

# APALACHICOLA HISTORY

APALACHICOLA AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Volume 3, No. 2

Fall 2011

## THE TRIAL OF JOHN G. RUGE

During the early years of the twentieth century John G. Ruge, along with his brother George, were known as two of the wealthiest men in Apalachicola. The brothers had operated the first successful oyster canning factory in Apalachicola since 1886. John and his wife, Fannie, lived in a grand house at the corner of Bay Avenue and Laurel Street (10th Street today).

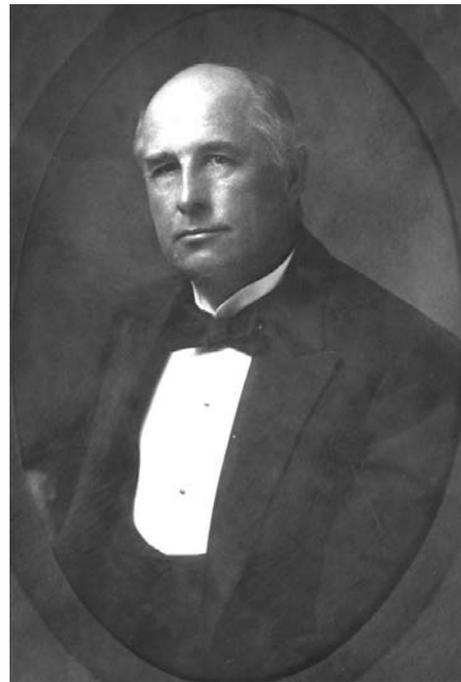
In addition to being known for his wealth, John Ruge was also known around town for his gruff personality, which sometimes got him into trouble. When he became angry with Postmaster Henry after finding the letters in his post office box had been opened, he ended up charged with using inappropriate language, much to the amusement of Apalachicola's citizens. His subsequent trial was a prominent event in the city.

The following account of the trial in the Mayor's Court was published in the Apalachicola Times on Saturday, August 29, 1914.

### **PROMINENT MEN FALL OUT A TRIAL BEFORE THE MAYOR IN THE PRESENCE OF MANY CITIZENS**

Long before Mayor Teague took his chair in the city court room Wednesday morning, all the available seats in the court room were occupied by citizens attracted by

the prominence of the main actors in the drama. When Mayor Teague appeared another crowd of citizens surged into the court room behind him, satisfied to stand while the court proceeded with the work in hand.



John G. Ruge (Florida Photographic Archives)

Attorney C. H. B. Floyd soon appeared with his client, Mr. John G. Ruge, who was charged in an affidavit made by Mr. C. I. Henry with having used unbecoming language to the complainant in a public place,

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to wit, the post office.

Mr. R. Don McLeod, Jr., represented the complainant. After the attorneys held a short conference in the adjoining room, Mr. McLeod made out a new affidavit and presented it to his client, Mr. Henry, for his signature. The proceeding finished, the attorneys announced ready for trial and Marshal Murphy, opened the court with the usual proclamation.

The city's witnesses were sworn by Mr. McLeod. Mr. Floyd objected on the ground that the Mayor was the proper person to administer the oath. Yielding to the objection Mr. Teague then administered the oath. Mr. Floyd then asked that the witnesses be placed under the rule. No objection being offered, the witnesses, with the exception of Mr. Henry, were requested to retire and not to talk about the case among themselves or to other parties. Mr. Henry's statement in effect was that Mr. Ruge came to the post office Tuesday morning for his mail, and that he found one or more letters in his lock box that had been opened. Mr. Ruge entered the post office proper, where Mr. Henry keeps his desk, and in a loud and insulting voice upbraided Mr. Henry on account of the opened letters that he found in his lock box. The witness stated that he told Mr. Ruge that he had but just returned from his vacation and that he did not know who opened his letters. The witness also swore that Mr. Ruge was angry and that he used "Cuss" words. Mr. Henry also admitted that later Mr. Ruge returned to the post office and apologized; that he had

found out that his employee, Mr. Prell, had opened the letters referred to. Mr. Henry said that he refused to accept any apologies, and told Mr. Ruge that he would have him arrested. Mr. Chas. Schoene, assistant postmaster, said that the language of Mr. Ruge was loud, angry and insulting; that it was loud enough to be heard for some distance. Mr. Duggar testified that he heard only a few words. Mr. Cotter heard only a few words.

The city rested and Mr. Ruge took the stand in his own defense. He swore that the language used was "you must take me to be a dam fool;" that he did not call Mr. Henry a "dam fool."

At the conclusion of the testimony after a little preliminary sparring by the attorneys Mr. Floyd opened for the defense. Those who expected pyrotechnics were disappointed. On the contrary, Mr. Floyd's argument was delivered in a conversational tone without a thrill or a furbelow, and lasted for about ten minutes.

Mr. McLeod followed with a ten minute talk for the prosecution. He caused a ripple through the audience by quoting a remark made by Judge Quinn, who said that he was "d—tired of public insults, and private apologies."

At the conclusion of Mr. McLeod's talk Mayor Teague announced that he would fine the defendant \$6.00 and the costs of the prosecution. In default of payment to be confined in the City jail for fifteen days.

And the crowd filed out of the court room.



The Ruge Brothers canning plant, located at the mouth of the Apalachicola River.

Photograph courtesy of the Florida State Archives.

## THE CIVIL WAR IN APALACHICOLA 150 YEARS AGO

At the beginning of the Civil War the only defense Apalachicola had were four locally recruited companies of soldiers, who were poorly equipped. Although one company was designated as artillerists, they had no cannons with which to defend the town until the state of Florida provided two old 32-pounders. These were entrenched along the bayfront to repel any attack from Northern ships.

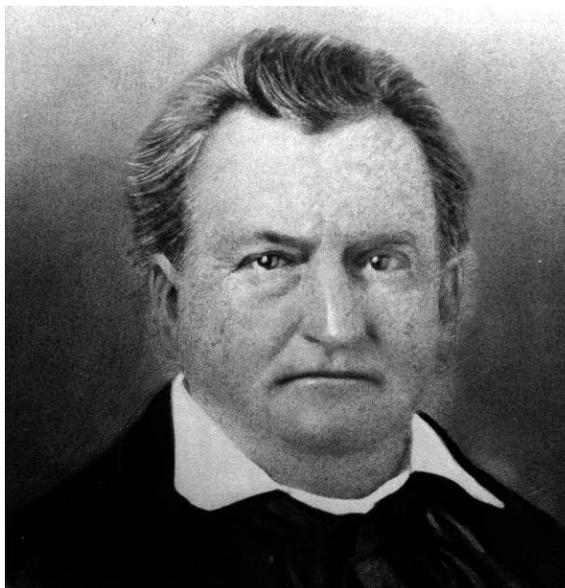
Apalachicola, along with Pensacola, St. Marks, Tampa, St. Augustine, Jacksonville and Fernandina, were the critical coastal points in Florida that the State felt must be defended. As soon as troops and supplies became available they were directed to these locations. On July 2, 1862, ten 24 pounder cannons arrived at Apalachicola onboard the steamer *River Bride*.

John D. Atkins, a local 44-year old, Virginia-born merchant, was originally in command of the local troops at Apalachicola. By July some Confederate troops from the 4<sup>th</sup> Florida Infantry Regiment were stationed in town. Companies from this regiment were scattered along the Florida coast from Fernandina to Apalachicola. The Colonel of the 4<sup>th</sup> Florida was Edward A. Hopkins, a wealthy planter from Duval County.

Hopkins had been the Constitutional Union party's candidate for governor, and Democrat John Milton's chief rival in the 1860 election. Milton, who resided in Jackson County, won the election in 1860, but he was not sworn into office until October 1861. While he was waiting to be inaugurated Milton fumed that Madison Starke Perry, his predecessor in office and political rival, was filling all the military appointments in state units with Perry's political cronies. Hopkins, who was placed in charge of the defenses of Apalachicola, came in for especially blistering attacks.

In an effort to provide better protection to Apalachicola and keep the Federal blockading vessels outside of Apalachicola Bay the Confederates built a fort on St. Vincent Island near West Pass. To arm and garrison this redoubt Colonel Hopkins removed all the guns and Confederate troops from Apalachicola to St. Vincent Island. The State troops in Apalachicola were left without any practical way of defending the town although they did begin digging a ditch around the entire town, three feet wide by three feet deep. (This might be the beginning of the large drainage ditch that encircles Apalachicola to this day along 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and Avenue M.)

Governor-elect Milton was livid. After a visit to Apalachicola in August he pointed out in a letter to the Confederate Secretary of War that the Union fleet could use any of the other entrances into Apalachicola Bay to circumvent the fort on St. Vincent Island and easily capture Apalachicola. That would isolate the troops on St. Vincent Island and force them to surrender.



**John Milton**

Florida's Governor 1861-1865

Photograph courtesy of the Florida State Archives

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The Union Navy demonstrated the truth of Milton's assertion. From the blockading vessels a ship, with her rigging partially dismantled, was visible in the bay. On the night of August 26 five boats from the U.S.S. *Montgomery* and U.S.S. *R. R. Cuyler* entered the bay, most probably by one of these alternative inlets through St. George Island, and captured the vessel without opposition. The ship proved to be the *Finland*, being prepared to run the blockade. The Union sailors also captured a schooner lying alongside the *Finland* supplying it with fresh water.

All day on the 27<sup>th</sup> the Union crew worked to rig enough canvas to allow the *Finland* to sail out of the bay. On the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup>, however, a steamer towing a large schooner approached from the direction of Apalachicola. Still being in the bay and beyond the protection of the guns of the blockading vessels the Union sailors set fire to the *Finland* and fled to their own ships, taking the captured crewmen and the small schooner with them. The *Finland* burned to the water's edge and sank.

After taking on 700 gallons of fresh water from the schooner that had been supplying the *Finland*, the Northern blockaders paroled its owner, described as a "poor Italian", and his two crew members. The master of the *Finland* was also allowed to return to Apalachicola. Fifteen of the crew members of the *Finland*, including ten free black sailors, preferred to remain on the blockading vessels, fearing they would be impressed by the Confederates if they returned to shore.

This foray into the bay created great consternation among the defenders of Apalachicola that the Union fleet was about to descend upon the town and burn it. The Southerners were not aware that the deep-drafted vessels offshore could not get over the bar into the bay, much less approach the town.

John Milton continued his campaign

against Colonel Hopkins. He suggested moving Colonel Hopkins's regiment to Pensacola and moving the First Florida Infantry Regiment, currently in Pensacola, to man the Apalachicola defenses. This suggestion did not meet with acceptance by the authorities, but after he was inaugurated as governor in October 1861, John Milton proposed to defend Apalachicola with state troops if the Confederate government would provide two good engineers to fortify the town and two good artillerists to drill the troops.

The Confederate government accepted this offer, and Gov. Milton called out state troops to garrison the town. Companies from Washington and Holmes Counties were ordered to report to Apalachicola. To command the garrison Governor Milton appointed Lt. Colonel Thomas E. James of Gadsden County. Lt. Col. James was a 28-year old planter and physician.

Col. Hopkins had been involved in some unspecified "difficulties in Apalachicola" and was ordered to remain on St. Vincent Island. To promote harmony among all the Southern troops protecting the town Gov. Milton directed Lt. Col. James to report to Col. Hopkins and obey his orders. After a few day, however, Col. Hopkins conduct had become so "extraordinary" that Gov. Milton rescinded his direction to Lt. Col. James, leaving Hopkins in command of just St. Vincent Island, while the governor sent his aide, Colonel Richard F. Floyd, to command the state troops on the mainland.

Colonel Floyd was a 50-year old planter from St. Johns County. A native of Georgia, in 1860 he owned 22 slaves and had a net worth of \$40,200.

This split command of the defenses did not last very long. Col. Hopkins was ordered to St. Marks with his command. At the end of October Governor Milton asked for and received permission to abandon the fort on St. Vincent Island. By the middle of No-

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vember all of the cannons and munitions had been removed from the island and the fort was destroyed. All the troops guarding Apalachicola were congregated on the mainland in and around the town.

Although the Federal blockade cut off Apalachicola's lifeblood, shipping out cotton and importing necessities, the citizens benefited from the military activity around the bay. Nearly everyone got into the business of selling supplies to the military. Alexander Yent, who lived by the bayou that bears his name, supplied beef to the coast guard company that patrolled Alligator Harbor. He also was paid \$138.50 for supplying quarters to the military.

Most of the businessmen in Apalachicola also sold supplies or services to the military stationed around the bay. David G. Raney earned \$114.50 for hauling supplies at Apalachicola from September through November, 1861. Thomas Orman was paid \$538.05 for a wheelbarrow, boards, pilings, timber and the rent on a warehouse. E. Jones rented out his schooner, *California*, to the military for \$100 per month. Jacob Lind cooked for 15 ½ days for one company of men assigned to Apalachicola, earning \$122.96.

The military was in need of just about every sort of supplies imaginable. From local merchants they purchased knives and forks, plates, pans, spoons, blankets, a writing table, an iron safe, sacks, nails, whale oil, barrels, brooms, axes, shovels, jugs, twine, paper bags, oats, corn, hay, peas, potatoes, lime, tar, hinges, lanterns, buckshot and gunpowder. Dr. Samuel Spencer, Franklin County's delegate to the secession convention, rented out one of his slaves to work in the military hospital for \$12 per month. Even the staunchly Unionist Dr. A. W. Chapman got into the business of supplying the Southern soldiers. He sold 500 percussion caps to the Milton Artillery for \$5.00.

With the armaments removed from St. Vincent Island the Florida troops constructed eight batteries along the shore of the bay to protect the water approaches to the town. There was a shortage of trained military engineers, so whomever possible was pressed into service. Samuel Benezet, a 40-year old, Pennsylvania-born merchant in Apalachicola, served as the superintending engineer for the construction of the batteries. He was also the treasurer of the telegraph company. In a December 14, 1861, report to the now promoted General Richard Floyd, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Mickle of the Confederate States Army, who had been sent by General Braxton Bragg to inspect the fortifications at Apalachicola, stated that he found the works satisfactory although he also admitted that he had little experience in military engineering. Luckily for Apalachicola the batteries along Bay Avenue would never be tested.

The remains of one of the batteries can still be seen on the south side of Bay Avenue at 10<sup>th</sup> Street.



The remains of the Confederate gun emplacements constructed in 1861 at the intersection of Bay Avenue and 10th Street.



Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives

## LOVETT HOUSE

The Lovett house sat on the corner of Avenue B and 5th Street. One of the oldest homes in Apalachicola, it predated the Civil War. One newspaper article from 1961 stated it was built in 1828, while other sources place its construction at a later date. What is certain is that Daniel Pope Holland, a local attorney, owned the home in 1860. From this house his wife, Mary Holland, hosted a party to see the Franklin Rifles off when they left for Pensacola and the Civil War in 1861.

The house was three stories tall. The first floor was brick with the two upper floors being of frame construction. Patrick Lovett purchased the house in 1890 for the back taxes. He fixed the property up and moved his family into the home. They continued to live there until the last two spinster daughters died in the late 1950s.

The vacant house was a liability for the owners. It needed a lot of work, although the structure was solid. There was nobody at the time who was willing to undertake the restoration of the house, so it was torn down in 1960, when the above photograph was taken. The destruction of this old home generated several irate editorials in *The Apalachicola Times* decrying the loss of Apalachicola's heritage.

# 2011-2012 ILSE NEWELL CONCERT SERIES

The schedule for the 2011-2012 Ilse Newell Concert Series has been set, and this promises to be one of the most entertaining seasons yet. A great line-up of artists will be providing a varied selection of musical performances. There will be something for every musical taste. All of the concerts will be held at Trinity Episcopal Church except the April 8 Nashville Dixieland Jazz concert, which will be held in Lafayette Park. Mark your calendar now so you will not miss any of these great productions.

December 11	Bay Area Coral Society Holiday Concert
January 8	Adam Kossler, Classical Guitarist
January 29	David Kalhous, Piano, Florida State University School of Music Faculty
February 19	Carla Conners, Soprano and Timothy Hoekman, Piano
March 4	FSU Voice Performance Majors in Concert
March 25	Bay Area Choral Society presents Faure's Requiem
April 8	Concert in the Park – Nashville Dixieland Jazz

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## CHESTNUT CEMETERY GHOSTWALK

The Apalachicola Area Historical Society will host the annual GhostWalk at Chestnut Street Cemetery in Apalachicola on Saturday, October 29, beginning at 7 p.m. Please join us for a tour of this notable necropolis, meet some of the permanent residents, and hear their stories from old Apalachicola. It will be a fun evening for all ages. Donations are appreciated. All funds raised will go towards the preservation of the cemetery.

Volunteers are still needed to help with the GhostWalk. There are jobs available for all ages and skill levels. We need people to help set up, fill and place luminaries, greet visitors as they come in the cemetery, lead tour groups through the tombstones and assist in cleaning up afterwards. If you would like to assist with this worthwhile project you can contact Dolores Roux at 653-9081 for further information.



*Apalachicola History*

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