

The Sebree Smith Story

The following story is the result of doing research and luck in making contact via the Internet with likeminded people. It relates to the family of Smithville's founding father Humphrey Smith. Humphrey Smith married Nancy Walker in 1803 and this story involves their 4th child who was Calvin born in 1813. Calvin Smith in his own right became well known in Smithville, managing the store his father had started, he was married in 1841 with Agnes Jordan and they had 9 children. One of these was son "Sebree" who was born in 1851. At the start of the Civil War period an order was issued that all citizens should hoist the Union Stars and Stripes from their front doors. However there were people Smithville that were strongly opposed to this.

The following is a synopsis from the autobiography of Calvin Smith, about what Sebree did at that time being only 10 years old. He on his own fashioned from a few yards of "bunting" a 3 by 9 feet flag with Stars and Stripes, attached a staff to it and climbed up a walnut tree in front of their house and fastened it about 25 feet up in the air. This act soon got the attention of the local "opposition" ("Sesash") boys who decided to deal with this with throwing rocks at the flag and Sebree who was trying to protect the flag, it became quite a battle and Sebree needed help from his mother, who in turn had to ask for assistance from neighbors as Calvin himself was away for the day. The flag was saved and remained in the tree for at least 3 years. Calvin was very proud of his young son actions and as time progressed his "feat of bravery" was relayed to other important and powerful people that Calvin came to know.

As mentioned before these were very difficult times and the Calvin Smith family moved away via Iowa to Kansas. When Sebree turned 15, his father Calvin learned about an opening at the West Point Military Academy and as a reward for his bravery at the young age of 10, he was accepted and passed the required examination and attended it for 4 years, graduating, and by 1870 was 2nd lieutenant of the 6th Cavalry. In 1873 Sebree married Annie Watkins and they eventually had 7 children, in 1886 while stationed in St Augustine, Florida, due to illnesses they lost at very young age their son Sebree Irwin and daughter Janet Comstock and they were buried at the local St Augustine cemetery. Sebree himself had a very distinguished military career and died in 1901 and was buried with honors at Arlington National Cemetery.

Now jumping forward to 2012 in St. Augustine Florida an utility crew digging a new storm water line in town uncovered a broken-apart tombstone, sparking the interest of local historians. According to St. Augustine City Archaeologist Carl Halbirt, the 12 pieces were actually parts of a broken marble headstone weighing a total of 200 pounds. The find was made just east of the St. Augustine National Cemetery, established as a cemetery in 1820, but dedicated as a National cemetery in 1881. The headstone held the names of two children, Sebree and Janet Smith, who died three days apart in May 1886. Following quote is from Mr Halbirt: "There are times when an artifact or cluster of artifacts, such as from a trash pit or well, will dazzle the imagination or emotions of even the most jaded of individuals. This was the case with the recovery of this tombstone. There is no explanation as to how and why the memorial was destroyed or how it ended up where it was but due to effort of Mr. Halbirt, it was restored (see the pic) and new memorials placed. Through the magic of the Internet I was made aware of this story and provided Mr. Halbirt with Smith family information, and he provided me with the pictures of the re-assembled memorial and the new memorials as they are today at the St. Augustine National cemetery.