Hopewell
Little Alafia River

4 pgs

The following is an excerpt from:
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY
HISTORIC RESOURCES SURVEY REPORT

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Bureau of Historic Preservation

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Prepared by:
Hillsborough County Planning & Growth Management
601 East Kennedy Boulevard, P.O. Box 1110, Tampa, Florida 33601

* These excerpts have been taken from the Historic Resources Survey Report with permission given by the Hillsborough County Historic Resources Review Board on December 15, 2003. The intention is to help provide targeted historical information on the water bodies in Hillsborough County.
**Hopewell (Callsville)**

Hopewell is situated along State Road 39, just south of State Road 60, and depending on who you talk to, may extend just north of State Road 60. The earliest known settlement in this section of east Hillsborough was the “Turner Plantation,” a large antebellum estate that probably did not survive the Civil War. Little is known of this plantation or of its owners. However, there was a Moses Turner listed in the 1850 Census who lived in the Simmons Hammock Settlement, which is near present day Seffner, that might have been the owner of the Turner Plantation. South Carolina born Turner was a 58 year old planter married to Olive Turner, a 56 year old South Carolina native. They had three Florida born daughters ranging in age from 13 to 18. Additionally, Henry Seastrong, a ten year old Florida native, resided in the Turner household.1

Sometime during the latter half of the 19th century, a community arose known as Callsville. No historical documentation has been found detailing the origin of the name. Callsville existed as early as May 14, 1883, when George W. Wells established a post office. The post office closed on May 13, 1884, with mail being sent to Alafia. Mr. Wells, along with his family, eventually relocated to the nascent Plant City. Supposedly, Callsville population totaled 200 people in 1883. However, this figure is suspect because only 20 farmers tilled a total of 1620 acres of soil. Farm size ranged from N. English’s 40 acres to A.A. Archer’s 140 acres, averaging 81 acres per farm. An 1890 map indicates that Callsville was located approximately where Hopewell is today. Further evidence supporting the fact that Callsville became Hopewell is that three McDonalds farmed in Callsville in 1883, one of whom had the initials J.R. A John Robert McDonald settled in what would become the community of Hopewell in 1870.ii

John McDonald, along with his wife Sarah and their four children, moved from Morgan County, Alabama, to the Suwannee River in north Florida in 1868. Two years later, the McDonalds moved further south, settling in Callsville. Mr. McDonald supported his family by transporting goods from Tampa to the Alafia settlement, located south of Callsville. He purchased several hundred acres of land at $2.50 per acre and planted orange trees, becoming one of the first orange growers in the area. By 1883, the McDonalds -- John and his two sons Walter and William -- owned 260 acres. Upon their arrival, the McDonalds joined together with eight other residents -- members from the Weeks and Wiggins families -- to found the Hopewell Baptist Church in 1870. Built on part of the McDonalds’ property, the church and the community were named after the Hopewell community in Alabama, the McDonalds’ prior home. John McDonald led services until Rev. L.J. Simmons became the first official pastor in 1873. Other pastors served the congregation, but it was under Walter M. McDonald’s leadership that the church flourished. Reverend McDonald served as pastor from 1888 to 1933. Originally, the church operated out a 10-by-12 foot school building with puncheon seats. After moving several times, it was reestablished in 1897 on land donated by John and Sarah McDonald’s son William McDonald. Church member L. Farnsworth was contracted to build a $854.92 church in 1902. It was a one-room, clapboard structure designed to separate the male and female congregation through doors and seating. The church was heavily modified in 1955 through the addition of a steeple, front steps, columns, and
stained glass windows.

The community’s citrus trees and other agricultural ventures produced so much that in 1914 Joe Thomas and R.W. Burch, Plant City residents, shipped fruit and vegetables from Hopewell as well as Plant City and Knights. Interestingly, Hopewell’s citrus industry boomed because of the timber industry. During the 1890s the Warnell Lumber and Veneer Company built a logging railroad through Hopewell. As they cleared the land of timber, farmers planted citrus trees on the denuded property. Florida Central and Peninsular Railroad bought the logging rail, and in 1905 the Seaboard Airline Railroad procured and expanded the track. Along with the railroad and packing plants, James Hester Hull became the first orange grower to practice “firing” his groves to prevent the oranges from freezing during one of Florida’s rare cold winters. Because of these events several citrus packing plants operated in Hopewell by 1927. Besides oranges, farmers also planted strawberries, corn, potatoes, and raised cattle.

Coronet Phosphate Company also began making inroads into the Hopewell area by 1916. During the mid-1920s, the company depleted the phosphate supply in Coronet and moved its mining operations to lands around Hopewell. A 1930's description ignored the agricultural and phosphate industry’s presence in Hopewell when it stated “Hopewell is a quiet, beautiful little town situated under the spreading limbs of gigantic oaks. The well known Hopewell cemetery is near the center of the town. Here an atmosphere of peace and serenity that is reminiscent of Gray’s ‘Elegy’ is found.” Coronet continued mining in Hopewell throughout the 1940s, but moved all of its operations to Polk County by the 1950s. Presently, Hopewell is dominated by orange groves, abandoned phosphate mines, the Hopewell Baptist Church, and its accompanying cemetery. Despite the span of nearly 130 years, many of Hopewell’s founding and influential family names, such as the McDonalds and Hulls, can still be found in the community today, choosing to reside in houses that their forefathers built.

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i. Hillsborough County, Florida, 1850 Census, 17; HTHCPB, The Cultural Resources of the Unincorporated Portions of Hillsborough County, 25.


