RUBY of Ruby Beach, Florida

By Don Mabry

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Courtesy of the Beaches Museum
Ruby, as in Ruby Beach which was named for her. Ruby Scull’s mother named what is now Jacksonville Beach, Florida a northeast Florida beach, after her daughter. Ruby was famous because the new settlement and its United States Post office were named “Ruby.” She was oblivious at the time; she was, after all, only a toddler of one and one-half years, having been born on March 22, 1882. No doubt she heard the story when she was older. The story must have remained in her mind, at least the back of it, until she died in 1951. Her parents, William E. and Eleanor K. Scull, moved Ruby and her six week old sister Bessie to what eventually became Jacksonville Beach in October, 1884. We need to start closer to the beginning and then we can see what happened to Ruby later.

The family temporarily closed their Jacksonville, Florida home and moved to the shore because the father of the family, William Edward Scull, Sr. got a job surveying the right of way for the Jacksonville & Atlantic Railroad being built from the city of South Jacksonville to within sight of the Atlantic Ocean. He had married Eleanor Kennedy in Jacksonville on October 14, 1879 and they had two girls, Ruby and Bessie. And they lived in a big tent on the oceanfront! They were joined after a while by General F. E. Spinner, Treasurer of the United State during the Civil War. His son-in-law and fellow stockholder, James Madison Schumacher, was a lawyer, banker, and a partner in the Jacksonville and Atlantic Railroad. He had come to Jacksonville in June, 1874 and organized the First National Bank of Florida. Spinner lived in tents with his daughters and ate with the Sculls until his house was built near what is now the Casa Marina Hotel.
Scull was determined that his family’s life would be better than his so he worked hard. He was born in Dent, Ohio on October 8, 1858. His father died and his mother married James Beatty. The Midwest was too cold so Beatty moved his family to Jacksonville in 1872; Scull was fourteen. Beatty bought twenty acres in what is now the Riverside neighborhood of Jacksonville and started growing strawberries in 1874. His success enabled him to buy more acreage and become known as the Strawberry King of Florida. Scull benefited both in being able to work and also get schooling to become a surveyor.¹

¹ Pleasant Dan Gold, History of Duval County Including East Florida. (St. Augustine: The Record Company, 1929.)
Marrying Eleanor Kennedy was a smart move because her father, D. H. Kennedy, was a civil engineer with good Duval County connections. Francis Fatio L'Engle, born in Florida in 1830 of a Florida mother and a father from the Dominican Republic, was a prominent lawyer and real estate developer. He was a Confederate Army Lieutenant in Florida during the Civil War. After 1865, he purchased land west of Jacksonville, subdivided it, and named it the Town of La Villa. He supervised the surveying the railroad right of way to the beach and hired D. H. Kennedy as his assistant. Kennedy hired his son-in-law, Scull.

Kennedy had also come to Florida from the Midwest. In this case Indiana, to escape the cold. Born in Delaware, he was surveying for a railroad in Indiana but realized that his ill young wife might not survive another Indiana winter. That February, 1875, he planned to move his family to the West but decided on Jacksonville instead after the family physician showed him a strawberry he had received in the mail. They left within days. Ironically, the strawberry was Beatty’s, at least figuratively, because he had commercialized strawberry production in Florida and Kennedy’s daughter married Beatty’s stepson, Scull. Scull.

Eleanor played the key role during the Scull’s four year sojourn at the beach. She established their tent home and operated the U.S. post office and a
general store until their wooden house was built. She hailed from Washington, Indiana, having been born there on May 27, 1861 and lived in Jacksonville, save the 1884-88 episode at Ruby Beach, until her death on December 29, 1949 at age eighty-eight. She was appointed postmistress of Ruby on August 22, 1884.

Living in one tent with a palmetto-roofed kitchen and using a second tent as a general store and post office only lasted until they built a house from wood William Scull salvaged from a German barque which was sinking. As Eleanor Scull told it:

It was loaded with all mahogany lumber. Dr. John C. L'Engle bought a lot of it, and after the ship struck, the remainder washed overboard. This my husband gathered up, lightered on two rafts up the river to Pablo Creek, from there he had it hauled to our beach lot. A big wind struck the second lighter, washing it out in the river so one load was all he was able to salvage.

So they moved from their tent home to the new house in February, 1885. The house was sturdy and an apt shelter from storms. The Sculls hosted more than one “storm gathering.” They moved back to Jacksonville in 1888. The house was sold more than once. An owner eventually called it “Dixie House” and rented it out. Fire swept from an oil cook stove in the kitchen through the building, almost completely destroying it. Mrs. J. T. Price escaped but her landlady, Mrs. H. V. Lambell of Jacksonville, didn’t get enough insurance money to rebuild it. B. B. McCormick bought and tore down the remains, replacing it with his twelve unit Pioneer Apartments.²

Few people lived permanently in Ruby. The settlement was considered part of Mayport for the purposes of the 1885 state census and was a stop on the
mail route from Mayport to Diego Plains [Palm Valley] to St. Augustine. Before
the railroad, Diego Plains played an important role as a route to Jacksonville. As
Eleanor Scull said in 1939:

There was a way by which Mr. Scull used to drive to Jacksonville by going
six miles south through the Palm Valley section where there was a
settlement, but it took two days to make the trip, so that one night he had
to camp out. There was no way to cross Pablo Creek except to ford it,
and that was the reason they had to go such a roundabout way in order
to reach near the source of the stream where it was narrow and shallow.
Dr. Burroughs had an orange grove in the Palm Valley section, and he
used to drive that route too, and sometimes he and Mr. Scull would make
the trip together. In 1885, a family “built a house in the woods one mile
south of us and then another built two miles north of us.” The Dickersons,
store owners, built the second house in Ruby. The railroad brought day
trippers, summer residents, and permanent residents to Pablo Beach.

Mail came once a week from Mayport, a village of 600 people at the
mouth of the St.
Johns River. The Katie Spencer, piloted by
Napoleon Broward,
sailed the three hours
to Mayport and Bill
Scull brought it (and
supplies) to Ruby by
wagon on a two-hour
trip down a sandy
“road.” Once the
train reached Ruby in
1885, it brought the
mail. The railroad
company also took
control of the town it
was building,
renaming it San
Pablo which became
Pablo Beach. When
the magnificent and
expensive Murray Hall Hotel opened in 1886, the post office moved inside, much
to the displeasure of the paying guests. Their idea of luxury didn’t include seeing working class folks coming and going to the post office.

In 1888, the Sculls left the beach for good, except for the occasional visit, to go home to their Jacksonville home and increase in number. Ruby simply became the oldest child. By 1899, she had three sisters and two brothers. Their mother, Eleanor, explained to Rose Shepherd, who interviewed her on April 11, 1939 for the WPA Life Histories Project, who and where her children were. Ruby had married Royal Searby and they lived in Wanblee, South Dakota. Bessie, born April 4, 1884, had lived in the tent, grown up, and married Charles Rufus Ellington of Jacksonville. Eleanor [Mrs. W. B.] Young, born October 6, 1886, lived in nearby of Orange Park, Florida. W. E. Scull, Jr., born November 2, 1892, lived in Washington, DC. He and his wife Marjorie had two children, W. E. III and Marjorie, both of whom visited Jacksonville Beach in 1984 to celebrate the centenary of their ancestors founding Ruby Beach. They continued to come on an annual basis, visiting the founder of the Beaches Area Historical Society, Jean Haden McCormick. The fifth Scull, Marguerite, born September 24, 1895, never married and remained in her parents’ home. Their last child, David Hildreth Scull, was born on March 23, 1899 but died April 5, 1900. Bill Scull, the father would die on February 25, 1927.³

Shepherd interviewed Eleanor Scull when the latter was 78 years old; her memory was not precise. Sometimes, the dates and sequence of events were incorrect. Shepherd did not prepare well enough to understand everything Scull said and failed to ask follow up needed questions or to keep Scull on track. The interview is available on several Internet sites and is worth reading.⁴

And so the telling of Ruby’s story usually ends, for the toddler’s name played it role for two short years.

Ruby Scull enjoyed a life that lasted long after she left her namesake beach for Jacksonville. In fact, that story is much more interesting.

A note on sources and procedure seems necessary. Historians rely upon primary sources to find out what happened. Yale University provides an excellent definition:

Primary sources provide first-hand testimony or direct evidence concerning a topic under investigation. They are created by witnesses or

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recorders who experienced the events or conditions being documented. Often these sources are created at the time when the events or conditions are occurring, but primary sources can also include autobiographies, memoirs, and oral histories recorded later. Primary sources are characterized by their content, regardless of whether they are available in original format, in microfilm/microfiche, in digital format, or in published format.\(^5\)

Without primary or original sources, we cannot know what happened. When gaps in the sources occur, we sometimes can deduce what probably occurred. I did not find all sources I wanted for Ruby’s life or that of her husband, Royal Searby. The desired documents may never have existed or they have not been found. Prominent people leave records behind. People such as Ruby Scull rarely do. So I relied upon the sources I could find.

The Beaches Museum owns a photograph of Ruby and another young woman who may be her younger sister Eleanor or a friend. The back of the photograph bears the inscription “Ruby Scull and friend.” Regardless, we can see the adult Ruby Scull. She is the woman on the right.

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Twenty-three year old Ruby was working as a bookkeeper in 1905 and living with her parents according to the Jacksonville City Directory of that year. Her father was a gardener. Five years later, when she was 28, she was still living with her parents, her brother William, Jr., sisters Eleanor and Marguerite, her grandmother Kennedy, and a boarder, H. G. Armitage. She had a high school education and one year of business school. Presumably, she was still a bookkeeper.

Her future husband, Royal Searby, lived in Crookston, Nebraska where he was born on December 26, 1889. His date of birth is important to remember because even census records sometimes had it wrong, probably because Ruby did not want people to know how young he was. On his draft registration in 1917, a government document that demanded accuracy, the 1889 date was given.
Ruby’s age fluctuated on census documents. The correct birthdates were used for their tombstones.

The Searby family were farmers in Crookston, Nebraska, a small railroad town on the South Dakota border adjacent to the vast Lakota Rosebud Reservation. The Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley Railroad ran from Omaha, Nebraska to Rapid City, South Dakota, serving cowboys and Indians (as Native Americans once were called). Crookston station existed to supply the United States government warehouses for the Rosebud Reservation. The whites who settled the town farmed and sold goods to the Brulé Lakota who lived there. Dairy farmers sold their products both locally and in the East. Rich farming and ranching land drew settlers, such as the Searby family, but Crookston’s population remained small, in the hundreds. It was a white outpost in Native America.

In December, 1910, Royal turned 21 years old while working as a farm laborer. His parents, Edward and Emma, managed to send him to school but for

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7 “Crookston, Cherry County,” Virtual Nebraska, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. http://www.casde.unl.edu/history/counties/cherry/crookston/.
how long is not clear. His 1925 South Dakota Census data card says he had a high school education but his 1935 card says ninth grade, which is probably correct. High school educations were uncommon in the United States and probably did not exist in places such as Crookston. He was the oldest son and needed to farm. His brother Charles, who was fourteen, must have also been in the fields. His sisters, Blanche (22), Myrtle (18), and Elva (16) also worked in the family enterprise. The Northern Plains forced people to work to survive.\(^8\)

Somehow, he and Ruby met, courted, and married, but no documents tell the story other than that they married in Omaha, Nebraska on January 17, 1914 less than four years since the 1910 US Census. Did he escape the Nebraska winter by taking the riding train to Jacksonville? Had he found another occupation besides farming, say one in Omaha, and had visited Jacksonville and fallen in love with a woman seven years older than he? He turned 24 a few weeks before his wedding; Ruby was closer to 32 than 31. She was marrying late by the standards of the time. Some might call her a spinster. Maybe she met Royal some place other than Jacksonville. She had a job and had traveled to Columbia, South Carolina with a married friend in 1903 and perhaps to other places before 1914. Did they elope to Omaha and then move to Crookston? We do not have the necessary records\(^9\).

We do know that she and Royal moved to Wanblee on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1916, a settlement 133 miles from Crookston. Reservation land throughout the West was being sold to whites. Royal bought land from Lakota families as would his father.


Pine Ridge Reservation, home to Crazy Horse and where Red Cloud\textsuperscript{10}, the fierce Lakota general and statesmen lived his later years, presented an opportunity. A history written by Oglala Lakota students and faculty mentions Royal Searby. “Royal Searby came from Crookston, Nebraska to look at some land which he intended to buy from Emily Brown Ears. Later, he came with a

\textsuperscript{10} Charles A. Eastman, “Red Cloud, Sioux Chief,” \textit{Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains} (1918), \url{http://historicaltextarchive.com/sections.php?action=read&artid=264}.
stock of general merchandise and built a store which he called the Blue Store.”
“[In] 1921 The Wanblee School was built, two rooms on ground were given by Royal Searby.”11 Between February, 1917 and June, 1922, Royal acquired 1,163.6 acres. His father and other Searby relatives followed him to the area.12 He was a man of some importance in the tiny village of whites surrounded by the Lakota.

Their only child, Ruth Caroline Searby, was born September 18, 1918 and died September 21, 1918 in Rapid City, South Dakota, the nearest “big” settlement. Ruby was 36 and would have no other children.

Perhaps Royal’s or Ruby’s family has a collection of letters or diaries they wrote to tell us about their lives in Wanblee, or perhaps not. Some government records exist—land records, South Dakota censuses, US censuses, and death indexes. South Dakota did its census in years ending in 5 and the Royal and Ruby Searby are in the 1925, 1935, and 1945 censuses. The South Dakota census included such categories as age, race, marital status, military service, maiden name, length of time in South Dakota, ethnicity, religion, educational level, and occupation. The data were entered by hand on a printed card. They lived in Wanblee, Washabaugh County, South Dakota (now Jackson County) surrounded by the Pine Ridge Reservation and they moved to South Dakota in 1916. She was a Presbyterian, he a Methodist. She was of Scotch-Irish ancestry in the 1925 census but American in the 1935 and 1945 census. He was of English


12 Bureau of Land Management (BLM), General Land Office (GLO) Records, http://www.glorecords.blm.gov/default.aspx. This is a searchable database. There are five entries for Royal Searby and six for Edward A. Searby, his father.
ancestry in 1925 and 1945 but of American ancestry in 1935. Both were literate; Ruby was better educated, having completed high school whereas he had a ninth grade education; she had acquired secretarial and bookkeeping skills at a business school. They owned their own home. He farmed; he kept house. No mention was made of a store but they may have quit retail after their initial venture. These and the US censuses of 1920, 1930, and 1940 have their ages wrong.

During the decades they lived in Wanblee, the little town acquired stores, a school, a doctor’s office, churches, a post office, and a community hall, but the difficult climate challenged the fewer than one hundred town residents as well as the Lakota outside of town. It was hot in the summer and bitter cold in the winter. The wind swept across the plains. Royal had experienced something like Wanblee weather for he grew up only 113 miles away. Ruby knew humid Florida which was very mild in the winter but hot in the summer. Sheer determination was required to live in Wanblee. Life was difficult for the Lakota, once an independent, mobile people.

Trains provided the means to visit Crookston, Omaha, and Jacksonville if one could afford the time and fares. The Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroad was merged into the Chicago and North Western Transportation Company which reached major cities. The route map shows the tracks acquired
by the Union Pacific in green. Travel to Florida required numerous changes of trains during a trip of days.

Did Ruby ever go visit her relatives in Jacksonville, either by train or automobile? By today’s roads, Wanblee and Jacksonville are 1,764 miles distant from one another using Interstate highways. See the Google map. If she went, it probably was by train.

Ruby finally went home to Jacksonville. Royal died on March 25, 1948; she buried him in Evergreen Cemetery just three days after she turned 66 years old. He was 58. We do not know when or why they left South Dakota. We know they were in Wanblee when the census was taken in South Dakota in 1945. Perhaps she wanted to spend her last years among her family; perhaps Royal was ill.

Ruby died May 11, 1951 at age 69 and did it in spectacular style. She died in Wanblee, South Dakota and Jacksonville, Florida on the same day! Each state’s official death notice claims she died there. Regardless, she is buried
beside Royal in Evergreen Cemetery. About 20 miles from the beach once
name after her.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{13} Of course this was impossible. My guess is that she died in Jacksonville and South Dakota
authorities were notified because she owned property there. An official death notice would
have been necessary to dispose of the property. Someone misunderstood and added her to the
South Dakota Death Index. Similarly, William W. Scull, Jr. stated her place of death as
Indianapolis, Indiana in the genealogical chart he prepared by hearing the word Indian and not
realizing that she spent most of her life among Oglala Lakota Indians.
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My friend and fellow retired professor, Edwin Ellis of Starkville, Mississippi, where we live, found invaluable census data and death records for me.

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My wife Paula listens as I work my way through the sources or wrestle with research problems. She’s a boon companion.

A person is molded or shaped or influenced or however you want to call it by hundreds of people during a lifetime, maybe thousands perhaps. Enumerating the categories is easy at first. Parents, children, siblings, other family members, teachers, preachers, friends, and classmates come to mind. Bosses, acquaintances, people we dislike, and others. We are influenced by others even though we may not be able to identify them.

I thank those people.

All errors are, of course, mine.
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