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LEVICOLLER
Born March 22, 1791, Springfield, Mass.; died July 9, 1855, Tampa, Fla

JEANETTE COLLER HASKINS (MRS. W. T.)
Born Sept. 25, 1841, Tampa, Fla.; died July 29, 1935, Tampa, Fla
LEVI COLLER CAME TO TAMPA FOR "THE CURE"

By JO ANN HASKINS CIMINO

Levi and Nancy Dixon Coller began their married life in 1813 on a land grant on Pigeon Creek near the St. Mary's River in north Florida. Their first child Nancy, who became Mrs. Robert Jackson, was born shortly after the young family experienced the death of Mrs. Coller's father, John Britton Dixon. He had been wounded by Indians and very much feared being scalped by them. The family hid in an abandoned cabin, and there John Dixon died. After this tragedy, they traveled on to Alachua County near present-day Gainesville. This is where Levi learned of the better land farther south.

A story passed down to his descendants tells that Levi Coller had contracted a respiratory ailment. He had been told by friendly Indians that curative powers would be found on the sheltered shores of Tampa Bay. He was told to fashion a shallow, circular dugout and lie down on the sand within. The perimeter of the dugout should be lined with burning pine knots, known as "lighter knots". These were found in abundance in the Florida woodland. What length of time this "Cure" would take is unknown.

TROUBLES WITH INDIANS

Levi and his family traveled on to the Bay Area. They arrived in 1824, with their young children along with Nancy's brothers, Britton and John Dixon. Some of their cattle had been stolen and released in the wilds by Indians. It was their hope that some of these would be found along the way, and would help sustain them in the new territory. They were Tampa's first family settlers. The healing "Cure" of the bountiful, better land must have instilled strength during his recovery, for Levi Coller lived for another 32 years through the early settlement of Tampa.

JEANNETTE COLLER HASKINS TELLS OF ONE OF THE FIRST GOVERNMENT CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN THE BAY AREA AND THE BEGINNING OF THE LOCAL CITRUS INDUSTRY

"When the Coller family arrived here they found a beautiful country, with fish and game in abundance. Soldiers were here under the command of Colonel George M. Brooke." The youngest daughter, Jeannette, then Mrs. William T. Haskins, gave an account to The Tampa Tribune in December, 1914, of some of her own experiences and some of the stories told to her by her family of Fort Brooke and the life of the early settlers. "There was no village here at the time of the arrival of the soldiers. Key West, Pensacola, Tallahassee, Apalachicola, St. Joseph's Bay and St. Augustine were the principal cities of the state then. One of the reasons the soldiers had been sent to Tampa was to stop the cutting of the giant live oak trees. In those days of wooden ships, the staunch oak was in demand; particularly such great trees as then formed a massive grove covering practically all of what is now (1914) known as The Garrison. Then, as the United States
was forced to put soldiers in the fields against the Indians, Tampa became the headquarters for the troops on the west coast."

**START OF CITRUS INDUSTRY**

When the Coller's first came to Tampa, their home was near what is now Six Mile Creek. In those days it was known as Coller Creek. There they lived in times of peace, but when Indian uprisings came, they were forced to the shelter of the Garrison. "On his farm he raised livestock, and some of this he sold to Fort Brooke. Levi Coller, a hardy woodsman, usually found profitable employment," Jeannette related. "One of his ventures was the building of a boat. A sailor ran this boat for him between Tampa and Cuba, bringing back fruit and produce that he sold to the Garrison. Oranges in barrels were brought back also. The oranges that rotted on the way over from Cuba were carefully saved. When the boat landed it was his custom to cover the spoiled fruit over with a little soil in rows. Thus he began the first nursery in the state of Florida. From these oranges the first groves were planted in Hillsborough County. The Odet Phillippe grove along Old Tampa Bay was the first to be planted with these trees. Levi Coller's grove on his farm was the second in the area. He sold nursery stock to many of the pioneers from the old stock that was grown on his land."

Levi Coller had served as a guide for the troops in Fort Brooke. Later in his life he moved into town and was granted permission to build his house inside of the military reservation. His daughter, while recalling her childhood days, described the Fort: "The military grounds were kept in beautiful condition with the cleared drilling grounds in front of the general's quarters and winding walks throughout the mammoth oaks."

Throughout the lifetime of Jeannette Coller, Tampa had grown from only a military post at her birth to an outpost of civilization. She walked through the mighty oaks and smelled the blossoms of the budding Tampa citrus industry. For 94 years she saw Tampa grow from a small fortress defending the sturdy oaks to the advent of the cigar industry and the commercial growth of today's Tampa.