

First Families inspiresBy **SARAH SAPP**

Bay County Genealogical Society

The First Families of Bay County, Florida, Certification Program seeks to identify and honor the first families of Bay County, recognize their proven descendants, and promote interest in the rich genealogical heritage and history of Bay County. This program is administered by the Bay County Genealogical Society of Florida.

In 2009, I submitted my family research to the First Families of Bay County, Florida, Certification Program. I was able to certify nine Bay County pioneers and prove my descent from them. It was a rewarding experience for 38 years of research and documentation. It also was a privilege to give honor to my ancestors that played a big part in the beginning of Bay County. Also to honor my Grandmother Ross, a friend and a family member that sparked my interest in this research.

In my documentation process, I began to uncover things about my ancestors that no in my immediate family knew. Through the research and documentation, I feel I've gotten to know my great- and great-great-grandparents that I did not have the privilege of meeting. Others became interested in my family and offered additional research information. I've been able to connect with distant family I probably would not ever have known.

When I began my research many years back, it was not as easy as today. It required lots of letter writing, visits to libraries,

courthouses, cemeteries and tracking down living relatives. At times I'd run into a block because the family member that knew the information I was seeking did not want to share it. This did not stop me, it just made the information harder to obtain, and sometimes I could not. The Internet has made the research so much easier, and with this new tool genealogists are growing in numbers each year. We are always ready to share our finds and our passion and to help others.

People think tracing your past is just about names and dates, but it is so much more.

I think the best part of the research is the stories you find. The stories are sometimes funny, sad or romantic. Reading the stories, good or bad, gives you a better understanding of what they went through. Then there are the pictures you find. When you look at those pictures and see a family resemblance, it is like finding gold. Genealogists never stop researching family histories because one find opens doors to other possibilities. Genealogists are trying to preserve the family histories for future generations. Always be willing to share you life stories because you never know who it will impact.

The Bay County Genealogy Society members are always willing to give advice in your research. They also offer after hour workshops at the Bay County Library at certain times to help people get started in their research.

For more information, visit www.rotsweb.ancestry.com/~flbcgs/index.html.