives/General Services Administration, 1970); Marriage license of Jefferson T. Lowe and Josephine C. Whitehurst, Clerk of the Court, Hillsborough County, Florida. Available at: [<http://www.lib.usf.edu/lds/digitalcollections/H19/images/1881/00122.jpg>]; "Wesley Lowe House" pamphlet; *St. Petersburg Times*, 4 July 1888; *Sunland Tribune*, 25 June 1881; *Largo, Then Til*, 9; Jerry Wilkinson, "Upper Keys Schools," located at <http://www.keyshistory.org/schoolspage1.html>. Nota bene: some family records spell the surname "Pindar" rather than "Pinder."

“scrubbed raw wood.”¹³ By the time the newlyweds settled in their new home at Anona, their neighbors had started to witness dramatic changes to the area around Lowe’s Landing. The construction of the Orange Belt Railway along the Pinellas Peninsula, and through nearby Largo, brought much activity to the region around The Narrows. Over the next few years, the iron horse replaced the boat as the primary means of travel for many settlers. Just as the arrival of the Orange Belt led to the growth of Tarpon Springs at the expense of the smaller settlement at Anclote, the path of the rails through present-day Largo led to wide-scale development to the east and northeast of Anona. In time, railroads replaced shipping as the preferred form of transport, and many farmers along the central Pinellas Peninsula decided to send perishables by rail. Indeed, by the early 1890s, Captain J. T. Lowe retired and decided to sell his schooners—the *Emma* and *Asa M.*—to spongers in Tarpon Springs. Many families lived near Lowe’s Landing and Anona, including the Lowes, McMullens, Hammocks, Meares, Walsinghams, Logans, Oliffs, Hamlins, Baylys, and Wilcoxs. Despite this influx of families, the settlement at Largo soon eclipsed Anona. By the early 1900s, Largo took on the moniker “Citrus City” as nearby farms and groves continued to expand.¹⁴

Jefferson and Josephine Lowe celebrated the arrival of seven children between 1883 and 1895. While keeping shop and serving as Anona’s only postmaster, Jefferson Lowe found time to spend with twins Laura and Eugene (born 9 April 1883), and their five siblings: Newton Phillips (born 25 May 1885), Emma Henrietta (born March 1887), Ernest Elwood (born 13 July 1889), Paul Rutledge (born 17 October 1892), and Victor Emory (born 21 March 1895). Josephine passed away on 3 June 1896 at Anona, leaving Jefferson to raise the seven children. On a subdivision of his father’s land, Jefferson cultivated citrus and other crops. Jefferson’s store also served as a local packing house. In October 1908, he married his second wife, Barbara Ellen “Nellie” Hammock McMullen, daughter of Thomas and Christiana McCall Hammock. Nellie had previously

¹³ Architectural research files created by Stephanie Ferrell reside in the Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; “The Lowe House Architecture and Restoration,” undated manuscript, probably written by Howard Hansen, located in building files at Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Milton Logan interview.

¹⁴ “Wesley Lowe House” pamphlet; *Largo, Then Til*, 32.

been married to John Thomas McMullen, and had at least two children from that earlier union: Angus and Bolivar McMullen.¹⁵

Captain's Lowe's other children also married and took possession of some of the family farmstead. In June 1896, Mary Ellen Lowe tied the knot with Murdo Logan, a native of Scotland born on 10 February 1867. Exactly one month older than Mary Ellen, Murdo had arrived in the United States in 1888. Murdo assisted Captain John and other Lowe family members on the farmstead's growing citrus acreage. Murdo and Mary Ellen Logan raised five children: Janet (born 1898), Guy Southwell (born 10 August 1902), Jessie Shirley (born 1906), John Milton (born 17 May 1909), and Maurice Fraser (born 25 December 1915). After the death of Mary Ellen on 29 September 1916, Wesley and Mary Pinder Lowe brought the infant Maurice to the Lowe House and helped to raise him. Born prematurely, young Maurice required special care. During a cool winter, Wesley and Mary kept the child by their wooden stove. Meanwhile, Asa Milton Lowe celebrated his 1 January 1896 nuptials with Mary Emily Stowell, a resident of Brookfield, Massachusetts, born in May 1875. Asa and Mary had two children: Earl Stowall (born 15 October 1901) and Marion Jennie (born in Tarpon Springs after 1900). Though Asa received a portion of the original lands claimed by his father in the late 1850s, he soon moved away from the homestead to work as a grocery clerk while living in St. Petersburg during the spring of 1900. Asa later moved to Tarpon Springs and Tampa as he pursued other business opportunities.¹⁶

Wesley Brownell and Mary Pinder Lowe started a family in their new home. Mary gave birth to Corinna Lois Lowe, their oldest child, on 28 April 1894 at the Lowe House. Sumner Russell Lowe entered the world on 14 April 1902. Three years later, in 1905, the parents celebrated the arrival of Laura Miriam Lowe. Early that year, on 21 February 1905, Wesley mourned the loss of his mother, Laura Dorothy Meares Lowe. They may have named their infant daughter in her honor. Young Laura often slept on a brass bed with her cousin, Maurice, in the Lowe House. After the elder Laura's death, Wesley built an addition to the Lowe House for his father, Captain J. T. Lowe, who had

¹⁵ Ibid.; Genealogical research appears in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo

¹⁶ Ibid.

switched from working as a mariner to growing fruit—especially citrus—on about seventy acres of his land.¹⁷

The family constructed a small barn to hold supplies for its growing agricultural operations. The exact date of this original structure remains unknown, though Wesley may have built the barn shortly after completing the Lowe House in the late 1880s. This original barn sat close to the Lowe House. By 1911, the family decided to replace the small barn with a larger structure, the barn presently located at Heritage Village. Sumner Lowe, then a small child, recalled that the building of the new barn coincided with the uproar throughout the Pinellas Peninsula as residents “declared their independence” from Hillsborough. He remembered helping his father, Wesley, by “handing wood up from the little barn” as the family used some of the best lumber from the dismantled smaller barn for the present barn. Wesley procured additional lumber from Hussey’s sawmill in Largo, a business that operated near the Atlantic Coast Line (former Orange Belt Railway) tracks and provided lumber for many early structures during the 1910s. The family used part of the barn to store hay and kept horses and cows in stalls on the other side of the structure. Sumner recalled that his father kept a horse-drawn buggy and wagon in the barn before the family purchased an automobile. He later parked his Model T Ford, a gift from his mother, in the barn near the cows and horses.¹⁸

By the time Pinellas received its independence from Hillsborough, members of the extended Lowe family had established firm roots in Monroe, Pinellas, Hillsborough, and Manatee counties. Many branches of the family continued to live in Key West, the seat of Monroe County. Those who lived along the Pinellas Peninsula frequently visited the Keys. For example, Corinna Lowe traveled to Key West in December 1913 with plans “to spend several months” visiting family. Others came from the Keys to the Tampa Bay region: Charles Lowe’s wife spent time with kith and kin in Tampa. She also enjoyed a visit with Robert McMullen’s family in St. Petersburg in February 1916. V. S. Lowe, Monroe County’s superintendent of public instruction, paid a visit during the spring of 1917 on his way back from a meeting in Lake City. He had previously visited

¹⁷ Genealogical research appears in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; “The Lowe House Architecture and Restoration” manuscript.

¹⁸ Sadie Johnson and Ken Ford, “Lowe Barn,” undated manuscript, located in Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; *Largo, Then Til*, 9. *St. Petersburg Times*, undated clipping (circa February 1977).

the central Pinellas about 1903, and mentioned the “many improvements” to the area that he witnessed. After his stay, he traveled to Port Tampa to catch a P & O steamer to Key West. Connections between the Lowe family and pioneer families of Manatee County deserve further exploration. For example, John and Mary Elizabeth Lowe of Key West had seven documented children, including a son named Stephen Francis Lowe. Born on 19 August 1872, Stephen spent two years in Brooklyn before moving to Fogartyville, a small settlement along the Manatee River that took shape long before the incorporation of Bradenton. Many members of the Fogarty family also had strong ties to Key West. On 26 April 1904, Stephen married Grace Fogarty. By 1908, Stephen and Grace moved to Elizabeth Street in Key West to oversee the family’s commercial interests.¹⁹

Meanwhile, Jefferson Theodore Lowe and many of his children lived along the Pinellas Peninsula for most of their adult lives. In 1911, after the legislature approved the separation of Pinellas County effective the following year, Governor Albert Gilchrist appointed “Uncle Jeff” Lowe as one of five original members of the Pinellas County Commission. Two years after his initial appointment, voters elected Jefferson to a second term that ended in 1915. Jefferson maintained a busy schedule, balancing his duties on the family land and at the post office with his countywide responsibilities. He frequently visited with local civic groups and met with constituents. For example, he attended a spring 1914 meeting of the Largo Board of Trade to describe plans for an improved road between St. Petersburg and Largo. The editor of the *Largo Sentinel* visited “Uncle Jeff” and his second wife, the former Barbara Ellen Hammock McMullen, in February 1915, at the invitation of Angus McMullen, one of Barbara’s children from her earlier marriage to John Thomas McMullen. Angus chauffeured the editor and his family, while the Lowes provided an “excellent and bountiful dinner” at noon. After their meal, the editor and family members enjoyed a “delightful drive” from Anona to Indian Rocks along Lowe’s “excellent road.” Victor Lowe, one of Uncle Jeff’s sons, worked in a limestone quarry in the area that provided rocks for the paving of Indian Rocks Road by the 1920s. Meanwhile, Eugene M. Lowe worked as a locomotive engineer. In his later years, he retired to 11534 Lowe Road in Anona, his home at the time of his death on 8 January

¹⁹ *Largo Sentinel*, 1 January 1914, 17 February 1916, 3 May 1917; Ollie Z. Fogarty, *They Called It Fogartyville: A Story of the Fogartys and Fogartyville* (Brooklyn: Theo. Gaus’ Sons, Inc., 1972), 214, 243;

1966. He passed away during a stay at Morton Plant Hospital. Newton P. Lowe left Anona during some of his adult years to work as a marine engineer for P & O Steamship Company out of Key West. Newton's wife, Madeline, became involved with the Anona Methodist Woman's Society for Christian Service. She also served refreshments at group gatherings. Emma participated in an early sewing circle for ladies by 1914. After a spur of the Tampa and Gulf Coast ("Tug and Grunt") Railroad arrived at the present-day site of Kolb Park in Indian Rocks Beach by the mid-1910s, Ernest Lowe operated a gasoline-powered "dinky." Before her death in October 1939, Nellie became an active advocate for the Anona Methodist church and community organizations. Jefferson remained active well into his eighties and nineties: He rode his tricycle around Anona by the 1940s, lived a moderate life, ate many vegetables, and abstained from alcohol. He only smoked on one occasion; he lit a cigar while trying to rob a beehive of honey. After becoming ill from the smoke, he never touched tobacco again. Jefferson passed away on 2 December 1952 at the age of ninety-six.²⁰

While Jefferson remained in Anona, his brother Asa M. Lowe became an important civic leader and public servant in Tarpon Springs. As a young man, A. M. Lowe worked as a clerk in a St. Petersburg general store operated by John Constantine "Tine" Williams, Jr., son of "General" John C. Williams. He later served as a cashier in the Central National Bank and as an educator, and soon became president of Tarpon's Sponge Exchange Bank. In this capacity, he worked closely with the Noblits, Vinsons, Gausens, and other leading families of the community. He joined L. D. Vinson, Granville E. Noblit, S. S. Coachman, John K. Cheyney and numerous other county leaders in coordinating a daylong "Pinellas Patriotic Pageant" on 22 February 1918 with appearances by Governor Sidney J. Catts and his wife at a number of events in Tarpon. Between 1916 and 1920, A. M. Lowe represented the Tarpon Springs and north Pinellas district of the county school board. In October 1919, he earned a seat on the Tarpon Springs city commission, joining fellow members J. W. Alderman, W. E. Little, Willis

Clearwater News, 15 January 1914.

²⁰ Sue Searcy Goldman, *A History of the Board of County Commissioners of Pinellas County* (Clearwater: Pinellas County Government, 1996), 15; *Largo Sentinel*, 22 January 1914, 19 March 1914, 10 May 1951, 26 September 1957, 13 January 1966; *St. Petersburg Times*, 29 October 1939, 30 October 1939, 22 September 1957, 9 January 1966; *Clearwater Sun*, 29 October 1939, 22 September 1957; Indian Rocks Area Historical Society, *Indian Rocks*, 42; *Largo, Then Til*, 8; Milton Logan interview.

Castaing, and Harry Shaw. The *Tarpon Springs Leader* often noted his frequent business trips to Clearwater, Tampa, and other cities in the paper's "Local and Personal" column. On occasion, his business commitments required journeys to distant venues. For example, Asa and his wife drove to Miami in April 1921—long before the "good roads movement" or the Tamiami Trail simplified the journey—to attend a meeting of the Florida Banker's Association. No stranger to automobile travel in the days before highways or uniform traffic laws, Asa took his wife and two children on a weeklong motor tour of cities along Florida's east coast, traveling through Orlando, Sanford, New Smyrna, St. Augustine, and Jacksonville. His meetings with other community leaders often combined business and recreation. For example, Asa M. Lowe and Granville E. Noblit enjoyed a shark fishing trip in 1921. After a long day, they rowed back to the dock at Dunedin and placed their boat on a trailer. During the drive back to Tarpon, they experienced two flat tires; the men did not get back to their homes until well after midnight. Unfazed by this experience, they took a boat into the Gulf of Mexico for a tarpon fishing trip just a few weeks later. While they enjoyed their time on the water, they remarked that "the mosquitoes and sand-flies came near putting them out of business the first night."²¹

The family came together at Anona to mourn the passing of Captain John Thomas Lowe in August 1921. Captain Lowe, who lived with Wesley at the Lowe House during this time, became ill in July 1921. Asa M. Lowe drove his family from their home in Tarpon to visit the family patriarch in mid-July. Though healthy and robust in his late eighties, newspapers reported that he had recently suffered great pain after one of his lower limbs erupted and he picked up an infection. On August 4, Captain Lowe "was up . . . and about the place." At 7:30 the following morning, he passed away at the Lowe House. The Captain's death on August 5 shook members of the family. "Uncle Jeff," the Captain's son who sometimes appeared in early newspapers as "J. T. Lowe, Jr.," became patriarch of the Anona branch of the family. By August 19, A. M. Lowe resigned his seat on the Tarpon city commission, citing "conflicting business interests," though his father's death may have played a role. To add insult to injury, shortly before vacating this office,

²¹ Pinellas County, Board of Public Instruction, *The Golden Anniversary of Pinellas Schools, Celebrating 50 Years of Educational Progress; Superintendent's Semi-centennial Report, 1912-1962* (St. Petersburg: Modern Printing & Publishing, 1962), 6; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, 11 February 1921, 20 April 1921, 22 June

robbers entered Asa's Tarpon Springs home and stole \$80. Although Asa kept a gun in the bedroom for protection, the stealth bandits came into the house and left without notice.²²

Corinna Lowe Moves to Tarpon, Teaches Classes, and Falls in Love

Corinna Lowe, Wesley's daughter, decided to enter the teaching profession during the mid-1910s. Kith and kin around Anona assembled at the home of Emma Lowe on 28 April 1914 to throw a surprise twentieth birthday party for Corinna. A few weeks later, Corinna traveled with her father to Sutherland, now Palm Harbor, to attend commencement ceremonies at Sutherland College. By the fall of 1915, she joined her mother as a member of the Anona school's parent-teachers' association (PTA). Corinna volunteered as secretary of the Anona PTA, while mother Mary Louise served as the organization's vice president. She spent four months in St. Petersburg during the spring of 1916 attending a training institute for teachers. She enjoyed a weeklong visit to Bert McMullen's family in Bay View that summer while preparing for her next round of tests. Corinna spent much of the first week of September 1916 taking teacher certification examinations in Clearwater. After passing the tests, she received an appointment to teach the fifth grade class at Tarpon Springs Elementary School. She continued to teach fifth grade during the 1917-1918 school year, and probably continued to work at the school through the 1921 school year; in May 1921, she took her fifth grade class to a Saturday picnic at Wall Springs. Her younger sister, Laura Miriam Lowe, came to Tarpon by late May and attended the elementary school's commencement exercises. The *Tarpon Springs Leader* mentioned many visits by Laura to her older sister's Tarpon residence during the early 1920s. By early June, after the end of the school year, Corinna returned to Anona with her cousin, Marion Lowe, for an extended stay at the Lowe House.²³

Corinna apparently spent much of her free time in Tarpon with her uncle, Asa M. Lowe, and his family. She often accompanied them on automobile trips throughout

1921, 22 July 1921, 19 August 1921; *Tarpon Springs Evening Leader*, 8 July 1918, *Largo Sentinel*, 7 February 1918, 6 April 1950.

²² *Tarpon Springs Leader*, 15 July 1921, 5 August 1921, 17 August 1921, 19 August 1921.

²³ *Largo Sentinel*, 21 May 1914, 21 October 1915, 18 May 1916, 13 July 1916, 14 September 1916; *Tarpon Springs Progressive*, 16 September 1917; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, 7 February 1921, 9 May 1921, 23 May 1921, 3 June 1921; *Tarpon Springs Evening Leader*, 14 May 1918.

Florida. For example, Corinna joined A. M. Lowe's family and other in-laws for a March 1918 trip to Tampa. They made the journey in part to witness an exceptionally large fish that attracted much curiosity. Before its final disposition, the fish also went on exhibition in St. Petersburg a few days later, where interested parties could witness the specimen after paying an admission charge of fifty cents, a hefty sum at that time. Corinna also assisted with social activities at the A. M. Lowe house. In May 1918, she became the hostess for a gathering of Epworth League members for the local church held at A. M. Lowe's home. These events increased the young woman's visibility in Tarpon; soon she met a newcomer to the community and fell in love.²⁴

Corinna Lowe caught the eye of Maurice P. Condrick, a Pennsylvania native and recent transplant to the city. Born in the Bryn Mawr-Haverford area just west of Philadelphia, Maurice entered the world on 11 February 1890. As a young man, he joined the United States Navy and rose to the rank of lieutenant during World War I. He moved to Ocala after the war ended and engaged in commerce. He arrived in Tarpon by the spring of 1922. Although documents examined do not indicate where he met Corinna, he may have had his first encounter with her at the local post office. By early 1922, Corinna had left the classroom to accept a job at the Tarpon post office. By early January 1923, Wesley and Mary announced the engagement of Corinna to Maurice Condrick. Within a month, Corinna and Maurice—partners who had “a wide acquaintanceship among the younger set” of Tarpon residents—tied the knot in a noontime ceremony in Tampa. Before returning to their home on Levis Street, they took a honeymoon trip that covered the circuit of local relatives: They ventured to Anona, St. Petersburg, Bradenton, and Sarasota. The Condricks raised two sons. Corinna gave birth to their eldest son, John Wesley, on 2 June 1924. On 19 October 1926, Maurice and Corinna celebrated the arrival of Frances Joseph. By this time, the Condricks had moved from Tarpon Springs to a St. Petersburg residence located at 974 Fourth Street South, near Bayboro Harbor.²⁵

At about this time, Sumner Lowe made a long-distance and short-term journey. By the time he reached his early twenties, Sumner had seldom traveled even as far as

²⁴ *Tarpon Springs Evening Leader*, 18 March 1918.

²⁵ *St. Petersburg Times*, 28 May 1970; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, 9 January 1923, 2 February 1923.

Genealogical research appears in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo. Residence

Tampa. When a young doctor and his wife asked Sumner if he could drive them to California in the early 1920s, he felt the wanderlust and received Wesley's permission. The trip in a Model T Ford took three weeks as they followed the southern route through the American Southwest, driving through Tucson and Phoenix before arriving in Los Angeles. While traveling through Texas, Sumner frequently had to open and close cattle gates along the roadway and open range of Texas. During his eighteen months in California, Lowe seldom saw the waterfront and frequently kept two fulltime jobs. Tired of his Western adventure, Sumner returned to Pinellas County, joined the Masonic Lodge in June 1926, became an early member of the Clearwater Lions Club at their organizational meeting in August 1931 at Seven Gables, operated a restaurant on North Garden Avenue in Clearwater, served as a Clearwater city commissioner from 1941 through 1945, and sold Buicks for over thirty years at local dealerships.²⁶

Wesley Lowe suffered the loss of two close family members in 1925. His wife, Mary Louise Pinder Lowe, died on February 15. His youngest child, Laura Miriam Lowe, also died in 1925. Wesley probably became the sole occupant of the once-crowded Lowe House by this time. After these deaths, Sumner returned to the family homestead in Anona. He may have lived there until his wedding to Joanna Brandon on 14 September 1929. After their marriage, Sumner and Joanna moved to a house on Drew Street in Clearwater. At some point after Mary's death, Wesley decided to marry her sister, the former Anne Pinder Martin-Vegue, who came to the area from Miami. She remained Wesley's companion until he passed away in January 1942.²⁷

A Family with Connections throughout the Region

Although many of the pioneer settlers had passed away by the 1920s, ties remained strong among the original families of the Anona area. In the mid-1920s, members of early families—most notably the McMullens and the Meares clans—began to hold reunions that attracted hundred of members. Beginning on Thanksgiving Day, 1927, over 125 members of the Meares family assembled for their first annual reunion.

information for the Condricks appeared in annual issues of R. L. Polk's *St. Petersburg (Pinellas County, Fla.) City Directory*.

²⁶ *St. Petersburg Times*, 14 August 1982.

Four generations of descendants of Richard and William Meares, and Laura Meares Lowe, congregated at Indian Rocks Beach. William “Uncle Billy” Meares, patriarch of this family, considered the gathering an excellent way of “bringing the members together and celebrating in a fitting manner” their contributions to the Pinellas Peninsula. People came from throughout Florida for this reunion: about forty relatives traveled from St. Petersburg, forty from the Seminole-Largo area, and the rest from other Pinellas settlements, Hillsborough County, Jacksonville, and even Key West. Wesley and Jefferson Lowe enjoyed the assembly, one that featured “an old fashioned picnic” with plenty of roast duck and turkey. During the second reunion on Thanksgiving Day, 1928, old-timers mentioned that the Meares “boys” had helped collect some of the shells and Indian relics gathered in the region by the Smithsonian Institution. Seventy members attended the third gathering, held at the county fair grounds in Largo. They enjoyed duck, crab meat, and other homemade delicacies. Jefferson Lowe hosted a Thanksgiving reunion in 1933 with a noontime meal and music provided by members of John McMullen’s Clearwater family. At these reunions, older members passed along their family history to the younger generation. For example, at the seventh gathering in 1934, “Uncle Billy” Meares described how he left Anona for Tampa during the Civil War to avoid capture by Union soldiers, while Richard “Uncle Dickie” Meares mentioned that Union sailors had forced him to launch the family sloop *Osceola* that the family had hidden along Indian Rocks. During this reunion, Maurice Condrick—related to the clan by his marriage to Corinna Lowe—read about other incidents during the Civil War from a family diary. By the fifth generation, members of the Meares family had married many other pioneer families. In addition to the close connections with the Lowes, they had tied the knot with the Campbells, S. D.(Samuel Davis) Harris’s sister, McMullens, Walsinghams, Belchers, Booths, Hammocks, and Wilcoxs, to name a few. A genealogy of the Meares family provides a web that connected many families of the Pinellas Peninsula.²⁸

²⁷ Genealogical research appears in building files, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; “Wesley Lowe House” pamphlet; *St. Petersburg Times*, 14 April 1982; Milton Logan interview.

²⁸ *St. Petersburg Times*, 25 November 1927, 30 November 1928, 2 January 1930, 3 December 1933, 2 January 1934; *Largo Sentinel*, 4 January 1934.

The Condricks of St. Petersburg, and Changes in Anona

Maurice P. and Corinna Lowe Condrick raised their children in St. Petersburg as other family members entered new phases of their lives. By 1929, the Condrick family had moved from the Bayboro area home to a residence at 767-15th Avenue South. They following year and for most of the next two decades, the Condricks lived at 1120-15th Avenue South. During this period, Maurice worked as a plumber. He often made it a tradition on Memorial Day to place flags on the gravesites of Civil War veterans at cemeteries in southern St. Petersburg. As young John and Francis Condrick started primary school, Asa M. Lowe retired as president of a Tarpon Springs bank in 1929 and moved to a home at 1818 Watrous Avenue in the Hyde Park area of Tampa by the early 1930s. Asa's daughter, Marion Jennie Lowe, married Melster Byrd McMullen, son of Dr. Byrd McMullen of Clearwater, in an April 1932 ceremony in Tampa. Marion, a native of Tarpon Springs, had moved to Tampa several years earlier, probably after completing her studies at the Florida State College for Women in Tallahassee and Florida Southern College in Lakeland. Melster, a native of Clearwater, attended Emory University. By 1933, Asa and Mary Lowe, and their son Earl, moved to a home on 1309 South Rome Avenue, just three blocks away from Mary's unmarried sisters, Katherine and Faith Stowell. Although retired from the bank in Tarpon Springs, by 1933 Asa worked as the treasurer for the National Thrift Organization of Florida, located at 309 Franklin Street in downtown Tampa. Before his death in April 1950, Asa moved in with Melster and Marion Lowe McMullen at their Lakeland home. Meanwhile, by the fall of 1933, Milton Logan became the tender of the old Indian Rocks Bridge.²⁹

Elder pioneers of the Meares family passed away by 1940. George W. Meares, brother of Richard and William Meares, originally came to the Anona area about 16 October 1861, possibly to get away from the Union troops controlling Key West during the Civil War; he first moved to Clear Water Harbor, then purchased land near present-day Lakeview Avenue (22nd Avenue South) in St. Petersburg by 1878 as a newlywed with his wife, the former Ellen Louisa Leonardy. At the time he arrived at his tract near

²⁹ Residence information for the Condricks appeared in annual issues of R. L. Polk's *St. Petersburg (Pinellas County, Fla.) City Directory*, while Asa M. Lowe appeared in editions of R. L. Polk's *Tampa (Hillsborough County, Fla.) City Directory*; *St. Petersburg Times*, 10 December 1933, 28 May 1970; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, 15 April 1932, 22 April 1932; *Largo Sentinel*, 6 April 1950.

Lake Maggiore, about seven families lived along that area of the southern Pinellas Peninsula. According to W. L. Straub's 1929 history of Pinellas, George had advocated that Hillsborough County commissioners set aside rights-of-way for early roadways in the region, including Lakeview and Tangerine avenues, and Ninth and Disston streets. Disston was renamed 49th Street by the mid-1920s. George died in early 1930. A few months later, in mid-September, Richard T. Meares died at his home in Indian Rocks. Wesley and Jefferson Lowe served as pall bearers at his Anona funeral. Shortly before she and her husband—"Uncle Billy" Meares—would have celebrated their sixty-seventh anniversary, Amanda Kilgore Meares passed away in February 1938. At the time of her death, Amanda and W. F. Meares were the oldest married couple in Pinellas County. Later that year, someone entered Uncle Billy's name in a contest sponsored by the Florida Theatre and the *St. Petersburg Times* to locate the oldest Pinellas resident who had never watched a motion picture show. Of the twenty-three entries submitted, the nonagenarian from Anona won the prize: He received a check for five dollars and two tickets to see a movie at the Florida Theatre. When asked why he had never entered a movie palace, W. F. Meares replied he "never had been interested in such." In late April 1940, death came to "Uncle Billy" Meares, the Key West native and longtime citrus grower and sawmill operator who first arrived in the area with Captain J. T. Lowe.³⁰

By the time Wesley Lowe died in January 1942, family members had sold most of their land holdings around Lowe's Landing. Although older brother and Key West native Jefferson T. Lowe outlived him by more than a decade, Wesley's death marked the passing of the oldest native of the Pinellas Peninsula at that time. Ill for three weeks, he died after leaving his home to recuperate at Morton F. Plant Hospital. Primary builder of the Lowe House, many at the time remembered Wesley for his leadership among citrus growers, his generosity in donating family lands for the cemetery and Methodist church at Anona, and the delicious bread he baked for his neighbors. A rough-spoken yet quiet man, what Wesley lacked in formal education he possessed with his good temper and "heart of gold." Long before his death, Wesley had met with Abraham Merritt, a magazine editor and publisher from New York. Sometime in the mid-1930s, the Lowes

³⁰ William L. Straub, *History of Pinellas County, Florida: Narrative and Biographical* (St. Augustine: The Record Company, 1929), 386; *Largo Sentinel*, 18 September 1930; 11 February 1938, 6 September 1938;

sold the site of the Lowe House and barn to the Merritts, who soon turned the area into a tropical garden. Wesley then moved in with Milton Logan, his next-door neighbor at the time. The barn provided an excellent storage area for equipment, fertilizer, and materials required to maintain the citrus and exotic plants. During this period, Eleanor Merritt lived in the Lowe House. Arnold Miller, his wife, and two sons—Ralph and Ronnie—also occupied one of the former Lowe homes and groves in the Anona area by 1950-1951.³¹

Moving the House, Piece by Piece

Corinna Lowe Condrick became interested in the fate of her home by the late 1940s. According to her husband's 1970 obituary, Maurice served in the Navy and the Merchant Marine during World War II. Between 1944 and 1948, city directories do not place the Condricks at the 15th Avenue South address, though Corinna and her sons may have continued to live there during this time. By 1948, Abraham Merritt passed away and his widow sold the old Lowe property in Anona to Dr. Hugh Ford and Paul F. Randolph. Renamed Ranford Properties, this parcel provided the Randolphs land for their farm animals, while Hugh Ford took control of the groves. Longtime owner of a Clearwater real estate firm, Randolph co-founded the Carlouel Yacht Club in 1934 and oversaw the development of the Carlouel subdivision along northern Clearwater Beach. At some point before the end of 1949, Corinna learned that the Ranford interests had no use for the Lowe House, and planned to remove it. Concerned that her birth home might become little more than scrap wood, Corinna worked with her husband to obtain the home from Anona and have it placed on land they owned in St. Petersburg along the 800 block of 37th Street North. The 1949 city directory lists that site as "under construction," indicating that Maurice may have started to clear and improve the tract by that time. According to a retrospective article written by longtime *St. Petersburg Times* columnist Dick Bothwell, Maurice paid a few hundred dollars to Randolph for the Lowe House, and numbered the boards as he took the home apart. By 1950, Maurice had arranged to have the home disassembled and moved to their property at 800 – 37th Street North. For an

27 April 1940.

³¹ *St. Petersburg Times*, 23 January 1942; *Tarpon Springs Leader*, 23 January 1942; *Clearwater Sun*, 23 January 1942; *Largo Sentinel*, 6 April 1950, 29 March 1951; Johnson and Ford, "Lowe Barn," undated manuscript; Milton Logan interview.

unknown period of time, the Condricks patiently reconstructed their jigsaw-puzzle home while continuing to occupy their primary residences at 1120 – 15th Avenue South. Directories listed Corinna and Maurice at their 15th Avenue South residence until 1953; the following year, they resided at the rebuilt Lowe House on 37th Street, though their son Francis continued to live at the former house during that year. By the time they occupied the 1880s structure, the home had electrical wires (originally added by the 1920s), a gas heater, an interior bathroom (rather than an outhouse), running water in the kitchen, and a metal roof.³²

The Condricks enjoyed their later years while Randolph's farming operations prospered. Corinna and Maurice watched a subdivision sprout up around their house. They witnessed the construction of the new "main branch" of the St. Petersburg Public Library across the street from their home, along Ninth Avenue North. Their sons had completed college and started successful businesses as doctors. John worked as a professor of veterinary medicine for the University of California in Davis, California, while his brother Francis established a dental practice in Rockville, Maryland. Both children had decided to change the spelling of their last name from Condrick to "Kendrick" at the request of their father, Maurice, who believed that the new spelling was easier for others to remember. By the early 1960s, Ford had decided to sell his share in Randford Properties to the Randolph family. Randolph Farms operated as a successful ranch during the 1950s and 1960s. John C. King, an employee of Randolph for twenty-two years, frequently herded cattle across the quiet and sparsely traveled Indian Rocks Road in the early 1950s from the site of a pasture at present-day Serenity Gardens Memorial Park to nearby dipping vats. With their numerous show horses and farm animals, the Randolphs probably added the extension to the Lowe barn in the 1940s or early 1950s. According to one story discovered by longtime Largo historian Sadie Johnson, a lumber company originally sold the Italian pine used for this extension to a church. When builders learned that a sawmill had cut the lumber improperly, the church agreed to sell it to Paul Randolph. With the expansion complete, King claimed that the

³² Residence information for the Condricks appeared in annual issues of R. L. Polk's *St. Petersburg (Pinellas County, Fla.) City Directory*; *St. Petersburg Times*, 28 May 1970, 20 July 1970; Johnson and Ford, "Lowe Barn," undated manuscript; "The Lowe House Architecture and Restoration," undated

barn easily accommodated fifty tons of hay. By the mid 1960s, Randolph had sold parts of the land, including a section of the pasture that became the cemetery at Serenity Gardens in 1964. As new homes and subdivisions appeared on portions of the Lowe's original homestead along Indian Rocks Road, a matriarch of the family passed away: Corinna Lowe Condrick died on 8 December 1967 while visiting John's home in California.³³

An Uncertain Future and Another Move

With the death of Maurice Condrick in May 1970, the Lowe House once again faced possible demolition. Edward P. Landt, a St. Petersburg realtor and construction company owner, took control of the property and planned to build an apartment complex on the site. With the main branch of the St. Petersburg Public Library across the street and other new subdivisions planned nearby, Landt saw the economic potential of the property. Realizing the house's history, he and John Kendrick contacted the St. Petersburg Historical Society to offer them the house if that organization could raise funds to move the house by the end of June at its liability. The Kendrick children agreed to donate the furnishings as well as the structure to the society. Oma Cross, curator at the St. Petersburg Museum of History and a long-time friend of the Condricks, visited the house in early June. A *St. Petersburg Times* article claimed that while supervising the removal of non-historical items by the Salvation Army, Cross looked through cupboards, boxes, and drawers "with all the adventurous spirit of Columbus." In addition to an old pair of ice skates, she located a linen-backed map of St. Petersburg dating to 1925. With utilities disconnected in the house, the teetotaling curator washed the dust from her hands with an unfinished bottle of gin. Meanwhile, Walter Fuller—a society director—told members that "(w)e should do anything we can to save it" and start an "all-out public campaign" to raise funds. Fuller, who had visited the site in early June, told members that the house contained "four trunks of virtually untouched Floridiana," as well as an

manuscript; Michael Sanders, *Clearwater: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk: Donning, 1983), 134, 182. See page 182 of Sanders's *Clearwater* history for a reproduction of a 1955 brochure from Randolph Farms.

³³ Johnson and Ford, "Lowe Barn," undated manuscript; *Largo Sentinel*, 14 December 1967; *Clearwater Sun*, 10 December 1967; *St. Petersburg Times*, 9 December 1967, 20 July 1970, undated clipping (circa February 1977); *Largo, Then Til*, 9.

unpublished Civil War diary by a Confederate soldier who was “a good writer (that) could hold his whisky.”³⁴

A lack of funds and city council deliberations nearly derailed the effort. The society’s monthly financial report in June 1970 showed year-to-date profits at \$1,161, and debts of \$1,181. Society directors called for an emergency committee meeting to search for possible funds to move the structure to the Haas Museum at 3511 Second Avenue South. They estimated that the move would cost about \$3,000. After raising the money, the society learned that the city’s House Moving Board had turned down its request to move the structure for fear that “this house would be a detriment to the neighborhood where it would go.” Members of the board claimed that the structure posed a fire hazard and would fit too tightly on the proposed site. Lorin Smith, executive director of the historical society, responded that neighbors of the Haas Museum had no objections to the structure. Noting that Landt had consented to a delay on the proposed move, society Attorney Seymour Gordon feared that the house would face demolition if city officials did not approve the move. At first, the St. Petersburg City Council refused to act on the society’s request to overrule the House Moving Board because council members wanted to visit the house and the proposed site before making a decision.³⁵

Members of the St. Petersburg City Council signaled their approval on July 23. After garnering three quick votes in favor of the move, supporters grew tense when Councilperson Horace Williams, Jr., expressed concern about a lack of available parking. A “yes” vote by Councilperson C. Bette Wimbish, however, provided the needed majority to override the House Moving Board. With a five-to-one vote in support of this measure, the St. Petersburg Historical Society finalized plans to move the structure to 3527 Second Avenue South. On the morning of 5 October 1970, drivers along U.S. 19 watched as the house slowly moved along the highway, past the Central Plaza shopping center, and to its new home at the Haas Museum.³⁶

On 20 June 1971, Father’s Day, the Lowe House opened to the public for the first time as part of the Haas Museum complex. Between October 1970 and June 1971,

³⁴ *St. Petersburg Times*, 10 June 1970, 17 June 1970, 20 July 1970, 4 July 1988; “Wesley Lowe House” pamphlet.

³⁵ *St. Petersburg Times*, 10 June 1970, 15 July 1970, 20 July 1970.

³⁶ *St. Petersburg Times*, 24 July 1970, 6 October 1970.

members of the St. Petersburg Historical Society had renovated the structure. Rooms included a variety of antiques, a pump at the kitchen sink, and an old wall telephone, as well as some furnishings from the Condricks, including a brass bed that Wesley Lowe's children slept in that was originally in the south bedroom. When she examined the house's contents in June 1970, Oma Cross had first noticed this bedstead, painted a dull brown, in the former bedroom of Maurice and Corinna Condrick. Sumner Lowe, born in the house in April 1902, attended the grand opening and seemed surprised when he jokingly noted that he had to pay an admission fee of "seventy-five cents to go into my own house." The Lowe House joined other structures of the Haas Museum, an extension of the St. Petersburg Historical Society's museum started in the early 1960s in a bungalow donated by history buff Edna Haas.³⁷

Moving the Barn for the First Time and the House Once Again

While visitors to the Haas Museum enjoyed the restored Lowe House, the Largo Historical Society hoped to preserve the barn. To take advantage of the region's demographic explosion, Lee Dorian established Dorian Housing Corporation and acquired the Randolph Farms property in 1971. Dorian soon planned a new condominium complex on the former Lowe holdings, a large development that kept the Randolph Farms name but eclipsed the rural character of the land and the barn. In 1976, as county officials planned for the opening of Heritage Village, Dorian offered the barn to the Largo Historical Society (LHS) for removal and preservation. That organization invited recently hired park Director Kendrick T. Ford and the chair of the Pinellas County Historical Commission (PCHC) to a meeting where they discussed the fate of the barn. LHS officers had received an estimate of \$6,000 to move the structure, and agreed to cover half of the costs if the Board of County Commissioners paid the other half. Roger M. Carlton, an assistant to the county administrator, told Ford that sufficient funds existed, and Ford used approximately \$500 of his budget for the new park to clear lands around the proposed site for the barn. With the PCHC's approval, the Lowe barn became the third structure moved to Heritage Village (after Plant-Sumner and Seven Gables) and

³⁷ *St. Petersburg Times*, 17 June 1970, 17 June 1971, 18 June 1971, 31 August 1990, undated clipping (circa February 1977); "Wesley Lowe House" pamphlet.

the fourth structure overall (arriving after workers had completed the Phase I building of the Historical Museum). Workers prepared the barn for its move in January 1977, and the PCHC celebrated its arrival by early February. That spring, student members of the American Association of Architects used photographs and drawings of the Lowe barn and the recently-moved Coachman-McMullen cabin to rehabilitate those structures. By the summer of 1977, laborers had completed restoration on the barn, and members of the Largo Historical Society began to place farm equipment and tools in the structure for an exhibit.³⁸

In 1988, the St. Petersburg Historical Society secured a \$25,000 grant from the State of Florida to research and restore the Lowe House, still located at the Haas Museum complex. State Rep. Peter Rudy Wallace provided assistance in securing the grant, and Howard Hansen—a local architectural historian—oversaw preservation efforts. The dismantling of the structure by Maurice Condrick circa 1950 complicated this project; fortunately a 1906 photograph allowed Hansen and others to workers to understand the earlier appearance of the building’s exterior. During this project, workers examined layers of paint to determine earlier colors and newer pieces of lumber not originally part of the structure in the 1880s. Maurice Frasier and John Milton Logan, children of Mary Lowe and Murdo Logan and grandsons of Captain J. T. Lowe, provided invaluable information during interviews in the late 1980s. Maurice and Milton, both natives of Clearwater, recalled the appearance of the house during their childhood years while walking through the building over seven decades later. During this project, workers cleared the house of furnishings, replaced the metal roof with cypress shingles, and removed the interior wiring and plumbing. The Lowe House also required tenting because of a termite infestation. Workers replaced newer door locks with earlier ones obtained from the Hotel Detroit in downtown St. Petersburg. Some doors came from turn-of-the-century homes slated for demolition for the expansion of the University of South Florida’s Bayboro Campus.³⁹

³⁸ *Largo, Then Til*, 208; Johnson and Ford, “Lowe Barn,” undated manuscript; Records of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo, undated (probably fall 1976), 19 January 1977, 16 February 1977, 20 April 1977, 19 September 1977.

³⁹ “Wesley Lowe House” pamphlet.

Despite this ambitious project, the closing of the Haas Museum left the restored structure's fate in jeopardy once again. At a 14 August 1990 meeting, trustees of the St. Petersburg Historical Society decided to consolidate collections and operations by closing the Haas Museum in early 1991. PCHC members convened at the Haas complex on September 19 to discuss this matter with Ford and Mary Wyatt Allen, president of the St. Petersburg Historical Society. Ford expressed some reservations about taking this structure. He worried about overloading the staff and overfilling the park. By this time, discussions had started with members of the McMullen family about the possibility of moving Dan McMullen's home, and he worried that the addition of Lowe's 1888 structure might become "just another house" on the limited acreage at a time when visitors enjoyed the Mercantile store and other non-residential buildings. Fearing the cost of moving this structure, some PCHC commissioners wondered if it might make sense to keep the building in the St. Petersburg area and allow St. Petersburg Preservation to operate it, or perhaps even move it to the Eckerd College campus. Most in attendance agreed that Boyd Hill could not maintain the site, but discussion centered on the St. Petersburg Historical Society's belief that Heritage Village offered the best alternative. Assuming that funds might become available, the PCHC debated potential uses for the Lowe House (a museum with walk-through displays, office space, a gift shop, a place to demonstrate crafts, administrative offices, etc.) as well as an appropriate location (i.e., should it sit next to the barn?). While commissioners discussed the merits and liabilities of a possible move, they also encouraged the historical society to consider other possible locations in St. Petersburg.⁴⁰

By October 1990, Ken Ford reported to the PCHC that he obtained a firm price of \$40,000 from Roesch Housemovers to bring the Lowe House to Heritage Village. Howard Hansen had reassured Ford that if Heritage Village did not accept the house, he would work with Mary Wyatt Allen to prevent its demolition. Ford, who had also started discussions with Nancy McMullen McLaughlin about the Dan McMullen house, worried that his maintenance budget could not support the ongoing needs of any new structures. At a special PCHC meeting held on November 14, members further discussed this urgent

⁴⁰ Records of the Pinellas County Historical Commission, Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo, 19 September 1990

matter. Hansen presented the concerns of the St. Petersburg Historical Society: Board members hoped to see the Lowe House occupy a site near the barn, but they would work on other options if Heritage Village declined their offer. After much discussion, commissioners approved a motion to accept the Lowe House if the St. Petersburg Historical Society funded half of the moving costs and if the Board of County Commissions provided sufficient funds and allowed Ford to hire an additional employee for park maintenance. In a move to save the Lowe House, Ford worked with County Administrator Fred Marquis on an alternative plan where the county covered the cost of the move, with payment deferred until the beginning of the new fiscal year in October 1991. To get the project rolling, the Pinellas County Historical Society agreed to tender an \$8,000 down payment to Roesch and receive its reimbursement, without accumulated interest, sometime in the fall of 1991. Between May 7 and May 8, Roesch brought the Lowe House to Heritage Village, and took a few additional days to get the house from the entrance by Heritage Mercantile to its place near the barn. Workers spent the next two months painting and patching the structure. Aside from a few small exhibits that came from its years at the Haas complex, the Lowe House remained sparsely furnished through the early 2004, due in large measure to security concerns. Despite all of the uncertainty that swirled around this important pioneer structure on so many occasions, in retrospect Ford claimed that “this was the easiest project for the park.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Ibid, 17 October 1990, 14 November 1990, 20 February 1991; “Heritage Village Quarterly Report, April 1-June 30, 1991,” p. 4, located in Heritage Village Library and Archives, Largo; Interview of Ken Ford, former director of Heritage Village, by Stephanie Ferrell and Jim Schnur, 3 May 2003, Heritage Village, Largo.