

Lynn Haven 14th Street School - March Green Elementary - Cain Griffin Park - A. L. Kinsaul Park
From The Archives of Jack O. Cutchens

It was told that initially a grade school was established for those desiring an education who resided primarily in the southeast part of the 1911 plat of Lynn Haven. Classes were held in homes and churches. New Hope Missionary Baptist Church was organized in 1916 and Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church in 1920. A frame building with steeple and bell was completed by the congregation of Allen Chapel in 1923.

During the middle and latter 1930s the Works Progress Administration funded numerous area school remodel, repair and build projects to employ local residents during the Great Depression. March Green, a member of Allen Chapel who had resided at 1304 Louisiana Avenue since the 1920s, emphasized to officials the necessity of a community school. According to a Bay County School Board survey conducted in 1947, a "two-room frame building" was built at the northwest corner of East 14th Street and Colorado Avenue with a capacity of sixty students. The building was recorded as "approximately ten-years old." It was noted in the survey that the building was wired for electricity with overhead fixtures, but the electric company, Gulf Power Company, had not extended company lines to the site. Within the year March Green extended power lines from his Louisiana Avenue home to the Colorado Avenue building. He would pay the school's electric bill for several years. The enrollment in 1947 was forty-two. Names of students and a teacher, Odecee Ralph Chestnut, born 1925, were identified on the 1945 U.S. Census.

The school was closed in 1950 and students were bused to Glenwood Elementary at Panama City. Whit A. Cain, who also worked for the City of Lynn Haven, was hired by the school board as bus driver. He and wife Sadie G. Wynn Barnes operated Whit's Grocery at 402 East 14th Street.

In the early 1960s Oscar Patterson Elementary at Panama City was determined to be "overcrowded." Classes were held in World War II government housing buildings that had been built at the site of today's Everett (Minor C. Keith Government Housing) and Tommy Oliver Stadium (Annie B. Sale Government Housing), and used at those sites for Everett and Jinks classrooms until current buildings were completed in 1950. From 1944 to 1946 I was a resident of the Jinks site named Annie B. Sale Government Housing.

A delegation of Lynn Haven residents led by Evelyn Avis Chestnut Carney, sister of Odecee, and Ruth Mae Jones, also a Chestnut descendant (both ladies descending from Jose Massalina who settled on North St. Andrew's Bay at the home of William M. Loftin in 1822), convinced the school board "to move Lynn Haven children into barracks at Lynn Haven which would reduce the enrollment at Patterson and keep the children of Lynn Haven in their community." Superintendent Earl Cochran and the school board approved the move.

The group requested James Lee Griffin, born 1935 at Lynn Haven, a great, great grandson of Alfred Griffin born near Sneads, Jackson County, Florida in 1835, and a teacher at Glenwood, as principal; Katie Lee Jackson a teacher at Patterson; and Earnestine Stanley Gainer, unemployed, as faculty members. The board purchased blocks 286 and 287 (current site of Cain Griffin Park) as the site for the school residents requested to be named "March Green Elementary." Sharon Marshall Sheffield, born 1942 at Lynn Haven, a great granddaughter of Alfred, was employed at the school.

March Green was born at South Carolina in 1873. His ancestors were among the "Freemen" who had arrived there from Jamaica "prior to 1820." It appears that before 1900 he lived in the vicinity of today's Parker and was employed by the St. Andrew's Lumber Company (site of today's paper mill) organized in 1899. He and Viola Daniels were married in 1909. In 1911 he began to purchase property and built a grocery at 608 Harmon Avenue (East 6th Street). They moved to Majette (vicinity U.S. 231 and Star Avenue) where he was employed as a foreman for Moore Timber Company. June 5, 1917, "Registration Day," he registered for the draft, listing vital information. Viola died at Majette in 1918, most probably a victim of the Spanish Influenza that was sweeping Bay County, killing about 300 persons. In 1921 he married Mary M. Bethune whose father worked with the logging company, and they moved to Lynn Haven where he continued to purchase property. March was told to be a person who "did not cuss" but who carried "a switch" as he supervised log crews, often leased convicts. He was said to have "delivered

gifts and candies to children” and “helped those in need.” In 1941 he worked for C. C. Moore Construction Company, one of two companies building Tyndall Army Airfield. In his later years he would work for Mowat Dairy (south of Hwy 390 and along both sides of Hwy 389). He died in 1969. He was buried in Lynn Haven Community Cemetery established at the site of St. Luke A.M.E. Church (erected by Andrew J. Gay in 1898), the first church at the area that would become Lynn Haven. Gay had commenced building a turpentine still north of the site December 1, 1897. Fletcher M. Marshall, 59, who died August 22, 1922, is the “earliest recorded burial in the cemetery by Brake Funeral Home” founded in 1905 at St. Andrew’s. Brake’s Lynn Haven Parlor was in a building at the rear of the Lynn Haven Bank & Trust building at the corner of West 9th Street and Florida Avenue. The Old Reliable Furniture & Undertaking building (Parlor and horse-drawn hearse behind 716 Ohio Avenue) was founded at Lynn Haven in 1911. No records are known to exist. It was owned by James A. Gard, Lynn Haven’s third mayor. Wilson Furniture & Undertaking Parlor, established 1913, had an office at Robert’s Hall.

March Green Elementary opened on East 16th Street, September, 1963 in one building. When built about 1942, the buildings were elongated containing four complete apartments. They had been remodeled for “three classroom combinations with boy’s and girl’s toilets and a storage room.” Teachers were: first and second grade, Katie Jackson; third and fourth, Earnestine Gainer; and fifth and sixth, principal James Griffin. The first enrollment was “98 which rose to 115 by the end of the school year.”

A second building was moved to the site in 1964 for a library, teacher’s lounge, office, kindergarten and a first grade classroom. The enrollment increased to 130 and Thelma Polite was hired. Henry Griffin was appointed part-time physical education instructor. In 1966 Mary Louise Reynolds Beech, born 1924 at Bessemer, Alabama, was appointed teacher, the “first white teacher in an all black school” for Bay County. March Green Elementary was “accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.”

Federal Judge G. Harrold Carswell ordered segregated schools at Bay County closed in April 1967. Bay County School Superintendent Thomas C. Todd announced that March Green Elementary would be closed and students transferred to the Lynn Haven Elementary 9th Street School opened in 1945.

Lynn Haven High School opened on the second floor of the Lynn Haven Bank & Trust building in 1912. A two-story building was built across 9th Street from today’s Presbyterian Church and opened in 1913. It was remodeled during the Depression. The building burned “the day before the last day of school” in 1944 and the center section of today’s 9th Street elementary school was built.

James Griffin returned to Glenwood Elementary as assistant principal; Earnestine Gainer went to St. Andrew’s Elementary; Kate Polite Youngblood went to Glenwood; Katie Jackson went to Oscar Patterson; Henry Griffin went to Lynn Haven; and Sharon Sheffield went to Glenwood as secretary. “The administration building was moved to Lynn Haven and one building was left on 16th Street to be used as a community center.” The site was recognized as the “17th Street Recreation Area.” In 1968 Glenwood would be changed to A. D. Harris, James Griffin, principal.

About 1966 an often flooded site was designated on Lynn Haven Bayou at West 5th Street as “A. L. Kinsaul Park” named for Alfred Lee Kinsaul, a past mayor and business and civic leader since 1935. He was interested in Lynn Haven’s youth, especially baseball a sport for which he was an avid fan. He never missed play by the Panama City Fliers, founded as an affiliate of the Detroit Tigers to play at Lions Park, carried to completion by John G. Oliver in 1926 (east of 19th Street on U.S. 231 - originally named Collins Stadium for owner Berry H. Collins, vice-president of Minor C. Keith Properties, Inc. responsible for the 1928 Lynn Haven City Hall and first sewer system). Oliver was the father of Tommy Oliver for whom “Tommy Oliver Stadium” is dedicated.

In March 1975 Commissioner Randy Holley, representing the Lynn Haven Commission, met with members of the Bay County School Board requesting the board lease blocks 286 and 287 for the city to build a neighborhood park at the “March Green School Property.” In May City Attorney Michael B. Mann prepared a lease with the board which was accepted. James Griffin and Leon C. Miller would serve on the Lynn Haven Recreation Board.

A lighted ball field, playground area, shuffle board and horseshoe courts, tennis and basketball courts

were planned for the 17th Street Recreation Area to be financed by the city and built with city employees. About \$35,000 would be expended at A. L. Kinsaul and \$15,000 at the 17th Street Recreation Area.

Over the next 45 years both parks were maintained and recreation facilities expanded. Following Hurricane Michael in 2018, both parks were rebuilt. A splash pad, named for James Finch, a resident commercial contractor at Lynn Haven born there in 1950, was added to A. L. Kinsaul. Cain Griffin Park was completely rebuilt with 4 ball parks, playground, splash pad, 2 tennis courts, basketball court and concession with covered picnic area to include public restrooms. It was officially reopened in November 2020. A bronze plaque recognizing the Cain and Griffin families was dedicated October 2, 2021, to the memory of Robert Bose Cain born 1882 and Alfred Griffin born 1875. Mayor Jesse L. Nelson pitched the first ball during the dedication.

Robert was the son of Andrew "Ary" Cain born 1855 in Georgia. Robert died in Alabama in 1922. His wife was Elizabeth "Bessie" Harden, a daughter of Allen Harden and wife Martha Sherman. Bessie and sons Sam born 1900, Leroy born 1902, Whit A. born 1904 and daughter Christine born 1907 at Malvern, Geneva County, Alabama, or Cuthbert, Randolph County, Georgia, moved to Lynn Haven before 1925. Whit and Sam were employed by Southern Kraft Corporation (paper mill). Whit married Dessie Chestnut in 1926, sister of Evelyn, then Sadie G. Wynn Barnes. He was very active with the affairs of Lynn Haven, running for city commissioner in 1972 and '74. He retired after working 15 years with the city and was Chairman of the Board of Deacons at New Hope Missionary Baptist Church. He died in 1995.

Alfred James Griffin born 1835 at Jackson County, Florida, was written in his obituary to have been "a houseboy for a Jackson County planter by the same name," who drove teams from today's Sneads to West St. Andrew's Bay and back hauling salt from the Confederate Government Salt Works between Crooked and Burnt Mill Creeks. He and Julia Freeman were married at Jackson County June 17, 1866. Their many sons and daughters were raised there. After 1910, sons James born 1869 who married Anna Epps at Jackson County in 1892, Jacob "Jake" born 1873 who married Delila Flewellen there in 1897, and daughter Eliza Jane born 1884, widow of Thomas Scott who she married there in 1901, moved to Bay County about 1914 to work at Vicksburg for the Southport Lumber Company of Pensacola.

Vickers-Sale Turpentine Company had organized the site, originally owned by Andrew J. Gay of Grassy Point in 1885, as company headquarters in 1905 (north of the junction of Hwy 77 and West Bay Highway - West Hwy 388). Andrew J. Gay of Gay (site of Panama Country Club) and Dr. George W. Carter of Chipley, had built a turpentine still there in 1900. The community consisted of several houses, barns, sheds, cemetery, commissary, logging railroad between Southport and Goethe (junction at today's Hwy 77 and Hwy 20), stockade, Labor System Lodge of Free & Accepted Masons and two schools built in the 1920s (15 houses were marked on a 1943 map). Vickers-Sale sold the site to Sale-Davis of Georgia in 1905. They leased the site to the Southport Lumber Company in 1909.

Son John H. born 1870 who married Mary Ann Holmes in 1897 at Jackson County, moved from Sneads to Lynn Haven before 1930. He was followed by Lloyd M. Griffin born 1900 at Sneads, son of Alfred born 1875 who had moved from Sneads after 1920 to Faceville, Decatur County, Georgia. Lloyd would work at the "St. Andrew's Golf Links" (today Panama Country Club) open for play November 1, 1925. The course was designed at the request of Minor C. Keith by Charles Hugh Allison in 1923, the most widely known golf architect in the world.

Alfred and wife Julia came to live at Lynn Haven after 1920. Alfred died there January 1, 1926. He was buried in Lynn Haven Community Cemetery. Julia returned to Sneads where she died in 1927.

References: 1850 to 1945 U.S. Censuses; *W.P.A. Historical Churches Survey, Bay County, Florida, 1939*, Sanders. Bay County School Board Building Survey 1946 - 1947; *Panama City Pilot*; *Panama City News Herald*; *Bay County Beacon-Tribune*; *Lynn Haven Spokesman*; *Jackson County, Florida Marriage Records 1848 to 1900*; Brake Funeral Home Records; Washington - Bay County deeds; Ancestry.Com; Lyn Hindsman; Willie B. Carpenter, Jr.; *The History of Bay County From The Beginning*, Smith; *A History of Lynn Haven on St. Andrew's Bay, Florida*, Cutchens

William Leslie Porter

b 24 Mar 1901 Izagora, Holmes Co, FL f James Cooper Porter m Minnie Wilson Collins

d 03 Jul 1968 Lynn Haven, FL bur Mount Hope Cem

w Gladys Fern Zion md 02 Apr 1924 Bay Co, FL

b 10 Dec 1903 Lebanon, In f Joel Zion m Lena Beatrice Sherrick

d 17 Jun 2000 Lynn Haven, FL bur Mount Hope Cem

The Porter family moved to Grassy Point (north of D. J. Bailey Bridge, today Mill Point named for a mill Andrew J. Gay built there about 1885) before 1910 where their father began a fishing business. He died in 1914 and the family moved to the "Gay Woods" (named for Andrew J. Gay, site of Panama Country Club). Leslie, and brother Raymond born 1899, established a building construction company at the northwest corner of Ohio Avenue and West 14th Street. They built their mother, Minnie, a house at 702 Colorado Avenue, on the "Country Club Road." By 1940 he and Raymond had established a filling station and garage at the Ohio site which would also become a distributor for auto parts, and body repair.

He would serve as a city commissioner, president of the Lynn Haven Chamber of Commerce, and held several offices with the Lynn Haven Lions Club and Scarlet Lodge I.O.O.F., serving as Nobel Grand in 1928. As president of the chamber in 1951 he pushed the establishment of a junior high school at Lynn Haven and paving of West 14th Street from Hwy 77 to U.S. Hwy 231. In 1968 he began working with the State Road Department to make Hwy 77 a four-lane highway from U.S. Hwy 231 through Lynn Haven.

After World War II the D. J. Bailey Bridge was completed and Hwy 77 continued through "Chautauqua Park" (originally called Lynn Park), then across North Bay to Mill Point. Previously State Road No. 52 (Hwy 77) turned east off Ohio Avenue onto East Fifth Street, then north onto Wisconsin Avenue to cross the timber trestle Lynn Haven Bridge to Grassy Point. The road department, in exchange for a right-of-way through the park owned by the Lynn Haven Garden Club, agreed to erect a wayside park in a grove of pines and oaks not taken over for the new highway. During construction of the road, a pit was dug for fill east and south of the south end of the bridge. It would become the City of Lynn Haven's trash dump. North of the dump, the wayside park was constructed on a picturesque point of land east of the bridge and west of Indiana Avenue. The entrance was from Indiana Avenue at Second Street where a cinder block restroom was located on the southwest corner. A cable across the entrance prevented access except during daylight.

In 1951 Chamber President Porter began efforts to improve the park and eliminate the trash site.

Beginning in 1955 the Road Department, County Commission and Lynn Haven Chamber improved the wayside park. A channel was dug along the west side of Indiana Avenue and a boat basin, and parking area was created at the site of the dump. The spoil from the site was used to cover trash, fill a finger of Maxwell Bayou (Lynn Haven Harbor west of D.J. Bailey Bridge); and trucks hauled fill to a recreation site on East 16th Street (today Cain Griffin Park). Entrances were at Hwy 77 (later eliminated) and at Michigan Avenue.

"A committee of Chamber and city officials went to the state and requested that the park be dedicated to Leslie Porter." April 28, 1956 the park was dedicated as "Leslie Porter Wayside Park."

Wife, Gladys, was librarian for McMullen Library in the 1950s and '60s. She kept the library open six days a week, usually closing one-hour for lunch.

Leslie Porter was born at Holmes County in 1901. His family moved to Lynn Haven about 1914. He and a brother established a construction company and garage at Lynn Haven. He was a City Commissioner and member of fraternities and civic groups. As Chamber President, he proposed the paving of Hwy 390, a Junior High School, wayside park and 4-laning Hwy 77. "A committee requested the state to dedicate the park to Leslie Porter." This park was dedicated April 28, 1956.

Alfred Lee "Alf" Kinsaul

b 21 Aug 1900 Hartford, AL f William "Willie" Franklin Kinsaul m Georgia Beatrice McGovern

d 23 Jul 1965 Lynn Haven, FL bur Mount Hope Cem

w Wanda Lucinda Hartwick md 26 Sep 1923 Bay Co, FL

b 29 Oct 1906 Chesterfield, IL f Edwin Hartwick m Laura Peebles

d 16 Aug 1999 Lynn Haven, FL bur Mount Hope Cem

Moved from Hartford to Bonifay, Florida, where 20 year old "Alf" was a "barber." Family moved to Millville. He and Wanda were married at Bay County in 1923. The Hartwicks owned a dairy in the vicinity of today's Mowat Dairy where Alf worked delivering milk. He and Wanda purchased the Silver Service Cleaners at 504 W 6th Street in Panama City and operated a filling station and lunch counter on Ohio Avenue between 4th and 5th Streets in 1935. He sold the station to Angus Nichols and Alf and Wanda opened "Al's Café" at 820 Florida Avenue. In 1948 and '49 he served as Mayor. He was a member of the Lynn Haven Lions Club, Chamber of Commerce and in 1950 he was Noble Grand for Scarlet Lodge I.O.O.F. and ran for county commissioner. He would serve as chairman for the March of Dimes at Lynn Haven. He and Wanda opened the Lynn Haven Furniture Company at 824 Florida Avenue in 1949. An avid baseball fan who was concerned about Lynn Haven's youth, he organized the "A.L. Kinsaul Little League" in 1962. Initial teams were: Hanson's Drugs; Van Kleeck Hardware; Croley Construction Co.; McCormick Contracting Co; Commonwealth Corp; Farrell-Barnes... Play at Lynn Haven was on "two-fields" at A. L. Kinsaul Park built 1964 to 1965. Major improvements were made on A. L. Kinsaul and the 17th Street Recreation Area in the late 1970s.

Son, William V. "Billy" was the second city manager at Lynn Haven, serving for 30 years.

Grandson, "Bill" is Bay County Clerk of the Court.

Alfred Lee Kinsaul was born at Hartford, Alabama, in 1900. He was a civic and business leader at Lynn Haven since the 1930s, serving as Mayor.

An avid baseball fan involved with youth, he organized the A.L. Kinsaul Little Major League in 1962. This park is dedicated in memory of him.