

The first board of county commissioners we have any record of, and we have no record as to how they came in possession of their offices, was composed of Readding Blount, James Hamilton, Isaac Waters and Joseph Mizelle. L. W. Cornelius was county judge.

On June 7, 1861, a business meeting was held by this board and the county was laid off into public roads and county commissioners' districts. Some time in the year 1860 or '61, an election was held to determine the location of a county site. The place voted upon was a beautiful parcel of land just four miles south of Bartow, on the Fort Meade road. Mr. James Hamilton and Zachariah Seward, Jr., built a hewed log building on this land, they owning it at the time, and put a stock of goods in it and made some concessions to the county as an inducement for the county site, but this only created a jealousy which defeated that place and Mud Lake was the county site of Polk County for about one year.

Capt. W. B. Varn's militia company mustered at that place a number of times, but the place was impracticable and was destined to be discontinued, and accordingly an election was called again on the 7th day of October, 1861, and Mud Lake was again voted upon as against a tract of one hundred and sixty acres of land one and one-fourth miles south of the present courthouse, to wit: The northeast fourth of section 18, township 30 south of range 25 east. The name given to the place was Jefferson, which was the legal county site of Polk County for about 5 years.

This last named place was chosen as a county site and was named Jefferson after the great constitutional writer and leader of the democratic party. This city of Jefferson was surveyed up into town lots by W. B. Varn, county surveyor, by an order of the county commissioners' court, and the lots sold to the highest bidder to raise money to build a courthouse, but the Confederate war coming on so soon and this land being reserved for internal improvement purposes could not be bought, and the city of Jefferson was destined to go the way of her senior city, Mud Lake.

After the war the subject of a county site was again one of deep interest to the people of Polk County. After much talk and considerable speculation, "Uncle Jake" Summerlin, out of his big heart, made his famous offer of one hundred and twenty acres for county, school & Church purposes, which was gladly accepted by the board of county commissioners, who gave it its present name in honor of Gen. Bartow, who was killed at the first battle at Manassas. At once the work of improvement and of house building was begun in good earnest. Since then its history is too well known for further comments.

Bartow was always the logical place for a county site. It was here that a company of soldiers was stationed during the Seminole War and some twenty families were forted up during the same time. It was the center of travel and attraction and the place during the early settling up of the county in which all of the newcomers stopped with their families until a place could be selected for their home.

Mr. R. R. Blount kept the first general supply store that was kept in the county here, from 1858 until 1862, hauling his goods from Tampa, a distance of forty-five miles.

In November, 1861, another county election was held for the selection of a full set of county officers, which resulted in the choice of H. S. Seward for the legislature; J. J. Blount, clerk of the circuit court; L. W. Cornelius, judge of probate; H. L. Mitchell, state solicitor; E. T. Kendrick, sheriff; F. A. Hendry, Readding Blount, Isaac Waters & Joseph Mizelle, county commissioners.

The sheriff was ex-officio tax assessor and collector. He made his lists and kept his books according to his own choice of style and made his reports and turned over moneys when called upon by the board