

JOHN WESLEY WHIDDEN 1839-1910

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John Wesley Whidden, son of Willoughby and Eliza (Pennington) Whidden, was born June 5, 1839 in Thomas County, Georgia. The family later lived in Ware County, Georgia and in March of 1843 settled in south Florida in Hillsborough County. The Willoughby Whidden family was living in Simmon's Hammock Settlement in the 1850 census of Hillsborough County. They settled near Fort Hartsuff in present day Hardee County in the latter 1850's. They were recorded in that area in the 1860 Manatee County Census. Manatee County was created in October of 1856 and according to Lillie B. McDuffee's The Lures of Manatee, John W. Whidden was the county's first sheriff and served two years.

During the Third Seminole Indian War, John enlisted as a private on February 18, 1856 at Fort Meade in Capt. Hooker's Independent Co., Florida Mounted Volunteers and was mustered out on August 20, 1856. On August 20, 1856 at Fort Brooke, he enlisted as a private in Capt. Leroy G. Lesley's Independent Co., Florida Mounted Volunteers, which was stationed at Alafia. He was mustered out Feb. 19, 1857 at Fort Brooke.

At the beginning of the Civil War, a company of militia with Capt. W. B. Varn at its head was formed; subsequently, it was reorganized under Capt. N. S. Blount. The company left Bartow on March 8, 1862 and marched to Gainesville where they were mustered in as Company E, Seventh Florida Infantry of the Confederate States Army. Soon after being mustered in, the Seventh was ordered to Tennessee to join General Braxton Bragg's army, with which they took part in all the campaigns of the Army of Tennessee, under Generals Bragg, Johnston and Hood, and surrendered a handful of men with Johnston at the close of the war.

John W. Whidden enlisted on April 10, 1862 as 1st Lieutenant, Co. E., Seventh Florida Infantry. He was promoted to Captain of Company E on June 2, 1863. The company muster roll of April 30 to July 13, 1863, which noted his promotion did not cite Company E's location, but a clothing requisition by Capt. Whidden was received July 8, 1863 at Knoxville, Tennessee. Captured August 31, 1864 near Jonesboro, Georgia, he was exchanged by order of General W. T. Sherman at Rough and Ready, Georgia September 19 or 22, 1864. Capt. Whidden returned to duty. On December 15-16, 1864, Union General George H. Thomas at Nashville attacked, crushed, and drove south in retreat the Army of Tennessee, commanded by General John Bell Hood. Capt. Whidden was captured Dec. 16, 1864 at Nashville. Nearly 43 years later on Oct. 8, 1907, James H. Murphy, a veteran of Co. E, put it simply in an affidavit for Capt. Whidden's Confederate pension application, "The Yankees flanked us on all sides and captured Capt. Whidden, but I escaped." After temporary confinement at the military prison at Louisville, Kentucky, Capt. Whidden was transferred on Dec. 20, 1864 as a prisoner of war to Johnson's Island, Ohio. After giving an oath of allegiance, Capt. Whidden was released on June 17, 1865. The oath described him thus: "Place of residence, Bartow, Fla.; age, 26; complexion, fair; eyes, blue; height, 5 ft 10 ins.; hair, light."

John Wesley Whidden married on Sept. 7, 1865 at Fort Green in Manatee County (now Hardee County) Ellen Catherine Hendry. Born October 9, 1842 in Thomasville, Georgia, Ellen was the daughter of