

Pioneers of Paradise



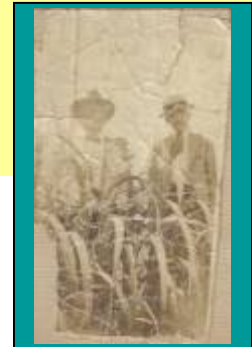
The Maltezo Sisters
Stella Marler, Mary Cox,
Cleo Marler, Vera Walter,
& Inez Woodward

The Maltezo Family

Written by: Kathy Marler Blue



The Primrose
On "Launch Day"



John George & Alex
Maltezo in field

The path of the Maltezo Family legacy dates back to the arrival of John George Maltezo in 1885 when he was only 20 years old. John came to the Gulf Coast as a Greek stowaway, serving as a cabin boy and cigarette roller. He arrived in America landing in Pensacola. He would become very important as a boat builder in the growing village of Destin as well as helping to start St. Andrew's Church. When he arrived in America, he could speak seven languages, but not English. He was born in January of 1865 on the island of Aegina, Greece and lived in the village of Perdica. He left his homeland at the age of sixteen to come to America because he had heard how much this new land had to offer. Although he had little formal education, he had a great business sense.

John settled in the Milton, Florida area called Ward's Basin. One of the first businesses he owned was a restaurant, general store and dance pavilion in Milton. He had also become an accomplished boat builder. In Milton he met and in 1890 married Isabel Weekley, the daughter of Austin P. and Sarah Weekley. Isabel would teach him English and in 1906 he became an American citizen. The Maltezo family grew to include five girls and four boys. The boys were Alexander P., Tony G., Nicholas, and Andrew. The girls were Anastasia Inez, Margarette, Stella, Eventhia, and Cleopatra. The family eventually moved to Destin in 1922, where Maltezo continued his shipbuilding business as well as fishing. He built a 35 foot snapper sailing vessel, the "Dreamland" which his son Nick would captain at age 12 going out for days at a time commercial fishing. The boat, the "Primrose", which is the last seine boat built in Destin was built by Maltezo. In 1926, Captain John W. Melvin, Sr. hired him to build his new boat. They worked as a team with Melvin explaining each desired feature and Maltezo using his draftsman skills drawing a scale model. The "Primrose", built of juniper, was 36 feet long and had a beam of 7 feet 6 inches and would see many young men work her along the waters of Destin. He would also build boats for other fishermen at East Pass, Niceville, and Pensacola. He also built a fleet of boats that would be sponge boats in Tarpon Springs.

John George Maltezo purchased a large parcel of land along the Harbor and on Hwy 98. From this he donated the land on which the St. Andrew's Episcopal Church would be built. His wife, Isabel, a devout Christian actively worked to bring their children up in the faith of Christ. Isabel joined a small group of faithful that Clement Taylor brought together in the Anglican-Episcopal beginnings. Early services would be conducted in their homes. When lumber was brought in for the church, Maltezo and his sons spent much of their spare time carrying the lumber from the gulf beach up to the church site. Much of the lumber used came from the remains of the St. Catherine's Church in Pensacola. While Maltezo did not convert from the Greek Orthodox faith, he called St. Andrew's his church home keeping the church books and the business end. Maltezo died in 1932 at age 67 without realizing his family's desire to attend services in this small wooden church which was not completed until 1937. Although he never saw his native homeland again, some of his children have made the pilgrimage to the little Greek isle walking his family's land and meeting their Greek family.

Salute to a Legend: Captain Reddin "Salty" Brunson

Written by Jean Melvin

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When the name "Capt.Salty" is mentioned in Destin, only one person comes to mind--Captain Reddin Brunson. Reddin lived to be 97 years young. Eighty-four of those years (except for a short time living in Clarksville) were spent in Destin--early days spent learning his craft from his elders, mid-life making a living and raising a family and later days teaching others all the things he had learned those 97 years.

In the last few years much of the teaching was done in the Destin History and Fishing Museum, where Reddin not only became my close friend but our walking "History Book". Reddin's mind remained sharp until just a few days before his passing, April 24, 2011. One never realizes how little is known about the small everyday things that happened in Destin years ago until you try to explain them to someone. When I had a "need to know", Reddin was so sweet and kind to answer my questions and help me understand exactly what went on. If he didn't remember or was not involved, he was just as quick to admit he didn't know. Never wanting to call attention to himself.

Reddin was very proud of his heritage and the part his family played in settling Destin. From fishing and business development to recreation for Destin's children and young people. He and his four brothers were among Destin's first commercial seine fishermen, all owned and operated seine and snapper boats and his two sisters married Destin fishermen. Reddin was thirteen years old when his family moved to Destin from Portland, Florida. After completing the eighth grade, he felt his time was better spent helping his father support the family so he withdrew from formal education and took a job with Homer Jones as the cook on Homer's seine boat. This was the beginning of a long and colorful career on the Destin fishing docks.

As I said, "Capt. Salty" was proud of Destin and his heritage. The Destin History and Fishing Museum was a perfect fit. He was very involved in getting the Museum into it's present location doing everything from raising the much needed funds to helping build historically accurate exhibits to tell the Destin story. I know "Capt. Salty" was happiest when he gathered a crowd at the Museum to listen to him tell "his stories". I feel sure these same wonderful stories are being told today, just in a different venue.

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