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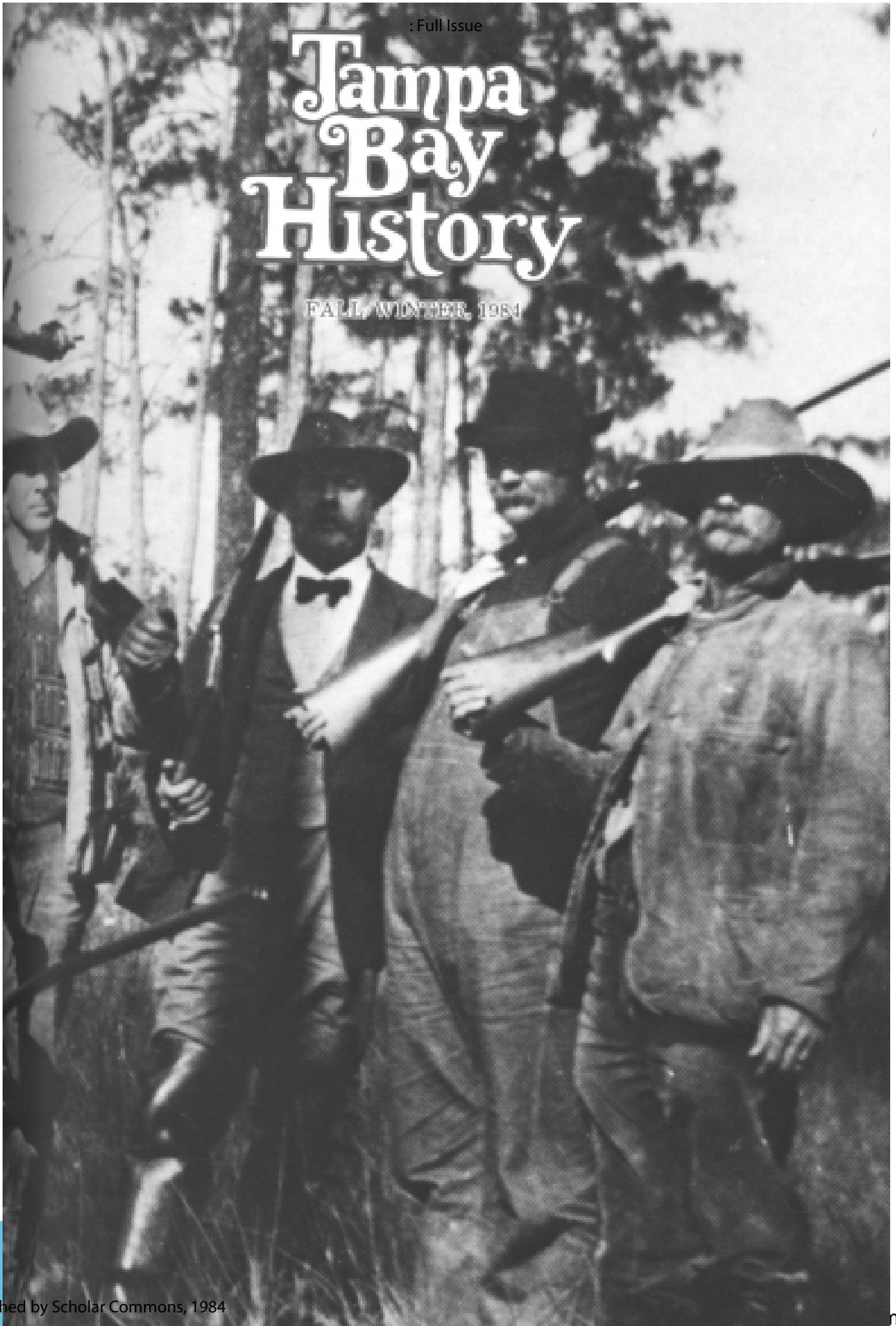
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: Full Issue

# Tampa Bay History

FALL/WINTER, 1984





FALL/WINTER 1984

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2

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## FROM THE EDITORS

Although not far removed in time, Florida's frontier period is difficult for historians to recreate. Among the obstacles, of course, is the paucity of surviving materials for historians to consult. Using a variety of sources, this issue of *Tampa Bay History* attempts to recapture life and events associated with several frontiers on Florida's west coast.

Lynch law originated on America's eighteenth-century frontier when Colonel Charles Lynch dispensed private justice in western Virginia. Although first employed in sparsely settled areas against horse thieves and common criminals, the practice of lynching persisted into the twentieth century as an illegal means of controlling unpopular minorities such as blacks, immigrants and political radicals. By 1934, Tampa was no longer a frontier, but some citizens still resorted to vigilante methods as demonstrated in Walter Howard's article which won first prize in the 1983 *Tampa Bay History* Essay Contest

The exploration of frontier conditions on Florida's west coast is taken up by other authors in this issue. Lynn W. Ware examines early life along the Peace River. James M. Ricci analyzes one of Florida's last frontiers - the land boom of the 1920s which boosters often represented as a new frontier. The photographic essay by Eirlys M. Barker shows images of pioneer life around the turn of the century. Finally, Ruth S. Irvin presents a document from 1851 that depicts Florida's west coast at a time when a handful of settlers still grappled with the process of carving a life out of the wilderness.

The annual Essay Contest has generated so many worthy entries that we are pleased to announce the fourth annual competition with an entry deadline of September 1, 1985. For more information see the announcement on page 91.

**UPDATE:** The caption for the picture of Tampa's Union Station on page 37 of the last issue should give 1912 as the date of construction.

The Fort Myers railroad depot shown on page 39 of the same issue has been transformed into the home of the Fort Myers Historical Museum. For the museum's current activities, see page 90.

Marian B. Godown of our Board of Advisors points out that the last issue (page 63) incorrectly identified the location of Punta Rassa. The Menge Brothers operated a steamboat line on the Caloosahatchee River in Lee County, where Punta Rassa is (and always has been) located.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Editors:

Your "Fort Myers' Lee Memorial Hospital: The Early Years," which appeared in your Spring/Summer edition, was fascinating reading.

I readily admit my prejudice on several counts, not the least of which is the fact that I was born in that hospital *before* the nurses mentioned came on the scene.

As a writer myself, I was very impressed by author Rawchuck's ability to weave so much history into such a readable, fiction-like narrative.

Sincerely,  
Nell L. Weidenbach  
Miami

Editors:

You are surely scraping the bottom of the barrel when you print "Right-Wing Extremists and the Sarasota Schools."

I was here in 1960 to date. That whole affair was insignificant, a "tempest in a tea-pot," and certainly does not rate the ink it got this month or 20 years ago.

Very truly yours,  
Benjamin H. Sullivan  
Sarasota

P.S. I will bet Mr. Daniel R. Campbell [the article's author] is a Democrat, and I bet he voted for (or would have if old enough) McGovern.

## **“A BLOT ON TAMPA’S HISTORY”: THE 1934 LYNCHING OF ROBERT JOHNSON**

by Walter Howard

During the first three decades of the twentieth century the city of Tampa was an area prone to lynching. In fact, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) reported that six lynchings had taken place there between 1900 and 1930, the largest number for any Florida city or county at a time when Florida had the highest ratio of lynchings to minority population of any state in America.<sup>1</sup> During the 1930s, however, only one black man fell victim to mob murder in Tampa.<sup>2</sup> The series of events leading up to this incident began on January 28, 1934, when Robert Johnson, a forty-year-old black, was arrested by Tampa police. He was accused of the shocking crime of robbing and then raping a white woman in the Belmont Heights area. Tampa detectives subsequently investigated the matter thoroughly and then exonerated Johnson. Still, some white Tampans believed he was guilty of the most heinous crime a black man could commit, the rape of a white woman. The fact that no formal charges were ever filed against Johnson for this alleged act failed to change their minds. In spite of the evidence to the contrary, a group of white citizens remained convinced that he was getting away with sexually violating a white woman, an idea they found intolerable.<sup>3</sup>

Lynch-minded Tampans plotted Johnson’s execution. Police officials made it easier to plan the black man’s demise by the way they mishandled the case. The Tampa police department of the mid-1930s, plagued by corruption and inefficiency, apparently did not have its heart in the job of protecting the rights and safety of a black man accused of a lynchable offense.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there may have been officers on the force who sympathized with those who wished to punish the suspect in this case. In any event, the police refused to let Johnson walk away a free man after the detectives’ investigation, and issued a warrant accusing him of stealing chickens and turkeys. In light of this development, it became necessary to transfer him from the cityjail to the county prison.<sup>5</sup>

The transfer, unfortunately, was fatally ill-timed. For some reason, Johnson was not moved by Tampa policemen or Hillsborough County deputies. Indeed, the person assigned to pick up and move the black prisoner was Deputy Constable Thomas Graves, who acted in this matter on the authority of his brother, Constable Hardy Graves. The deputy constable was on his way home from a routine evening shift when he decided, with his brother’s approval, to transport Johnson to the county facility. Graves called the police detective bureau shortly after midnight on January 30 to inform the city authorities that he was coming for the black man. Needless to say, it was not standard procedure to move a prisoner in the middle of the night. The Tampa police department and sheriff’s office could not later adequately explain why this was allowed to happen. Graves, however, would later explain his actions by stating, “I went to the police station to transfer [Johnson] to the county jail, thinking with that out of the way, I would not have to get up so early the next morning.”<sup>6</sup>

In the dead of the night, at about 2:30 a.m., detectives delivered Johnson to Graves at city hall. The deputy constable put his prisoner in the front seat of his automobile and drove toward the county jail. Suddenly, three cars appeared on the deserted downtown streets of Tampa and “hemmed” Graves in. “At first I thought it was a traffic Jam and tried to drive out of it,” declared the deputy constable subsequently. Men in these cars proceeded to kidnap Johnson from his escort in a dramatic and somewhat acrobatic way, according to Graves:

By this time there was a car on either side of me, and before I realized what was happening a man got out of either car, jumped on the running board of my car and threw open the front doors at the same time. The man at my left caught me by the mouth and whirled me over the back seat of my car. This man and the other one then got in the back seat and forced me down on the floor board, one holding his foot on my neck.<sup>7</sup>

At this point, one of Graves’ assailants promptly disarmed him. They also forced him to lie on the floor of his own car for the entire twenty-minute death ride. Graves later reported that Johnson was resigned to his fate and never begged for mercy or broke down in any way. “I heard the Negro say only one thing,” stated the Deputy Constable. In response to one of the white kidnapers who said to Johnson, “you \_\_\_\_ you know you did it,” the latter supposedly replied, “yes, white folks, but I am sorry.”<sup>8</sup> Finally, the vigilantes put Graves out of the car and drove off with Johnson to a wooded section of town.

The lynching was a carefully planned and swiftly executed murder. The kidnapers carried the terrified Johnson to the lynching cite along the Hillsborough River near Sligh Avenue, where a crowd of about thirty Tampa citizens had gathered to witness the victim’s execution. Ironically, the lynchers gunned down Johnson with Graves own .38 caliber pistol. The killers, making every round count, shot the hapless black men four times in the head and once in the body. Leaving the bloody remains by the side of the road, the crowd of men piled into about fifteen automobiles and drove off. Just about thirty minutes after being kidnapped, Johnson was dead.<sup>9</sup>

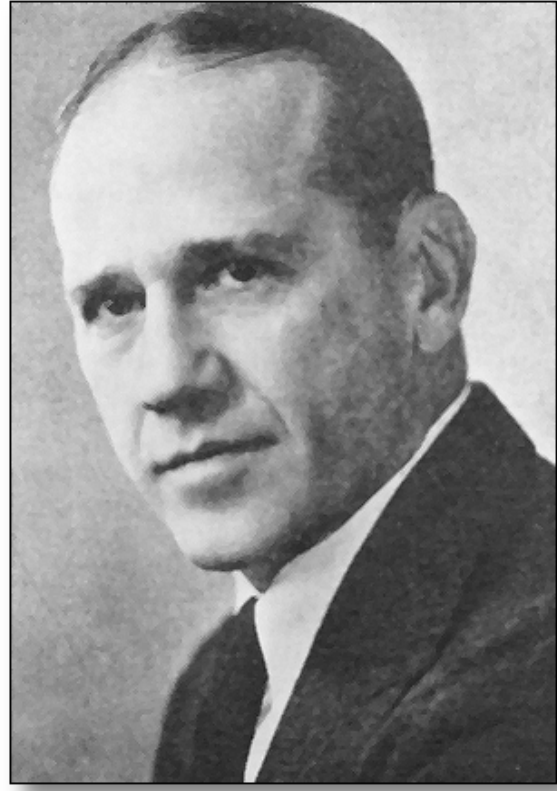
As soon as he could, Graves phoned the sheriffs office reporting the lynching. He then walked to the home of a nearby justice of the peace, and the two men searched with flashlights for Johnson’s body. At daybreak they found it. Later that morning a coroner’s jury examined the body, but the inquiry into this lynching would go much further than a coroner’s investigation.<sup>10</sup>

Florida Governor David Sholtz immediately involved himself in this case. He ordered Tampa officials to take substantial investigative steps to bring the lynchers to justice. The governor’s telegrams to State’s Attorney Rex Fariior and Sheriff Will Spencer were published in full in the *Tampa Tribune* for all to read. Florida’s chief executive ordered the state’s attorney “to use every agency and function of your office to detect and bring to speedy justice those guilty of the lynching which took place in your county today.”<sup>11</sup> He wired the sheriff a similar message:

I have just been informed of the lynching of Robert Johnson, Negro, in your community today, but have no report from you. We don’t condone the crime of lynching in Florida. I am holding you responsible for immediate and diligent

investigation of this crime to the end that those persons guilty of this murder shall be brought to speedy justice under the laws of this state.<sup>12</sup>

In response to Sholtz's demand for a thorough investigation, Tampa officials fashioned their plans. Farrow and other local officials conferred briefly on January 31, and then announced that the Hillsborough County grand jury, already in session, would look into lynching at once. The state's attorney declared that "lynching is as much a matter for investigation by the grand jury as murder and other capital crimes." He added "We must not tolerate such a happening that spreads a blot on Tampa's history." In heading up the grand jury inquiry, Farrow expressed a determined attitude by stating, "We expect to dig to the bottom of it, and if the evidence is produced pointing to persons who had part in it, indictments will be returned."<sup>13</sup>



**State's Attorney Rex Farrow, from Tampa  
by Karl H. Grismer.**

In a marathon all-day session the day after the lynching, Farrow and the grand jury grilled some twelve witnesses. The state's attorney immediately ruled out the possibility that the work of the jury was to answer the "question of the guilt or innocence of the Negro as regards the attack on the woman." Rather, he observed, "It is a question of stamping out lynching."<sup>14</sup>

The obvious possibility confronting jurors was that Tom and Hardy Graves had conspired with the lynchers. In a strenuous effort to ascertain this, the grand jury questioned Tom Graves for four and one-half hours. Under pointed questioning it was revealed that the deputy constable was wholly without authority in transferring the prisoner from the city jail and that he had no more right in that capacity than any private citizen. In fact, Graves was working as an assistant to his brother on a special police commission that had expired weeks earlier. Other parts of Graves' testimony also dismayed the grand jury. For instance, he said that the vigilantes had manhandled and badly bruised him during the kidnapping. Yet, when jurors examined his body, they found no such bruises. Until 7:35 p.m. the grand jury put considerable pressure on the deputy constable, but failed to uncover evidence of any conspiracy involving Graves or his brother.<sup>15</sup>

Governor Sholtz, outraged over the lynching, demanded that Tom and Hardy Graves be brought before him to explain their actions. He did not even want to wait a day for the Graves brothers to testify before the grand jury. When telephoned by Farrow, however, Sholtz relented saying, "All right, but have them here by Thursday." And so the governor confronted the two suspected conspirators, but he failed to force them to change their story.<sup>16</sup>

Sholtz's indignation over the lynching was genuine. He fancied himself a New Deal liberal who abhorred such a gruesome custom as lynching.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, his strong reaction to the Tampa incident earned him praise from unexpected quarters. Prominent blacks in the state openly expressed their appreciation to the governor. Mary McLeod Bethune wrote him that the "Negroes of Florida commend you for your stand in deplorable Tampa tragedy."<sup>18</sup> "You give encouragement to my people by taking prompt and definite action," declared J.R.E. Lee, President of the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College for blacks.<sup>19</sup> The Colored Citizens' Committee of Jacksonville stated that it had "voted its unanimous approval of your attitude toward the lynching of Robert Johnson."<sup>20</sup> "The colored citizens wish to thank you for your fearless stand and hasty action in upholding the dignity of the law," wired the Key West branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).<sup>21</sup> Several black clergymen also lavished Sholtz with praise, and one in particular observed that the governor "believes in Justice and fair play regardless of race or color."<sup>22</sup>

Not everyone, however, praised Sholtz for his words and deeds. Several whites wrote the governor criticizing him for his antilynching stance. One Tampa woman asserted that she could not understand Sholtz's concern and the public stir over the lynching of Johnson when "nothing is done if white women are murdered by blacks."<sup>23</sup> A woman from Minneapolis, Minnesota, declared, "I must say that the Negroes are responsible for all things that happen to them."<sup>24</sup> And a Jacksonville woman observed:

I noticed through the daily press you seem to be much concerned over the recent lynching of that Negro rapist in our state, and that the sobsisters are urging you to hunt out and prosecute men who are only endeavoring to protect their children from these beasts in human form. . . . If they let our white girls alone there will be no lynching.<sup>25</sup>

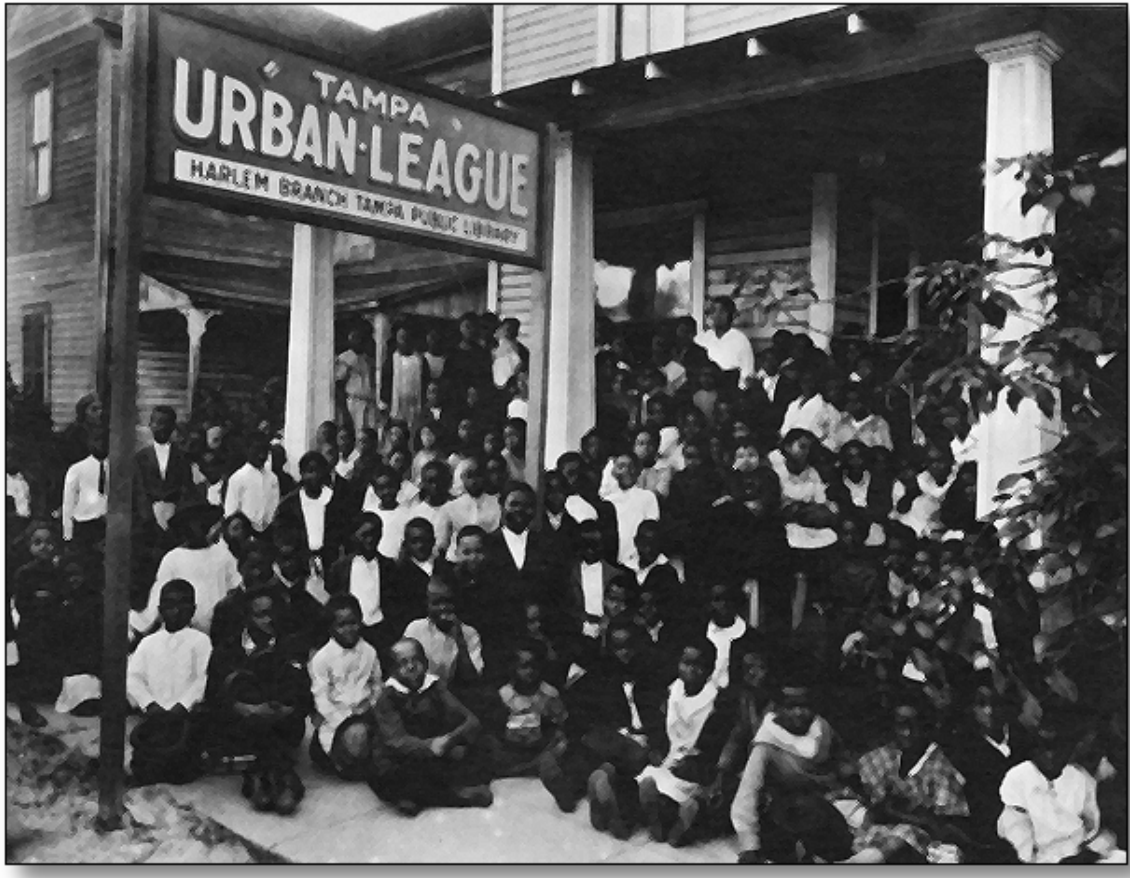
These pejorative sentiments, however, were not shared by all whites in Tampa. Indeed, many Tampanks knew all too well that lynchings were messy affairs that created a bad press for their community. The Kiwanis Club, for example, publicly "deplored" the crime because it was concerned about damage to their city's and state's good name. One of their spokesmen stated:

It was not a Negro lynched any more than it was the lynching of Tampa, Hillsborough County, and Florida. And the publicity going out over the country is the very worst kind we could get.<sup>26</sup>

A *Tribune* editorial demanded, "There must be the fullest investigation of the lynching which occurred in this county." And it added, "the Governor should order officers here to continue the inquiry until the responsibility for the act is definitely placed."<sup>27</sup>

Tampanks who protested the lynching of Johnson said little in the press about its causes. However, almost everyone in the community, white or black, understood why Johnson was murdered by vigilantes. The extralegal execution of this black man was not merely punishment meted out to one individual. Rather, it was a device designed to warn blacks to stay in their "place." To be sure, white Tampa was never uncertain about what place blacks should have in their city's life. During the 1930s whites were determined to maintain the city's large black





**The only library open to blacks in Tampa was privately organized by the local chapter of the Urban League.**

Photograph courtesy of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

population of some 22,000 residents (about 21 percent of the total) in a socially inferior position.<sup>28</sup> They forced this large minority to endure an existence of rigidly segregated life in which it faced continuous discrimination. The result was a sharply drawn color line that marked blacks off as a segregated group deemed undesirable for free association with white people in many types of relationships.<sup>29</sup>

It was common at this time to see signs around town pointing “colored” here and “white” there. In the area of transportation, blacks had either to sit at the back or ride in separate street cars. Unlike the situation in many other southern cities, Tampa blacks did not attend any of the downtown movie houses and theaters because no balconies or other provisions were made for them. A separate waiting room was provided for them at the downtown railroad station. White objections kept blacks out of parks, beaches, and swimming areas in various sections of the city. In addition, blacks had to attend their own schools in their own neighborhoods. In amusement places such as Ballast Point and public dance halls there was a very rigid line. The city’s





**Black parishioners in front of Tampa's Allen Temple A.M.E. Church on East Scott Street in 1926.**

Photograph courtesy of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

restaurant and hotel managers, by general agreement, did not sanction the use of their facilities by blacks.<sup>30</sup>

The color line was very tightly drawn in Tampa in the area of employment. At no time during the 1930s were individual blacks permitted to compete on equal terms for jobs in the city. Custom relegated the majority of them to service occupations so that the bulk of the black population was concentrated in lower-paid menial and unpleasant jobs.<sup>31</sup> The employment policies of Tampa companies and racial discrimination in training and promotion made it virtually impossible for them to find jobs in the skilled trades, in clerical and sales work, or as foremen or managers. Most Tampa industries had what might be described as a "lily-white" employment policy. This was especially true of the public utilities, and the city banks and offices.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, certain Tampa trade unions constitutionally excluded blacks from membership and thus restricted black job opportunities.<sup>33</sup>

Tampa blacks were confined to certain residential areas of town. Not surprisingly, these regions were the most rundown and deteriorated areas of the city. Most blacks rented housing





**Tampa Urban League members packing toys for distribution in 1932.**

Photograph courtesy of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

responsibility for the act,” and then urged white officials “to make life more secure for the Negro citizens of Tampa, Hillsborough County, and Florida.”<sup>41</sup>

The 1934 Tampa lynching also disturbed the national black community. Walter White, executive secretary of the NAACP, wired Sholtz deploring the lynching and calling on the Governor to bring the lynchers to justice.<sup>42</sup> The black press deplored the lynching. Black newspapers in Chicago, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and Atlanta printed the bloody details of the crime on their front pages.<sup>43</sup> The *Pittsburgh Courier* wrote that the Johnson lynching was a “death-dealing orgy” and “cold-blooded murder” that “aroused the ire of the entire nation.” The *Courier* also claimed that the Tampa lynching was certain to “help the antilynching bill cause” because it occurred “in the short space of a month since Costigan-Wagner [federal antilynching bill] was introduced” and showed how powerless state authorities “are to deal with lynch murders.”<sup>44</sup> Along these same lines, the NAACP magazine, *The Crisis*, argued that the facts of the Johnson lynching and other similar crimes invalidated the argument of many southerners that a federal antilynching law was unnecessary because state leaders could control lynching.<sup>45</sup>

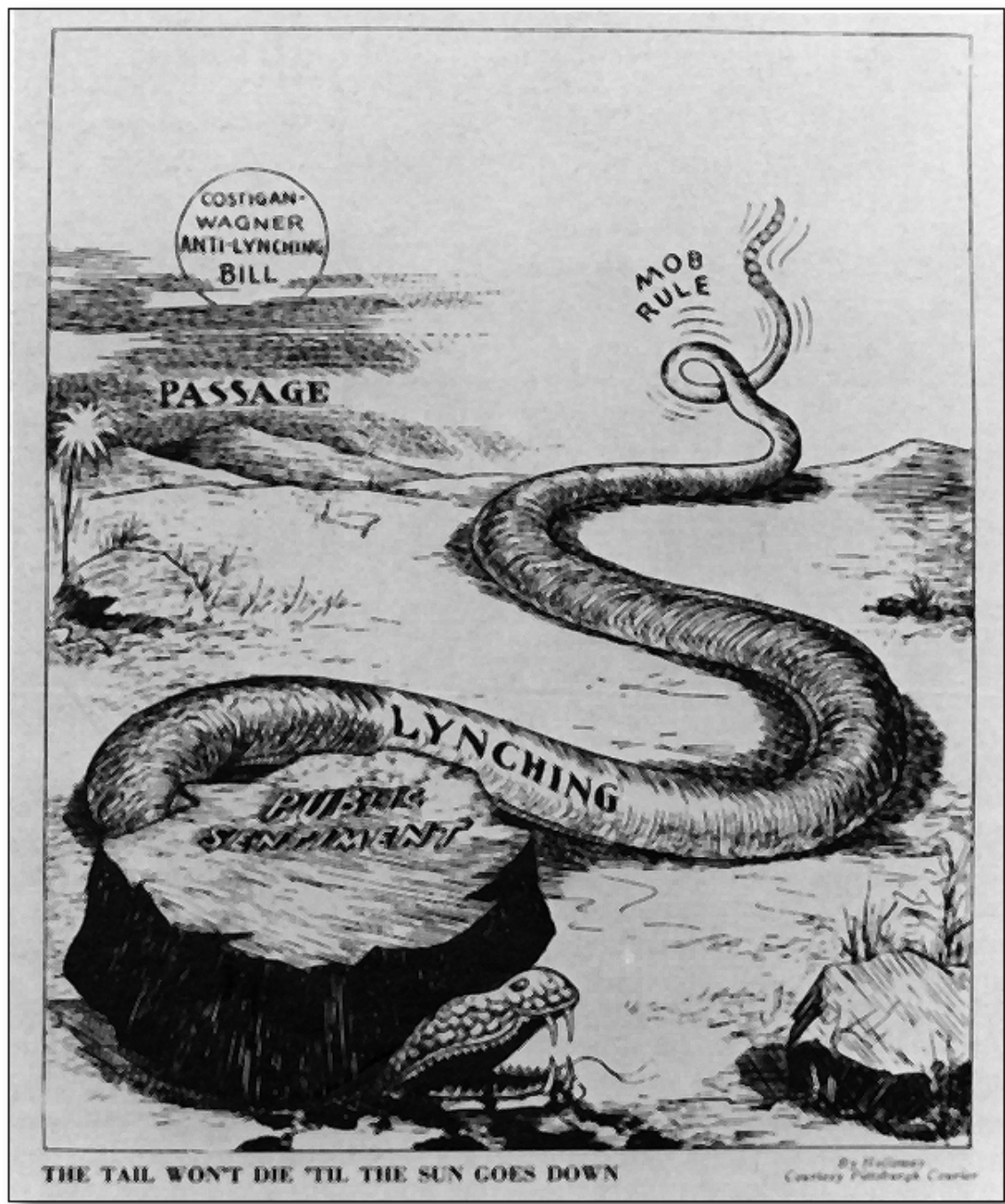




Anti-lynching cartoon indicting “Th’Law” in Florida.

From the Philadelphia Record, reprinted in *The Crisis*, January, 1935.

The lynching of Johnson did indeed stir antilynching forces. The first antilynching organization to protest the Tampa episode was the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL). In Florida, the ASWPL and its allied organizations were very well organized and active in the 1930s.<sup>46</sup> By 1934, the Florida Council of the Association boasted a membership of about 750 women and 50 men.<sup>47</sup> As soon as she heard about the Tampa affair, Jesse Daniel Ames, the national leader of the ASWPL, sternly lectured Governor Sholtz about



A cartoon in support of the federal anti-lynching bill which never passed Congress.

From the *Pittsburgh Courier*, reprinted in *The Crisis*, February, 1935.

his commitment to take action against lynchers. In a telegram she reminded him, "Last Thursday you assured a committee headed by Mrs. William P. Cornell, Chairman of Florida Council of ASWPL, that while you are governor of Florida there would be no lynching if you had two hours





white citizens of Tampa, the state's attorney, and the governor let the grand jury decision stand unchallenged. In the final analysis, the white citizenry of Tampa and Florida officials did not genuinely support vigorous prosecution of lynchers when the victim was black. Thus, the Johnson lynching stands as "a blot on Tampa's history."

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<sup>1</sup> National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918* (New York, 1969), 53-56. Jackson County, Florida, also had six lynchings during this period. Arthur F. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill, 1933), 483.

<sup>2</sup> Records of blacks lynched in Florida during the 1930s can be found in the "Lynching by Counties," Negro Collection, Files of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, Trevor Arnett Library, Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia. There are also records of these incidents in the "Lynching Files" of the Administrative Correspondence, Records of Florida Governors in the Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>3</sup> *Tampa Tribune*, January 31, 1934. The explosive issue of sex between black men and white women in the South of the 1930s has been thoroughly explored by John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New York, 1937), and James R. McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal* (Baton Rouge, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> In 1935 Tampa policemen were indicted in the Shoemaker flogging case as actual participants in the lynching of this Tampa socialist. See Robert P. Ingalls, "The Tampa Flogging Case, Urban Vigilantism," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 56 (July 1977):13-27.

<sup>5</sup> *Tampa Tribune*, January 31, 1934.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Lynching did not always take the form of hanging. An extralegal murder, committed by any means, constituted a lynching. James E. Cutler, *Lynch Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States* (New York, 1905), 9-12.

<sup>10</sup> *Tampa Tribune*, January 31, 1934.

<sup>11</sup> Sholtz to Farrior, January 31, 1934. David Sholtz Records, 1933-1937, Administrative Correspondence, Series 278, "Lynching File," Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>12</sup> Sholtz to Spencer, January 31, 1934, *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Tampa Tribune*, January 31, 1934.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, February 1, 1934.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Tallahassee Democrat*, February 3, 1934.

<sup>17</sup> Merlin G. Cox, "David Sholtz: New Deal Governor of Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 43 (October 1964), 149-51.

<sup>18</sup> Bethune to Sholtz, January 31, 1934, Sholtz Records, "Lynching File."

<sup>19</sup> J.R.E. Lee to Sholtz, January 31, 1934, *ibid.*





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<sup>40</sup> Tampa Urban League to Sholtz, February 3, 1934, and Tampa branch of the NAACP to Sholtz, February 1, 1934, Sholtz Records, "Lynching File."

<sup>41</sup> William M. Davis to Sholtz, February 3, 1934, *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Walter White to Sholtz, February 2, 1934, *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Chicago Defender*, February 3, 1934; *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 3, 1934; *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 3, 1934; and *Atlanta World*, January 31, 1934.

<sup>44</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 17, 1934.

<sup>45</sup> *The Crisis*, 41 (February 1934): 7.

<sup>46</sup> ASWPL, "Southern Women Look at Lynching," 34, Sholtz Records, "Lynching File."

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* See also Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jesse Daniel Ames and the Woman's Crusade Against Lynching* (New York, 1979).

<sup>48</sup> Ames to Sholtz, January 31, 1934, Sholtz Records, "Lynching File."

<sup>49</sup> Sholtz to Ames, February 1, 1934, *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Robert L. Zangrando, *The N.A.A.C.P. Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia, 1980), *passim*.

<sup>51</sup> White to Sholtz, February 2, 1934, Sholtz Records, "Lynching File."

<sup>52</sup> Robert L. Zangrando, "The Efforts of the N.A.A.C.P. to Secure Passage of a Federal Antilynching Law, 1920-1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1963), 307-08.

<sup>53</sup> Sholtz to Walter White, February 15, 1934, Sholtz Records, "Lynching File."

<sup>54</sup> Spencer to Sholtz, January 31, 1934, *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Farrior to Sholtz, March 15, 1934, *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> In October, 1934, Claude Neal, a black man, was lynched in Jackson County. A black man named Reuben Stacey was murdered by vigilantes in Ft. Lauderdale, July, 1935. And Joseph Shoemaker, white, was flogged to death in Tampa in November, 1935. Jesse Daniel Ames, *The Changing Character of Lynching* (Atlanta, 1942), 56-58.

<sup>57</sup> Ingalls, "Tampa Flogging Case." 13-27.

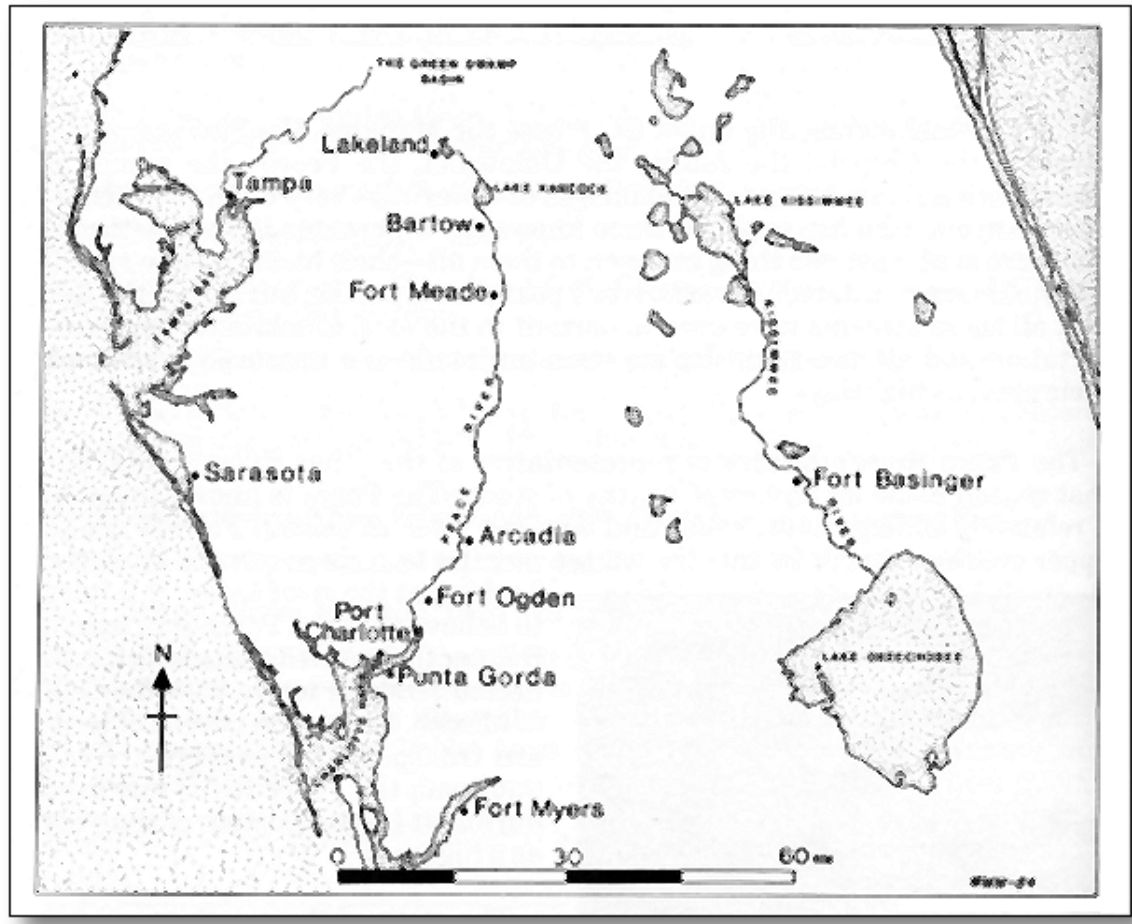


The Peace River near its northern source,  
from *Peace River Pioneers* by Louise Frisbie.

## THE PEACE RIVER: A FORGOTTEN HIGHWAY

by Lynn W. Ware

The Caloosahatchee, the upper St. Johns, the Manatee, the Suwannee, the Myakka, the Chipola, the Alafia, the Oklawaha, the Peace—the names of these Florida rivers bring to mind images of waterways very different in character. Anyone who has explored them knows the differences in their settings, but there is at least one thing common to them all—their history. More specifically, it is not the details of each river's past that are alike, but rather the fact that all these streams were once important to the local inhabitants for transportation and all saw their decline when railroads and improved roads took their place as highways.



Map by William M. Murray.

The Peace River's history is representative of the other rivers' pasts. For that reason alone its history is worthy of study. The Peace is known today as a relatively unimportant, small and winding river in central Florida whose upper reaches shrink in the dry winter months to a mere stream of water. Looking at the river today, it is hard to believe that the Peace was once a frequently traveled route which connected central Florida with the Gulf of Mexico. Before the advent of modern transportation networks of rail and road, the Peace River was used during at least a portion of the year as a highway.

The story of the river's usage begins at least three thousand years ago when natives used the Peace River system up into the Green Swamp north of present-day Lakeland as a highway for their dugout canoes. There is evidence that the Seminoles also used the river as a form of transportation. Because of the Indians' reliance on the river as a means of travel it follows that when the soldiers of the Third Seminole War moved into the area, they too would use the river in order to find the elusive Seminoles. Later as the threat of Indian attack subsided, settlers began moving into the area which ironically lead to the disuse of the Peace River. As the population grew, the building of roads and railroads brought a more reliable and direct means of traveling

and made river transportation of lesser importance. Like most other Florida rivers the Peace River was eventually forgotten as a transportation route. Today only those who enjoy fishing and canoeing have ever seen this beautiful stream except when crossing its bridges in their cars.

As early as 1000 B.C. natives used the Peace River to travel between the Green Swamp and the Gulf of Mexico. Their shallow draught dugouts would have had no difficulty in traversing the river even during the lowest stages of water. The oldest canoe in the western hemisphere was uncovered on the northern shore of Lake Parker, northeast of Lakeland. By radiocarbon analysis this canoe recorded a reading of 3040 B.P.  $\pm$  115 years, indicating that it was used about 1090 B.C. Two other canoes were found—but not analyzed for age—near this lake that once was a link in the chain of lakes and streams extending from the Green Swamp to the Peace River.<sup>1</sup> The continued use of this waterway may be inferred from the discovery of other dugouts near Lake Hancock. One of these craft dates from 1520 to 1620 A.D.<sup>2</sup>

By the mid-eighteenth century Creek Indians and runaway slaves from Georgia and Alabama had moved into central Florida. Collectively known as the Seminole Indians, they too used their canoes to travel along the Peace River.

Park DeVane, a long-time student of the Seminoles, has an interesting theory concerning the Seminoles' use of Florida rivers. According to DeVane, it was once possible by using the Green Swamp in the fashion of a railroad roundhouse to travel from one part of Florida to another via the Peace, Kissimmee, Alafia, Hillsborough, Withlacoochee, Oklawaha, St. Johns and Econlockhatchee Rivers. All of these rivers had their headwaters in the Green Swamp or connected to another river that did, so it was possible to travel through the swamp to get from one river to the next. By this means the Indians could have traveled by water continuously from the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic.<sup>3</sup>

DeVane bases this theory on the scores of years he has spent in learning Florida history first-hand from those elder Seminoles yet surviving. He has learned that the Indians once traveled practically anywhere in Florida in their canoes. Using linking lakes, creeks, rivers and inundated swamps, it was possible to travel long distances. DeVane published an account by Billy Bowlegs, III, of a canoe trip from Fort Basinger on the Kissimmee River, through Lake Okeechobee, up Fisheating Creek to Rainey Slough and Gannett Slough, then into Myrtle Creek, Shell Creek and up the Peace River to Fort Ogden where he traded and then made the return trip.<sup>4</sup> The two-hundred-and-sixty-mile roundtrip does not seem possible now that the smaller bodies of water are dried up, but this was once common practice. DeVane has pictures of canoe wharfs built by the Seminoles in the Everglades. It is an odd sight to see the wharf remnants in the midst of dry land.<sup>5</sup>

Early white explorers left accounts of Indians living at the river's edge. One of these was by Horatio S. Dexter, who in 1823 sent to Florida's territorial governor a detailed account of central Florida terrain. Dexter left the Tampa Bay area for the interior during the rainy season. The land became flooded, and he had difficulty making his way by horse. He met an Indian who told him of a village where he could get a boat to take him down the Peace River to Charlotte Harbor. Finally, he reached Oponey's settlement in Lake Hancock, but unfortunately for Dexter there was no boat. His communication with the Seminole was so poor that he could not tell if the boat

had been sunk or if someone had taken it, but there is no question that the Indians used the river for transportation.<sup>6</sup>

The Treaty of Moultrie Creek in that same year set aside an Indian reservation in the heart of the peninsula which included the northernmost reaches of Peace River. James Gadsden was appointed to head the operation of surveying the Indian lands. In addition to Oponey's settlement, two other villages were noted by him in 1824 on the upper reaches of Talakchopko, or Peace, River.<sup>7</sup> Another 1824 map shows villages near Fort Meade and further south on Bowlegs Creek, a tributary of the Peace River that joins the river two miles south of Fort Meade.<sup>8</sup>

Another account of Indians in the area was left by a slave of an army officer who was captured by the Indians. Sometime between 1835 and 1837 he stole a canoe from his captors and escaped. He traveled the entire length of the Peace River before being recaptured by the Indians.<sup>9</sup>

In 1839 Alexander Macomb, commanding general of the U.S. Army, concluded a treaty with two of the Seminole chiefs left in Florida. He moved the Indian reservation south and east so that the Peace River from its mouth north to Big Creek (Charlie Apopka Creek today) became the western boundary.<sup>10</sup>

By the 1850s a few white settlers had built homes along the Peace River and its tributaries. On the heels of the settlers the army moved in with a string of forts to flush out those Indians remaining. Peas Creek, as it was then known, now became important to the U.S. Army. The army built Fort Fraser near Lake Hancock in November, 1837. It was located a couple of miles north of present-day Bartow. The "fort" was actually a supply depot for the interior and east coast forts.<sup>11</sup>

In 1841 the army built Fort Ogden. The main purpose of this post was to supply the military with cypress canoes for the fighting in the Everglades. Soldiers built fifty-five of the craft here and transported them down the Peace River to the Gulf and up the Caloosahatchee.<sup>12</sup> At about the same time the army expanded its surveillance of the area by building Fort Winder. It was located south of Fort Ogden on the west side of Lettuce Lake.<sup>13</sup>

In 1849 U.S. forces established two additional forts to the north. In October they laid out Fort Chokkonikla near the site of a former Indian trading post at the confluence of the Peace River with what became known as Payne Creek. The store had been burned by Indians earlier that year. Near where a wharf once had stood on the west bank of the river, soldiers ferried a bridge into place to allow access to the opposite side of the river.<sup>14</sup> In December they constructed Fort Meade. Named after second Lieutenant George Gordon Meade, this fort served longer than all the other military establishments on the river.<sup>15</sup>

Additional installations followed during the 1850s. Two miles southwest of the present location of Wauchula, soldiers built Fort Hartsuff in August, 1851. After abandoning the post, they brought it back into service in April, 1856.<sup>16</sup> The military set up its last installation near the mouth of the river in 1857. They used Camp Whipple as a site for mounted forces on reconnaissance and a depot for supplies that came by steamboat from Fort Myers on the Caloosahatchee and Fort Brooke at Tampa Bay.<sup>17</sup>





**Peace River bridge at Bartow.**

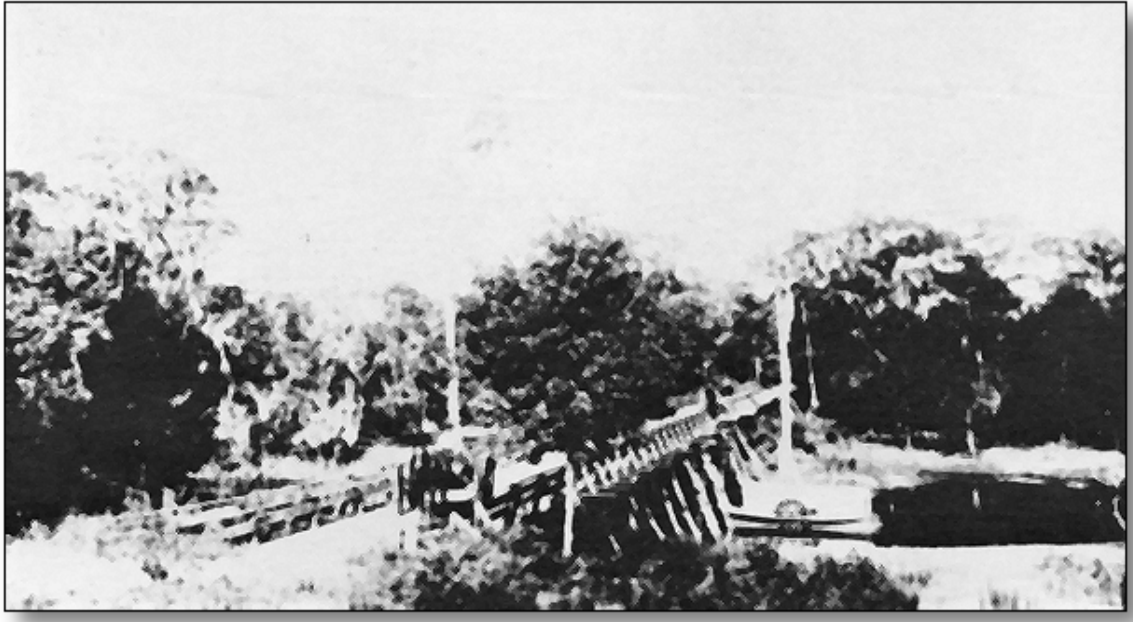
Photograph courtesy of Polk County Historical Library.

In addition to the military's posts, settlers constructed fortifications. The Blount family built a stockade for their own protection near what is now the corner of Main Street and Floral Avenue in Bartow.<sup>18</sup> James Green made a fort of his homestead near Payne Creek, west of present-day Fort Green Springs, between the years 1854 and 1856.<sup>19</sup>

The Peace River figured prominently in fighting between Indians and soldiers. In June, 1856, Indians attacked the Willoughby Tillis family near Fort Meade. Volunteer forces set out to avenge the raid. Twice they contacted the Seminoles. The last skirmish occurred on the banks of the Peace River. Finally, after losing a total of five men with others wounded, the soldiers temporarily retreated, enabling the Indians to flee.<sup>20</sup> Jesse Carter, Florida's special agent on Indian affairs, told Governor Broome he believed the Indians had escaped "down-river . . . in boats or rafts."<sup>21</sup> Later Carter reported finding a canoe that he thought might have been "used by the party attacking Tillis."<sup>22</sup>

Because the Indians were slipping away from the troops through the swamps and down the waterways, the soldiers employed the same means of transportation in order to find them. Skiffs and scows were kept at Forts Meade and Chokkonikla for this and other purposes.<sup>23</sup>

Two reports filed in 1857 described reconnaissances made by boat. On February 5, 1857, Captain John A. Whitall left Camp Whipple with nine boats. He ascended the river



**Peace River bridge at Fort Meade, showing paddlewheel boat to the right of the bridge.**

Photograph courtesy of Polk County Historical Library.

approximately twenty-eight miles, landing often to burn the country. He slowly continued an additional seven or eight miles before having to turn back because of low water.<sup>24</sup> According to a November, 1857, report, Captain L. G. Lesley took seventeen men in four boats down the Peace River on another reconnaissance mission. He traveled from Fort Meade south to five miles below Fort Winder where he was forced to turn back. The high southerly winds made the water too rough for his small boats.<sup>25</sup>

Besides using the Peace River in looking for hostiles, the army sometimes utilized the waterway to transport supplies and troops. The steamboat *Texas Ranger* brought in supplies to Camp Whipple from Fort Myers.<sup>26</sup> In 1851 Captain W. H. Winder reported to the adjutant general that twenty-three men had embarked the previous day from Fort Myers on one transport to relieve Company E, 9th Artillery, at Fort Meade. Eighteen additional troops were to follow southerly winds made the water too rough for his small boats.<sup>27</sup>

After the Tillis skirmish the threat of Indian attack on the Peace River valley residents subsided. There was no further conflict between the Indians and the army or individual settlers in this area. Gradually the country began filling up with pioneers eager to begin a new enterprise in a country possessing both cheap, fertile land and a warm climate.



**Phosphate dredge boat.**

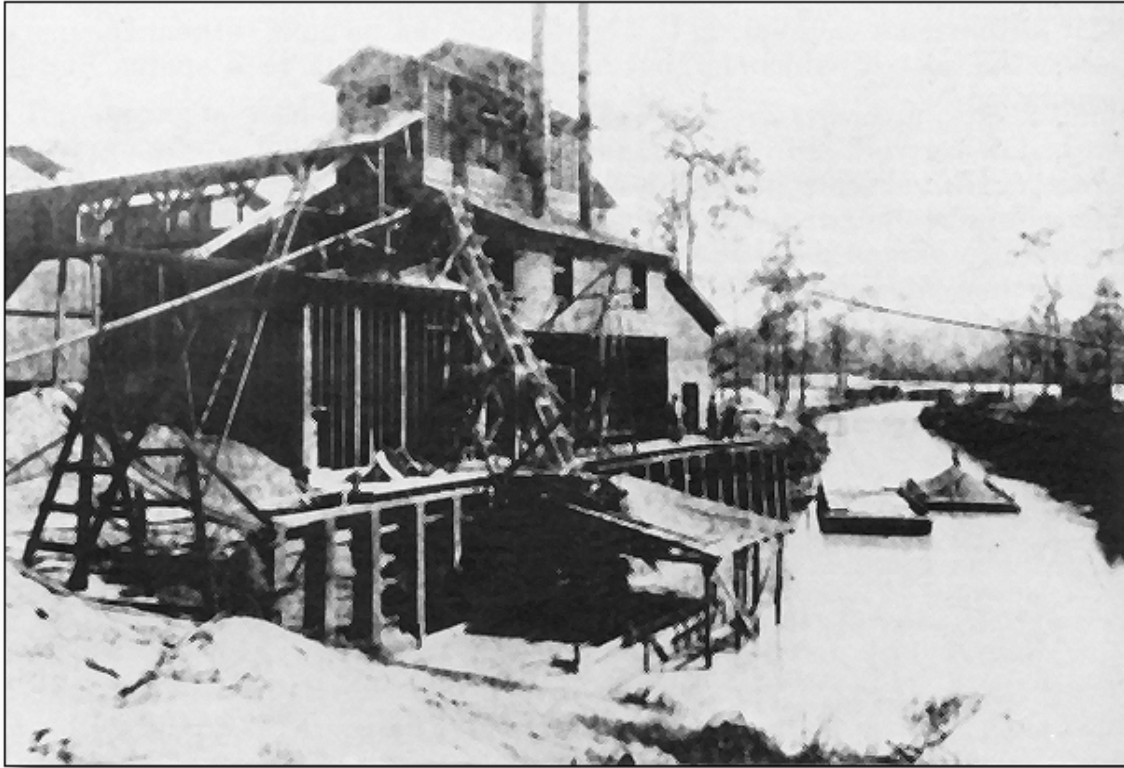
Photograph courtesy of author.

Early entrepreneurs took advantage of the Peace River's current in transporting logs from the river swamp to sawmills located downstream on the banks of the river. The first man to open a mill on the Peace was Louis Lanier who built a greatly needed facility near Fort Meade in 1860. Prior to that time lumber for the area had to be transported overland from Tampa.<sup>28</sup> Later other mills were established in Bartow, Fort Ogden, Arcadia and near the mouth of the river.<sup>29</sup>

The logging method used along the Peace River was typical of cypress lumbering procedures found in other parts of the country. First the trees were "girdled" to drain them of their sap, making them light enough to float. Months later the trees were cut down where they floated in place in the stagnant water of the swamp. When enough were felled, loggers pushed them out into the river either rafted together or floating singly. The river carried them downstream to the mill, where workers fished the logs out with a winch and cut them into boards.<sup>30</sup>

The new inhabitants of the Peace River valley also used the river in transporting goods. Oranges, sweet potatoes, furs, hogs and chickens were moved from one location to another along the river.<sup>31</sup> The early traders sometimes found it hard going north of Arcadia. Fallen trees, sunken logs from the logging operations and shoals often made passage difficult. The new inhabitants of the Peace River valley begged the Congress for improvement of the river. In March, 1879, Congress responded by authorizing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to examine



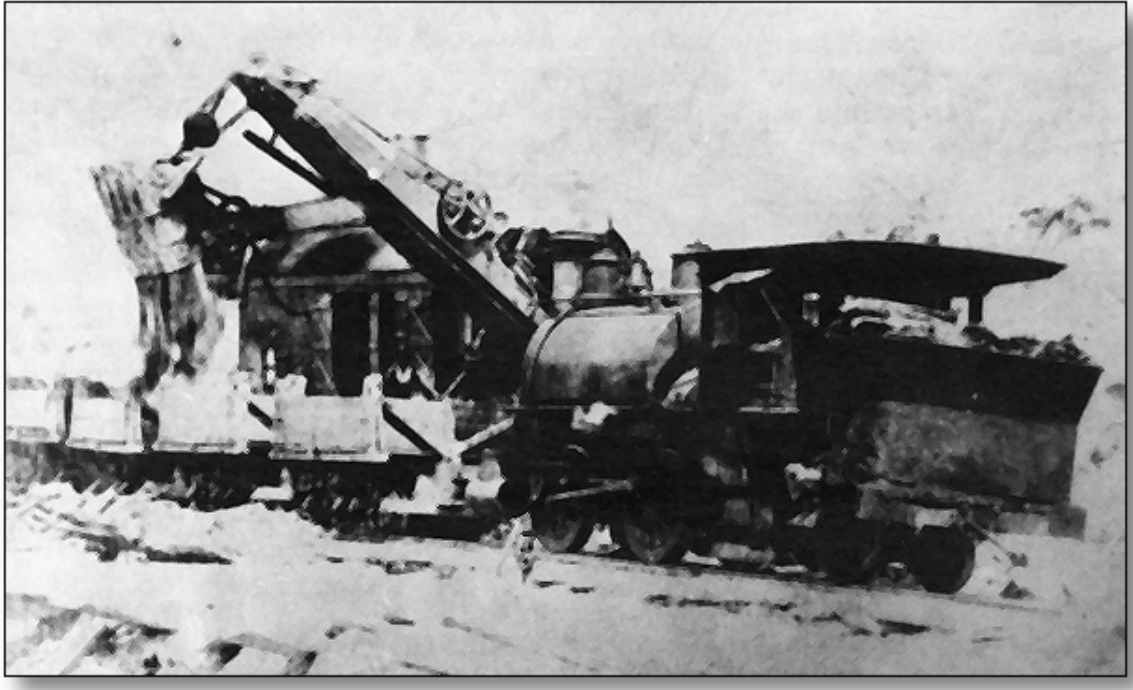


**Bone VaHey Phosphate Works on the Peace River, circa 1900, from *Peace River Pioneers* by Louise Frisbie.**

the river. The report by J.L. Meigs was favorable, and sixty-four miles of the river were cleared before the money ran out in 1884.<sup>32</sup>

As the task of clearing the river was getting underway another Corps of Engineers project included the Peace River. In 1880 Congress passed an ambitious act calling for a cross-Florida steamboat canal. The waterway was to connect the St. Johns River to the Peace River by way of the Topokalija Lake without the use of locks.<sup>33</sup> J. Francis LeBaron surveyed the Peace River from Fort Meade to its mouth as a part of the Corps' examination of the canal route.<sup>34</sup> As a result of the surveys conducted, the Corps of Engineers concluded that a steamboat canal along this route could not be built without the use of locks, the cost of which far outweighed the benefits to a sparse Florida population.<sup>35</sup>

Although it did not produce a canal, the survey reported the presence of phosphate in the river, and businessmen soon organized phosphate hunts. Usually working in secret so as not to drive land prices up, these men and their scientists floated down the river taking random samples of the riverbed.<sup>36</sup> When they were satisfied that huge amounts of phosphate could be recovered from the river, they quickly set to work. By 1891 the fledgling phosphate industry had bought up acreage on both sides of the river and had begun mining the river bottom. Dredge barges, resembling large rafts with room aboard for a steam engine and a centrifugal pump, could be



**Steam shovel loading phosphate on railway cars, circa 1905.**

Photograph courtesy of Polk County Historical Commission.

seen as far north as Bartow. Accompanying the large barges were smaller “lighters” which conveyed ore to drying houses on the river bank. Once the phosphate was dried, the lighters hauled it downriver to Punta Gorda where ocean-going steamships carried it to domestic and foreign ports.<sup>37</sup>

Within a short time mining was so intensive that the phosphate industry had practically taken over the river.<sup>38</sup> Use of the river by anyone else would have been difficult at this time because of the number of boats working the river.

The miners eventually learned that dealing with the extremes in water level was a part of the job. They became exasperated with using the river for transporting their vessels when during the dry months low stages of water were sometimes too low for floating their laden boats and high water in the wet season occasionally flooded their works.<sup>39</sup> The miners welcomed the coming of the railroad which promised a more reliable means of getting the phosphate to Punta Gorda. As the companies began abandoning river mining altogether for the more profitable land mining, there was even more reason to rely on the railroad for transportation of the phosphate to Punta Gorda. The Peace River was soon abandoned in a worse condition than it was in before the mining began. The river was now cluttered with sunken barges, fallen trees and new shoals made by the dredging operations.<sup>40</sup>

Before the Corps of Engineers again studied the feasibility of improving the river, times had changed. The railroads that had crept through the Florida peninsula during several decades finally choked off Florida's reliance on river transportation. In 1886 the Florida Southern Railroad, which generally followed the course of the Peace River, was completed to Punta Gorda.<sup>41</sup> It was impossible for river transportation to compete with railroad service. Both agriculture and industry preferred to rely on the railroad for moving their products. In those days before refrigeration, farmers needed a more direct and, therefore, quicker means of getting their products to northern markets than the now-antiquated method of ferrying them downriver to Charlotte Harbor, to be loaded onto an ocean-going steamer that slowly plied to New Orleans or New York for final distribution. The railroad and phosphate industry doomed the river as a means of transportation.<sup>42</sup>

Although residents complained about railway freight rates, they could not convince the Corps of Engineers to improve the entire river again. The Corps could not justify the expense of clearing the river so that its navigation could be used by the citizens solely as a club to hold over the head of the railroad owners. A 1918 report concluded: "It is not believed that any improvement of the river will bring back the commerce that has left to seek other outlets according to natural trade laws, and owing to the good service given by the railroad it is not believed that the improvement of the river would open up any new territory."<sup>43</sup>

With alternative means of transportation afforded by the railroad system and an improved road network, most of Florida's rivers were soon forgotten as transportation arteries. The Peace River was one of these rivers whose usefulness fell into obscurity.

Today following the river by canoe from Bartow, one encounters few other boaters but many reminders of past activity. Just north of Fort Meade there is a broad place in the river where once the Seminoles dammed the water to make a fish weir. One can still see the evidence of a long-ago cypress logging industry in the upper river. Near Bartow is a sunken phosphate dredging barge whose outline can be discerned at low water. The remnants of wharves built by the earliest phosphate companies are still standing near Arcadia. These physical evidences remind one that this river was not always as quiet as it is today. The Peace River, once a frequently traveled route, is now a forgotten highway.

<sup>1</sup> Ripley P. Bullen and Harold K. Brooks, "Two Ancient Florida Dugout Canoes," *Quarterly Journal of the Florida Academy of Sciences*, 30 (June 1967): 97-107; "Four Rivers Basin, Florida," House Executive Document No. 585, 87th Cong., 2d. sess. (Washington, 1962), 21.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Joe Lamed, March 31, 1981, Bone Valley Phosphate Museum, Bradley, Florida; Murray Tamers to author, September 23, 1981, transmitting report of carbon dating analysis.

<sup>3</sup> Interviews with Park DeVane, May 7, 1980-March 29, 1982, Sebring and Tallahassee.

<sup>4</sup> Park DeVane, "Billy Bowlegs III Describes a Canoe Trip," *DeVane's Early Florida History*, 2 (Sebring, Fla.: Sebring Historical Society, 1979), n.p.

<sup>5</sup> A copy of one of these photos is in the possession of the author.



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<sup>24</sup> F.N. Page, Summary of Capt. Whitall's Report to Headquarters, "Memoirs of Reconnaissance."

<sup>25</sup> L. G. Lesly to Francis N. Page, November 25, 1857, "Letters Received – D. O. F."

<sup>26</sup> Winfield S. Hancock to Francis N. Page, January 22, 1857, *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> W.H. Winder to R. Jones, September 26, 1851, "Adjutant General's Office – Letters Received," Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives Microfilm Publication No. M. 567.

<sup>28</sup> *The Florida Peninsular*, February 4, 1860.

<sup>29</sup> *The Bartow Informant*, April 14, May 26, 1883; *Bartow Advance Courier*, January 18, 1888; J.F. Bartholf and F.C.M. Boggess, *South Florida, The Italy of America* (Jacksonville: Mead Brothers, 1881), 13; *Polk County News*, February 6, 1891; L. French Townshend, *Wild Life in Florida with a Visit to Cuba* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1875), 126.

<sup>30</sup> *Fort Meade Leader*, April 9, 1964; Deposition of G.W. Williams, taken January 4, 1894, in Transcript of Record, *State of Florida vs. The Charlotte Harbor Phosphate Company*, U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, 260, Federal Archives and Records Center, Fort Worth, Texas. Phillip Ware, a geologist who has spent many hours in the Peace River swamp, has recovered several "deadheads" which are logs that were sawed on both ends by the lumbermen but which sank before they reached the mill. One of these deadheads still had attached to it a "dog" or metal clip used in tying several logs together into a raft.

<sup>31</sup> *Bartow Informant*, December 23, 1882; *Tampa Tribune*, August 16, 1959; *The Arcadian*, January 7, 1943.

<sup>32</sup> "Examination of Charlotte Harbor and Peas Creek, Florida," Senate Executive Document No. 128, 46th Cong., 2d sess. (Washington, 1880), 1-8; "Report of the Secretary of War," House Executive Document No. 1, Pt. 2, 49th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, 1885), 1268-69.

<sup>33</sup> "Steamboat Communication in Florida," Senate Executive Document No. 189, 47th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, 1882), 1-23.

<sup>34</sup> It was during this survey that LeBaron discovered phosphate in the Peace River. Although LeBaron tried to exploit the vast resources of the now-famous Bone Valley Phosphate District, he was unable to find sponsors for the venture and never profited financially. His original report may be found in Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers, Record Group 77, Federal Records Center, East Point, Georgia.

<sup>35</sup> "Steamboat Communication in Florida," 17.

<sup>36</sup> M.F. Hetherington, *History of Polk County, Florida* (St. Augustine: Record Company, 1928), 178-79; *Polk County News*, February 20, 1891.

<sup>37</sup> Francis Wyatt, *The Phosphates of America* (New York: Scientific Publishing Co., 1894), 77; Louise Frisbie, *Peace River Pioneers* (Miami: E.A. Seemann Publishing Co., 1974), 111.

<sup>38</sup> W.W. Finerin, to the District Engineer, January 4, 1918, transmitting report on the preliminary examination of Peace River, Florida, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers District Office, Jacksonville, Florida.

<sup>39</sup> *Polk County News*, June 12, 1891.

<sup>40</sup> Finerin to the District Engineer, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Vernon E. Peebles, "Charlotte Harbor Division of the Florida Southern Railroad," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 58 (January 1980): 296.



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<sup>42</sup> Finerin to the District Engineer, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 6.

## **BOASTERS, BOOSTERS AND BOOM: POPULAR IMAGES OF FLORIDA IN THE 1920s**

by James M. Ricci

Florida has always been an upstart state; its cities have always been upstart towns. Development and promotion are the hallmark features of virtually every phase of Florida's recent past. The land boom of the 1920s represents one apex, and ultimate failure, ordained for a state that rests upon a foundation of boosterism and image-making. So while the boom of the twenties is important to understanding Florida's past, it may be equally instructive in illuminating its present and anticipating its future.

The boom began around 1920, accelerated to a peak in 1925 and died in 1926 as hurricanes swept across the state. The causes of the boom are intricate and diverse. Numerous forces acting together after World War I attracted many Americans to Florida. Ideologically, postwar Americans confronted a dilemma. On the one hand, they faced the opportunity to pursue a path of establishing and protecting democratic ideals throughout the world, or on the other, of concentrating their efforts on domestic affairs of their own country. In the elections of 1920, Americans expressed their preference, and the domestic emphasis easily carried the day.

Culturally, during this time, Americans sought new outlets, and they had various alternatives with which to experiment. The middle class found that automobiles, radios, and sports provided pleasant diversions. Between 1920 and 1930, a large number of Americans, especially the younger generation, became enamored of such fads as Mah Jong, crossword puzzles, and flagpole sitting. Jazz was their music and symbolized their lifestyle. They wore distinctive clothing as badges of their devil-may-care attitudes. They also worshipped heroes – from matinee idols such as Valentino, to sports figures such as Dempsey, Ruth and Grange, to achievers such as Byrd, Eberle, and Lindbergh, all of whom seemed greater than life. Postwar Americans became frivolous faddists captivated by anything that produced enough noise and ballyhoo to attract their attention. And by the 1920s, Florida was rather adept at producing noise.<sup>1</sup>

While general attitudes produced a mood conducive to booms of all types, groups and organizations within Florida initiated measures to make the state especially attractive. Seeking to establish Florida as America's winter home, these groups campaigned to attract Northern tourists to the Sunshine State. Chambers of commerce, civic clubs, railroads and bus lines achieved some success, and tourists from all economic strata (not just the idle rich who were already in the habit of wintering in the sun) filtered south. This influx, though, was neither great enough nor fast enough for many Floridians. It was action by Florida's elected officials and a governor dedicated to good roads that helped accelerate the slow migration of the early 1920s into the boom of 1925.

In 1923, the Florida legislature passed a constitutional amendment abolishing state income and inheritance taxes. It was presented to the people for ratification in the general election of 1924, and it passed. The amendment was a drawing card, theoretically, for the capital needed to



Ohio cartoonist's view of the Florida land boom, from *Review of Reviews*, May 1925.

develop Florida's "great latent resources." According to the secretary of the Florida Development Board, the amendment would "result in millions of dollars becoming available to be loaned at a low rate of interest for building new hotels, apartment homes, residences and industries, resulting in cheaper money to the men who want to build homes and expand manufacturing operations."<sup>2</sup> This would translate, proponents hoped, into continued employment, increased population and, ultimately, greater prosperity for Florida merchants. Exemptions from state income and inheritance taxes were powerful bait to many Americans, if for no other reason than simply to go south and take a look around.



In 1924, Floridians elected a governor committed to completing the network of roads that had been started in 1915. The successful gubernatorial campaign of John W. Martin sheds light on the mood of Florida's electorate. Martin, convinced that a system of paved highways would help increase the industry and tourist trades, "promised to build roads from one end of the state to the other, before the people now living [were] in the cemetery." Postwar prosperity had given the state a sort of "brassy aura," and Martin exuded the same feeling. He believed the chief executive of the state "should be imaginative, a living advertisement for the splendors of the sub-tropic paradise of oranges, palm trees and white sand."<sup>3</sup>

Around this time, the citrus industry moved to the southern sections of the state to escape the destruction of freezes. Moreover, the Everglades were being drained for farm use, enhancing the possibilities of real estate development in South Florida.<sup>4</sup>

Spurred by such trends, the state began to boom. The boosters, however, from both Florida and elsewhere, played an equally, if not more, significant role in the Florida land boom. They created the image of the state.

By 1920, boosterism was fairly common in the upstart state of Florida. Shortly after the Civil War, promoters began producing literature proclaiming the unlimited possibilities of the state. The most prolific sources of this literature were the railroads. As Henry Flagler's line opened up the east coast and Henry B. Plant pioneered the west coast, their organizations frequently hired professional writers to wax eloquent on the beauties and charms of the sparsely settled region. These publicists were often renowned authors such as Sidney Lanier, or would-be artists who used such obvious pen-names as Sylvia Sunshine.<sup>5</sup> As the railroad magnates plowed south and opened up magnificent hotels, the boosters turned out piece after piece concerning the respective projects and the benefits of the area where each was located. Civic groups joined the railroads in the community advertising business, and by the turn of the century, Florida cities were spinning out travelogues and brochures at a prodigious clip.<sup>6</sup>

It was during the 1920s, though, that Florida received dramatic results from the boosters' efforts. Between 1920 and 1930, Florida's population ballooned from 1,000,000 to 1,468,211. Its 51.6 percent growth rate was significant compared to the nation's 16.1 percent increase for the same period. During the boom years, from 1920 to 1925, more than 295,000 people settled in Florida, a growth of 30.4 percent. For the same five-year period, the net income of Florida individuals and corporations rose from \$119,656,824 to \$815,707,142.<sup>7</sup>

Immediately preceding and during this era of expansion, literature boosting Florida flooded America. The promotional material came in a wide range of written forms that boasted Florida's claims.

The newspaper industry was naturally one of the most forceful vehicles for publicizing the state. Within Florida, newspapers skillfully advertised the benefits of their communities and state. Daily newspapers spread to virtually every town or city regardless of size. In cities that previously had had newspaper services, other presses arose to supplement the established voice. The total number of daily newspapers in Florida jumped from thirty-three in 1921 to fifty-one by

*"Opening of*  
**HOMOSASSA**  
*Florida"*



**T**HE first sale of home sites, villa sites and business sites in Homosassa, Florida's new west coast metropolis, opened Monday, February first. Milboms have been spent improving this famous beauty spot.

All the west coast needed was transportation. This is now assured.

When this railroad construction is completed the neck of the traffic bottle at Jacksonville will be broken. Homosassa and the Tampa Bay and Miami districts will be two hundred miles closer to Chicago. Fortunes will be made in real estate here.

Millions are being spent in predevelopment construction. A scientifically planned city is under construction. Wide boulevards, streets, water mains, sewers, sidewalks, hotels, homes and business blocks are completed, others under way.

The west coast and the new city of Homosassa offer you exceptional opportunities, beginning Monday, February first.

The Florida West Coast Development Company was formerly the Hoover Interests, Homosassa, Florida. Branches and representatives throughout Florida and all principal Northern cities. An unusual opportunity is offered syndicates and reliable individuals.





**HOMOSASSA**  
 FLORIDA WEST COAST DEVELOPMENT CO.

Advertisement from *Suniland*, February 1926.



# IT TOOK 400 YEARS to build this Old World Atmosphere



## Here D. P. Davis Will Build In 400 Days A Great Modern City And Resort Center

**W**HEN in Florida do not fail to see Davis Shores and Davis Islands, the South's greatest realty projects—the most fascinating development operations in America! See Davis Islands in Tampa, where many millions in homes, hotels, apartments, and business structures are now completed or under way. And see Davis Shores in St. Augustine, the new \$30,000,000 D. P. Davis development in the Heart of America's oldest city.

All world records for intensive development and sales achievement have been broken by Davis Islands and Davis Shores. And investors from everywhere are making quick, substantial profits—virtual fortunes in many instances—by following D. P. Davis. Ask anyone who has been in Florida—see for yourself when you get there.

*Davis Shores*  
—another DAVIS ISLANDS  
*St. Augustine on the Ocean*

**D. P. DAVIS PROPERTIES**

Tampa and St. Augustine

*Developers Throughout Florida*

Advertisement from *Suniland*, January 1926.

increased from seventy-eight in 1921 to ninety-nine in 1925.<sup>8</sup>





**View of Big Island as dredging began for Davis Islands, April 9, 1925.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

More important than the increase of Florida publications, however, were the methods of writing and type of articles printed. While national news coverage during the period centered around such stories as Presidential elections, the League of Nations, the Halls-Mills case, the Scopes trial, and the exploits of Red Grange, Florida journalism was preoccupied with promoting the land boom and any related hype of even the least significance. The mission of every Florida newspaper appeared to one observant commentator to be “to broadcast the virtues and splendors of its home town at the top of its voice.” The press’s main function, it seemed, was to pave the way for the real estate men. In defense of his profession, one newspaperman complained:

If the editor becomes lax and forgets to shout, he is reminded by the Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce. If he grows honest and declares that Main Street is a fright and the trash barrels should be kept in alleys, he is instantly damned as “anything but a booster.” If he keeps it up, he faces a future barren of advertising and subscribers.<sup>9</sup>

One need only scan Florida newspapers between 1920 and 1926 to come away with similar impressions; few editors wanted to be labeled “anything but a booster.”



**Housing under construction on Davis Islands, March 13, 1925.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.



**Finished houses on Davis Islands, June 9, 1925.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

While the local press reassured residents and visitors of the community's splendors and future, many national newspapers spread the word to their readers through articles, editorials and advertisements. Newspapers in northern cities printed accounts of Florida which tended, at least in the formative years of the boom, to create a favorable image of the state. These almost formulaic reports often detailed the benefits of Florida as a retreat, related miraculous stories of people who became rich overnight from real estate deals and, finally, urged their readers to make a trip to this magical land. Accompanying such laudatory stories were advertisements for Florida subdivisions and lots, perking the interest of Northern readers tired of the harshness and associated costs of severe winters.

Northerners also became familiar with Florida through promotional brochures. Freely distributed, these ranged from one-page leaflets to book-length manuscripts filled with pictures, maps and hyperbole. One of the most successful brochure producers was David P. Davis of Tampa, who dredged a series of islands in Hillsborough Bay into an extravagant residential and resort community called Davis Islands. His brochure campaign ranged from artistic pamphlets detailing the profits "made and refused" on the islands to lessons in investment acumen such as "If – The Barrier to Wealth," which recounted profits missed by those who failed to buy when the opportunity was ripe. These brochures were also placed as advertisements in newspapers and magazines.<sup>10</sup>

While developers and subdividers used these small pamphlets regularly, the more elaborate booklet was just as widespread and equally persuasive. Davis Properties, for example, published a number of booklets to lure prospective buyers. One twenty-two-page effort, *Life on Davis Islands, Tampa in the Bay: Florida's \$30,000,000 Development*, was produced in 1925. It dripped with hyperbole and finely illustrated drawings of the "good life." Scenes of leisure activities, including people playing tennis, motorboating, sunbathing and golfing, were worthy of accompanying the text of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. The stories trumpeted in flowery

language the project's various components: "Entrance Towers—to Beckon a Cordial Welcome"; "Roman Pools—last word in Bathing Luxury"; "Distinguished Homes—where pleasurable living abounds"; "The Yacht Club—Center of Brilliant Activities"; "The Tennis Club—scene of absorbing pleasures"; "Alluring Waterways—of Real Venetian Charm"; "The Davis Arms—Ultimate in Hotel Magnificence"; "The Country Club—Haven of Good Fellowship"; "Luxurious Apartments—Masterpieces of Architecture"; and "Home Life—of the Highest Type."<sup>11</sup> Images as vivid as these helped assure Davis Islands' initial success. The first unit sold out in less than three hours after it went on sale. Over \$1,683,000 worth of lots and properties changed hands on October 4, 1924.

The skillful use of language and pictures to produce favorable images of Florida was a hallmark of developer publications. In Davis' *Life on Davis Islands*, for example, the developer used romantic renderings to create a moonlight and magnolia picture of his dredged islands. Then, as the brochure ticked off the highlights of the development, the language reinforced the image while calling to mind the ingredients and virtues Americans typically seek for their home or vacation. The production emphasized a combination of the alluring and the practical – an idyllic relationship for postwar Americans who wished to enjoy their new prosperity.

Civic agencies, such as chambers of commerce, were also quite adept at producing booster literature. Like the developers and promoters, civic organizations used the brochure, pamphlet and book, along with advertisements in the press, to attract vacationers and new residents. Typically, these groups put out literature filled with dry facts that supported the industrial, agricultural and touristic viability of their town or city. Often, though, civic clubs produced literature as artistic as the developers' publications. The Tampa Board of Trade, for instance, compiled booklets full of hype in the form of letters written home from visitors to the area. Filled with pictures of everything from Tampa's churches to its beaches teeming with bathing beauties, one such effort included a letter which began "Dear Jack and Mary" and ended on this note:

Hillsborough County, and Tampa the gem, as the county seat, is so near like my dreams of paradise used to be that it is hard to believe. I don't dare tell you all the virtues, for you would think I had gone into the real estate business and trying to sell you a city lot or farm tract by correspondence. That will come to you soon enough after your arrival, but you will have to take my word for it until you come and see. You be surprised and pleased and your doubts will have gone a-glimmering.

Please give my best regards to the folks I know, and don't delay your trip any longer. The good wife joins me in sending greetings, best wishes and extending an invitation to come.

Your Pal  
Jim<sup>12</sup>

Despite the stylistic and grammatical faults (perhaps an attempt to capture the vernacular of the common man), experiments such as these added spice and originality to civic campaigns. As early as 1922, the Tampa Board of Trade annually sent out more than 412,000 pieces of printed matter.<sup>13</sup>





Cover of Tampa Board of Trade promotional brochure, from *Tampa: The Treasure City* by Gary R. Mormino and Anthony P. Pizzo.

Adorned with artistic covers, promotional literature was often attractive. The Tampa Board of Trade's 1919 number was graced by a young lady with a tennis racket in hand gazing over a body of water and waving at a carload of motorists riding against the backdrop of Tampa's

skyline. The prose inside typically spoke of “unlimited future,” “educational advantages,” “hospitality,” “paved roads” and “parks and playgrounds in plenty.” These booster organizations were masters at the art of persuasion, as shown in the following description of the Tampa area.

South Florida is essentially the Land of Happiness, with an equal charm for young and old. The worst pessimist in the world cannot hold the same gloomy views after he has spent a winter in the all-healing sunshine; many magical transformations have been effected. It is said that all legends have a foundation of fact, and it is not hard to understand why the elusive Fountain of Youth should have been sought in Florida. It was no distinct fountain of youth, but a monopoly from November to April of the world’s supply of sunshine and blue skies and summer breezes . . . They all dreamed a dream of Arcadia, fantastic and unreal, someplace they could be free from the rigors and hardships of a long and bleak winter. That undoubtedly is the secret of South Florida’s charm – it is the realization of every man’s dream – the Fairyland of America. Pack your kit and motor south – to Tampa, in South Florida, the winter playground of America.<sup>14</sup>

A panned inscription on one frontispiece testifies to the fact that such literature was passed around. It reads: “You ask me why I love this place /’tis winsome nature woos me here.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus, land developers, civic organizations, the local press and national newspapermen all produced booster literature that created in the minds of Northerners a compelling image of Florida. Yet the popular magazines, because of their widespread circulation to a fairly well-educated, middle-class readership, were the most significant image-makers. Whether because of the state’s natural beauty or the booster literature they were handed upon their arrival in Florida, the popular magazine writers were also “wooded.” And the images they created helped woo the rest of the country, or so it seemed, to the Sunshine State.

Numerous popular periodicals of the 1920s, from the *Saturday Evening Post* to *Harper’s Monthly*, devoted space to the happenings in Florida. The authors of these articles, purposefully or not, used similar literary devices to create a distinct picture of the state and its boom-time activities. Examining these devices and how a number of writers employed them illuminates one of the essential aspects of the boom – how Florida was depicted to the nation at large.

Mentioning Ponce de Leon and discussing Florida as a Fountain of Youth had been a popular device since the earliest days of the state’s promotion, and one seldom finds an article from the 1920s that fails to invoke them. E.W. Howe, in one of the earliest articles leading up to the boom, opened a 1921 piece by recalling the romantic implications of “Ponce de Leon and his dream of a perpetual fountain of youth.”<sup>16</sup> A classic example of the device is found in Roger W. Babson’s 1925 article, titled “Florida’s Future,” which began with the following message:

Ponce de Leon had the right idea. He did not come to Florida to look for paper town sites, isolated acreage, subdivision auctions, or the other paraphernalia of exploitation. He went to Florida in search of a fountain of youth. And he found it; for Florida can add from five to ten years to the lives of people who will spend their winters there in quest of health and happiness.<sup>17</sup>



## An Unusual Opportunity for Profitable Investment

**V**ENICE possesses every requisite for rapid growth. Its location directly on the Gulf Coast is unrivalled. This feature alone unambiguously points to Venice as the future resort supreme of Western Florida.

But Venice is not dependent wholly on its natural resources. Back of this great 50,000-acre development is unlimited capital. Vast improvements are being started. Immense building activity is getting under way. The sponsors for this gigantic development are showing their complete confidence in the future of Venice by investing their own money in far-reaching public and private improvements.

Capital attracts capital. Activity begets activity. These are fundamental principles that are doubly true in Florida. Every successful investor in Florida real estate knows that the best investment opportunities have been offered by those developments which have been backed by large capital, in the hands of able, energetic men. In such favored spots, the momentum gained by sheer force of large operations and unusual personal energy will inevitably drive all investments rapidly upward.

Men of vision see in Venice the future Miami of the West Coast. But, in Venice you have the opportunity of starting with the upward movement. You can look forward with faith—instead of looking back with regret because you did not invest ten years ago.

*Watch for future announcements about Venice. You will be told interesting facts, for we are making Venice the city which will become the RESORT SUPREMU of Florida's West Coast.*

### The Venice Company Venice Florida,

205 MAIN STREET, SARASOTA, FLORIDA. 120 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

528 Central Avenue, St. Petersburg, Florida. 111 Feigg Street, Tampa, Florida.  
 Jennings Arcade, 420 Main Street, Bradenton, Florida.

Advertisement from *Suniland*, January 1926.



A picturesque corner of the Administration Building. There are many such beauty spots to be found on Davis Islands.

## Fortunate Owners of Property

ON

# DAVIS ISLANDS

TAMPA IN THE BAY

## Dot Nearly Every State in the Union!

**THEY** come from everywhere to buy on Davis Islands! Far beyond the Mississippi River—over to California—the list of property owners extends, great numbers of them whom purchase of Davis Islands property suggests to date the summing total of \$1,000,000. And this property was first placed on the market only five months ago.

Hundreds of these good people, together with their friends, will build palatial homes on Davis Islands and come here to live a life of comfort and luxury with only a picturesque, tropical island, with its delightful atmosphere and palm trees, sea breeze. Others who see and see gain will soon be taking their friends of the amazing people they meet on Davis Islands property to that wonderful city of Tampa, the fastest growing in Florida—where the real estate market is one of constantly shifting action! Whether you are seeking a splendid investment or a place where your investment will bring a golden yield, Davis Islands is especially chosen in every way. It is the prettiest beauty spot of Florida and its location is just one-half mile from Tampa's city hall, top that with its generous low prices and the assurance of great and rapid growth in value, makes it the most attractive real estate investment in America today. In purchasing a purchase here, there is no one mistake that can be made. And that is why it is being so fast, before this property is taken off the market for the season. Those who are already owners and those who will become owners during the next few days—before the Country Club goes on its entirely sold out—will buy at development prices and make the greatest profits.

**D. P. DAVIS PROPERTIES**  
Home Office in Tampa—Branches Throughout Florida

Advertisement from, *Suniland*, November 1925.

Naturally, such a place was attractive to the freezing Northerner advancing in age.



Calling Florida a pioneer state where the frontier spirit abounded was an equally popular device. In a 1925 article, significantly entitled “Florida – The Pioneer State,” Frank Peter Stockbridge declared, “Florida is a pioneer State, the largest and perhaps last full-scale stamping-ground in [the] Continental United States for the trail-blazer, the axe man and the road builder, preparing the way for the land agent and the settler.”<sup>18</sup> Throughout this article, the author extended the frontier metaphor by showing how the settler was the key to any boom. The peak, Stockbridge proclaimed, occurred when there were no more settlers willing to pay the prices asked; and in Florida, he emphasized, the settlers had only just begun to buy. Through this method, the writer pictured the state as the last territory where democracy – the keynote of his essay – could prevail. Florida was a place where one could stake a claim and relive the romantic frontier spirit. The state could provide a new home for those who sought a new life. All that one needed was a little vigor, a dash of nerve, a bit of daring, and the good sense to purchase lots on binders.

Asking “How long will the boom last?” and “What parts of the state are booming?” were trademarks of image-making articles. The first question was usually posed because, the writers claimed, it was what Northerners wanted to know. The answers hinted either that it would last a good long time, which was supported by some economic theory, or that in actuality Florida was not really experiencing a boom.

J. Leroy Miller, in his 1926 article, “In the Land of the Realtor,” queried: “How long is the Florida boom going to last? Can the pyramiding of prices go on forever? When is the bubble going to burst?” While searching for an answer, Miller employed several of the usual image-making devices but somehow failed to answer his own ponderings. He recounted that Floridians denied there was a boom in progress and claimed that such vitality was normal and long overdue; that the wealthy who frequented Florida, such as Ford, Collier, and Ringling, would never let the boom burst; that the natives frowned upon the speculative nature of real estate purchases; that Florida's boom was no different than any other period of rapid growth; that people were getting rich overnight; and that all should come “witness” the spectacle and judge for themselves.<sup>19</sup> By posing the question “How long will the boom last?” and hinting that it might never end or at least that there was no end in sight, writers led readers to believe that they had plenty of time to invest in Florida land. If readers had not had the foresight or good fortune to have already purchased Florida land, this device suggested it would never be too late.

“What parts of the state are booming?” was another primary concern writers of boom-time articles thought readers wanted to know. The answer, of course, was that the state was booming all over – north and south, east and west, rural and urban. In 1925 *Literary Digest* reprinted excerpts from an article from *Business Conditions Weekly* which concluded that the boom was perhaps centered in the Miami-Palm Beach area but the whole state was feeling its impact. By using a chart, the article illustrated the population growth and rate of increases from 1900 to 1920 for Jacksonville, Tampa, Pensacola, Miami, West Palm Beach, Lakeland and West Tampa in order to reinforce the notion of an all inclusive boom.<sup>20</sup>

The idea of “boom everywhere” was best used by Frank Parker Stockbridge in his lengthy essay for a 1925 issue of the *Review of Reviews*. As with his earlier work for the same publication, Stockbridge again used almost all of the popular image-making devices. He also

# HAINES CITY

## *Built on Actualities*



*Moonlight on Lake Twa*

**HAINES CITY** is located in a strategic location on the corner of the famous **U.S. and LULU** sections of Florida where five great highways meet and on the main line of the **A. C. I. Railroad** with excellent passenger train stopping every day. The **State Board of Health** has it one of the healthiest places in the whole country.


**HAINES CITY** is 221 feet above sea level. There are six lakes within the city limits and the water is excellent in the drinking. **Engineer C. Bryan Moore** of Haines City, organized the building program for the rest on March 21, 1917, in address to the \$11,000,000 being spent on development and the City's Board of Health.

**HAINES CITY** has many beautiful homes and about every home has an orange and grapefruit trees in its yard. Its location is excellent for distribution. This is why the **National Machine Co.** company, the largest in the world, has its headquarters in the world, is moving its plant here in December. **Haines City** has a wholesale house doing approximately \$1,000,000 worth of business packing boxes, a cabinet factory, an ice company with large refrigerating plant, a lumber company, a sawmill and works, 2 cement factories, 2 concrete manufacturing companies, and many other concerns.

**HAINES CITY** business is developing. Factories are multiplying. Values are rising. Everything is expanding with the enlargement of the city's limits. In 1920 the population was only 1500. It now totals 6,000. It is growing with a growing city in one of the sections of prosperity.

**FRANK BRYSON**  
Realtor

*Haines City sky line*



**WHEN IN FLORIDA VISIT A Frank Bryson DEVELOPMENT**

Advertisement from *Suniland*, January 1926.

commented on virtually every element of boosterism, including the fountain-of-youth idea,





WHERE THE TAMiami TRAIL MEETS THE GULF

# Announcing Venice

*Sarasota County's Premier Investment Opportunity*

The only resort city in Florida situated directly on the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico

**THIRTEEN** miles south of Sarasota, overlooking the broad expanse of the Gulf of Mexico for over four miles, and adjoining Venice Bay for another twelve miles, are being laid the foundations of the Resort Supreme on the West Coast.

The site, at present the southern terminal of the Seaboard Air Line Railway, and directly on the Tamiami Trail, was formerly a part of the Potter Palace properties and was carefully selected as one of Florida's choice beauty spots. Developments at Venice are under the guidance of city planners, architects and contractors of national reputation. These plans contemplate the expenditure of millions of dollars.

**This 10,000 acre development is the largest on Florida's West Coast**

*Venice will have one of the finest deep water harbors.*  
Venice Bay, whose depth is already under way, has within a few hundred feet of water deep enough to flow the greatest ocean liners.

*Venice will be the western terminus of the island waterway system joining the East and West Coasts.*  
A canal seven miles long is planned to connect Venice Bay with the Spanish River. Boats will then be able to pass through the river to one of Lake Okechobee and its connecting canals to Palm Beach and Miami.

*Venice is easily accessible from all parts of Florida.*  
Spurred by the Seaboard Air Line and connected by the Tamiami Trail and other major highways, Venice can be quickly reached from all East and West Coast centers.

*Venice will be center of agricultural products.*  
It is situated directly on high, dry land, in the heart of Florida's West Coast agricultural district. Agricultural experts are already on the ground preparing to market such crops and produce items on the richest acreage of the Venice property.

*Venice will be a great resort city.*  
A BEACH—stretching five miles on the warm waters of the Clear Gulf.  
FISHING—Long Spanish in the Venice Tarpnet and Fish Culture grounds of Florida.  
OTHER SPORTS—Tennis, Golf, Tennis, Ruffing, Hunting will be available.  
ENTERTAINMENT—Casinos, Clubs, a Casino, and Explanade, along the Gulf.



*Long famous as one of Florida's choice beauty spots, Venice is now to take its rightful place as the leading resort of the West Coast.*

Advertisement from Suniland, January 1926.

winter recreation, Florida's excellent roads and beaches and get-rich-quick stories. Naturally,



**D.P. Davis watching English Channel swimmer Helen Wainwright sign a 1925 contract for the promotion of Davis Islands.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

anywhere visitors searched – from the east coast and its beaches, to the west coast and its Mediterranean-like waters, to Pensacola and West Florida – they were likely to find “paradise.” The cost of coming to see the spectacle, Stockbridge concluded, was insignificant and easily managed by families of even the most modest means.<sup>21</sup> Thus, writers pictured the boom as if occurring throughout the state.

Some writers even argued that Florida was not experiencing a boom because a boom implied artificially inflated prices that would drop sooner or later to their true level. This view pictured rapid growth, rising profits, and the subdivision of vast amounts of land as merely signs of natural expansion. The growth in Florida, Northerners could assume, was normal though long overdue. One national magazine reprinted a testimonial by a clergyman who had lived in Florida for a decade.

This is not what could be properly called a boom. I have studied the subject and the situation very carefully. There is some strong force that is causing people to flock down here; . . . rather it seems as if it were the effect of unleashing a force long bound. I think

I have found a clue in my parish records, which go back many years. You may know that prior to the Spanish-American War Florida had been little developed. But when people began to make money and more and more Americans [found] that rest and relaxation were worthwhile, they discovered in increasing numbers the climate and the other charms of this coast. And now that these are widely known, you can not stem the flood that is bound this way. No, this is not a boom; Florida is just coming into its own.<sup>22</sup>

To prove this argument a number of writers offered economic theories which pointed out that the true value of Florida land had long been underestimated. Thus, the boom was not really a boom, but a period of “economic adjustment.” Felix Isman's article, “Florida’s Land Boom,” used this argument adroitly and serves as an example.

Just what constitutes a boom depends, of course, upon the material fact of value. Land may be worth \$100 an acre, we will say, but because it started at five dollars an acre and gets up to twenty-five dollars, that condition is defined and classified very often as a boom if the acreage is in sufficient quantity to permit a number of people to profit by the increment; so we must be very careful in considering the conditions of the Florida boom to see whether it is one which may result in total collapse or whether it is in the twenty-five-dollar-an-acre-and-worth-more class.<sup>23</sup>

And if Florida’s development was not actually a boom, then why should Northerners fear heading south to purchase land that had not yet reached its true value?

In order to show that Florida’s boom was part of an historical pattern, journalists invoked the authority of history. For example, E.W. Howe began his piece, “The Old Visitors,” by citing the relationships between Florida and early historical figures and events. Columbus had discovered America “almost within sight of Florida – as the crow flies, less than two hundred miles.” Howe then ticked off the long list of visitors who had recognized Florida’s importance: the Spaniards, the British, and eventually the railroad magnates.<sup>24</sup>

A similar ploy, by comparing the Florida’s boom to other land booms, attempted to show that the mania in the Sunshine State was not all that unusual. In the next breath, however, writers often pointed out that Florida’s boom would “eclipse all others.” In a 1925 article, Roger Babson explained:

A real estate boom in one place or another seems to be as much a part of returning prosperity as a bull market in stocks. In my boyhood days, the part of the country where real-estate speculation struck was in the Middle West, in Kansas and Nebraska. I will recall how excited my neighbors got over the rising values in Omaha, Topeka, Kansas City, and other localities; for both city and farm property were involved.

Ten years or so later another boom broke out, in the Northwest. Whole families migrated and remarkable profits were made, not only in farm lands but in city properties in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Duluth, and other localities. The Dakotas, Montana, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon, all took a turn at real estate speculation.



**Jack Dempsey and promoter Burks L. Hamner before a promotional fight on Davis Islands, February 1926.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

Today the household words are Palm Beach, Miami, St. Petersburg, etc. But older readers will remember when there was much the same sound in the names of Sioux



Falls, Aberdeen, Grand Forks, Helena, Boise, Seattle, Tacoma and Portland. Most of us recall the California boom of recent past.<sup>25</sup>

The cataloging of booms past was an attempt to put Florida's in proper perspective. Nothing that odd was going on down there, except, of course, it was a bigger boom than the others. As the editor of a Maryland newspaper who was freely quoted in the *Literary Digest* proclaimed, "All our gold rushes, all our oil booms, and all our free-land stampedes dwindle by comparison with the torrent of migration pouring into Florida from all parts."<sup>26</sup>

Get-rich-quick stories, which were placed in most boom-time Florida articles, created an image of the state as a gold mine. Such stories usually mapped the fortunes made by individuals on particular properties. For example, Stockbridge dedicated a portion of a 1925 article to the "Fortunes Made in Real Estate." After mentioning how some of the well-to-do turned quick profits, he focused his attention on the common man.

"Charlie" Carr met Charles A. Hall on a St. Petersburg street. "I hear you just paid \$40,000 for a lot on Fifth and Central Avenue," said Carr. "There is nothing the matter with you except you're crazy." Six months later Hall needed cash and sold the lot for \$70,000; the purchaser sold it to "Charlie" Carr for \$125,000, who in turn sold it for \$250,000. "And I'll give the present owner \$600,000 for it today," said Hall, telling me of the incident. Five miles from Sarasota is an eighty-acre tract, inland, for which the owner was trying to get \$4,000 when his death broke off the negotiations. That was in December, 1923. His executors got \$45,000 for the tract, and exactly one year later it was resold for \$240,000. Exclamation points lose their emphasis when relating incidents like that.<sup>27</sup>

With tales such as these the Northern reader could hardly help but envision Florida real estate as a safe bet. However, the images produced by this device were slightly misleading. Most lots were bought and sold on binders or options, and the seller, in effect, merely received a promise that the buyer would eventually relieve his obligation. That buyer would also sell on a binder and, as the pyramiding continued upward, the reality that the original seller would ever collect his money became more and more doubtful. These were paper profits. Someone would eventually be stuck with a piece of property owing commitments that could never be met. The spiraling would last only as long as Florida land was in demand. If and when the demand fell off, which was inevitable, the speculation would slow down. Yet the image-makers who employed this device reported only the possible profits to make from a piece of Florida land, and as a result the risk seemed minimal.

Boom-time writers used the earlier success of Southern California as a metaphor to explain why the Sunshine State was so desirable. At the same time, they argued that Florida surpassed California in all areas. The object was to draw potential California visitors south rather than west, with the claim that everything was bigger and better in Florida, even the oranges. Will Rogers pointed out the absurdity of the device by turning it on its head. In his piece, "Florida Versus California: A Debate Held Before the Prevaricators' Club of America," a club of which "California was a charter member," Rogers related most of Florida's magniloquent claims, and then entertained rebuffs from California, such as the following.



Fla.: We have the longest seacoast of any state in the Union. We have 1145 miles, and is 100 miles more than California has.

Cal.: Now you notice they emphasize the word “California.” Why didn't they say how much more they had than New York or West Virginia? No, they must outdo California. Now what does a large seacoast have to do with the quality of the state? According to the latest returns from Rand McNally, Siberia has quite a mass of seacoast, but I have never heard of any emigration going there – that is, voluntarily – on account of their seacoast. Clam diggers and lighthouse keepers are the only two professions that I know of that strive off long coast lines.<sup>28</sup>

Many writers used the California comparison to illustrate the possibilities of Florida. Although Rogers’ article turns the device upside down, the method still created the image of Florida as a vast playground for water-related leisure activities.

By telling how Floridians frowned upon real estate speculation, and especially corruption, writers pictured the natives as honest and trustworthy. Spurred by the Florida Development Board’s 1925 campaign against fraudulent advertising, many magazine articles recounted how Floridians disdained the boom hysteria. One journalist assured his readers that “the state of Florida is doing everything possible to protect” tourists and investors.<sup>29</sup> Another reported, “One salesman encountered upon the west coast declared that he had moved from a certain east-coast town on account of this [speculation, buying and selling on binders] condition.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, Floridians were absolved from any unscrupulous behavior with regard to the boom. The Northerner, accordingly, could trust the natives.

Furthermore, promoters contended that Florida had enough land to support a large portion of America’s population. This reinforced the notion that the state could support virtually an infinite number of visitors and settlers. *Literary Digest* quoted Governor John Martin as saying, “We have a population of one million two hundred thousand, but we can support fifty million.”<sup>31</sup> As Felix Isman stated, “There are more than 37,000,000 acres of land in the state of Florida . . . and practically all of it has been thrown on the market for a price.”<sup>32</sup> If all of this land had been subdivided into quarter-acre lots, as seemed possible, there would have been more than enough for any Northerner wishing to invest. According to one source, some 20,000,000 acres had already been subdivided. If this were accurate, uninitiated visitors to the Sunshine State could have calculated that such development could support at least 20 million people, or about one-fifth of the country’s population at the time.<sup>33</sup>

By dropping the names of the wealthy associated with developing Florida, writers demonstrated that the state was attractive to insightful businessmen who knew how to invest their money and spend their leisure time. If the titans of industry deemed Florida worthy, why should middle-class Americans feel otherwise? Men such as Ford, Edison, Olds, Fisher, Collier, DuPont, Singer and Deering provided endless examples for booster articles which frequently used the generic terms “millionaire” and “multi-millionaire” to describe prominent investors. Once more, Isman serves as an example.



**Horseshoe match at Tampa's Plant Park in 1922.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

Billions of dollars have been spent in the creation of homes – investments in health. James Deering, a Chicago multimillionaire, after traveling the world over and seeking a favorable place for rest, pleasure and health, looked in upon the southern east coast of Florida for several days one year. The following year he began building a great estate. Such investors know what they are doing.<sup>34</sup>

Writers correctly pinpointed the climate as one of the major contributors to Florida's boom. Most writers assumed that the majority of Americans were attracted to subtropical environments. If so, then Florida was "a wonder land with a magical climate, set in a frame of golden sunshine."<sup>35</sup> It was a state blessed by the heavens in which everything from its landscape to its fruit products was better than in any other place in the world. And, naturally, divine providence explained these blessings. As Will Payne reckoned, "People used to say the supply of real estate was limited; God made only so much and retired from business. They know better than that in Florida."<sup>36</sup>

Writers also promoted the good and simple life which they claimed existed in Florida, especially for those with middle incomes. Northerners could head south for a winter of relaxation in the sun and escape the rat race. In Florida, pitching horseshoes or playing checkers under the

palm trees was not condemned. Payne dedicated his 1925 article in the *Saturday Evening Post* to “Capturing the Simple Life” in Florida. Payne listed numerous examples of the simple life, from ready-to-live-in homes to fishing and recreation in the “Mecca,” and he found that “people all along the economic scale live more simply” in Florida, which was “an important reason why they go back.”<sup>37</sup>

Finally, mentioning Florida’s undeniable future was frequently used to create an image of unending and unprecedented business opportunities. It also portrayed Florida’s success as more than ephemeral. Boom or not, Florida would continue to prosper despite the growing Northern skepticism started by Ohio bankers who refused to loan any more money for Florida investments. Many writers ended their articles with the assertion that Florida’s future was bright and unarguable. At the same time, they hinted that the sooner people became involved in the state, the better off they would be. Barron Collier’s closing statement serves as a classic example of this image-making method.

The “to-morrow” of Florida is dawning. In its soft light we see the forms of men hurling back the wilderness, draining large tracts, building homes, planting great orchids. Soon will come the blaze of the full mid-day. Picture, if you can, the scene as it will be then.<sup>38</sup>

Heralding the dawn created a hope-filled dream for those who had yet to be initiated to Florida’s alluring mystique.

By using one or more of these devices in their articles, writers of boom-time Florida created a favorable image of the state. Florida was a fountain of youth, an Eden, a settler’s paradise, a gold mine. Yet it was simply history repeating itself; no need to be alarmed. The state was merely experiencing a long overdue period of natural growth. The mania was not encouraged by native Floridians, who were sensible folk. They, above all, recognized the dangers of speculation. The state was large enough to support a great number of people, perhaps half of America. It was an unpretentious place where settlers and tourists could find a good and simple life. And, finally, the boom was the precursor of a resort and business paradise that was undeniably the course of Florida’s future.

While the majority of national magazine writers that focused on boom-time Florida employed formulaic devices to popularize and promote the state, at least one writer, Kenneth Lewis Roberts, refused to invoke stereotypical views and conventions in his reports. Instead, Roberts focused each of his articles for the *Saturday Evening Post* on specific aspects of the Florida scene. These topical concerns were always related to what George Horace Lorimer, the *Post*’s influential editor, termed the “social, political, economic situation” of the state.<sup>39</sup> These issues provided a thesis for each essay which covered aspects of Florida that most other writers ignored. His topics ranged from the propensity of the wealthy classes to kill time in Palm Beach to the habits of Floridians who boasted their community’s benefits, especially growth. As a correspondent to the *Post*, the historical-novelist-to-be (*Northwest Passage* and *Oliver Wiswell*) used a more systematic strategy for reporting Florida, which adds to the significance of his work.



**“Tin-can” tourists, with a car from Massachusetts, in the Sunnydale Camp Site at Six-Mile Creek in 1925.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

One of the most striking elements of Roberts’ style was his humor. He evoked this through biting satire and caustic wit, which undercut many popular conceptions of Florida and questioned the integrity of those who wrote about the state by relying on clichés. Roberts’ humor permeated his eleven Florida articles and pointed out the absurdity of the boom. His irreverent tongue-in-cheek reports allowed Northern readers to construct their own opinions regarding the mania. At times, his style hinted at his disapproval of the conditions in Florida; at others, he seemed to believe that all would turn out well in the Sunshine State. Overall, Roberts’ posture was ambivalent. This ambivalence toward Florida’s future was the key to his analysis of the Florida boom.

Roberts second article, “The Sun-Hunters,” typifies his Florida work. It appeared in 1924 and investigated the relatively new but growing phenomenon of automobiling to Florida. Beginning with a cross-cultural examination of the foundations of most modern migrations, he pointed out the social and economic underpinnings associated with most mass movements of people. In contrast, these new migrants who headed south each winter were after just two things – sun and air.



Roberts continued by pointing out the difference between the “sun-hunters” and the “time-killers.” The “time-killers,” the topic of his first Florida exposé, were made up of Northerners who parted their names in the middle, spent their winters in Palm Beach riding wheel chairs, changed their clothes three or four times a day, waited for telegrams that never came, constantly pondered what day it was, guessed at the number of nails it took to build such-and-such building, drank bootleg booze from curved pocket flasks and perpetually searched for useless ways to part with their money. The “sun-hunters,” on the other hand, were those Northerners who worked hard all year and desired to spend their winters primarily on Florida’s west coast which was less hostile to the “tin-canners” than the east coast, even though they camped, ate out of tin cans and spent their time pitching horseshoes. Roberts was more sympathetic to the “sun-hunter” who, he told his readers, was “not recruited from any one class of citizens” and who was usually “garbed in dark trousers which hung loosely on his legs like the trousers always inflicted on sculptured statesmen of the Horace Greely period.” The “sun-hunters” were a democratic breed.<sup>40</sup>

A major portion of “The Sun-Hunters” described how Floridians received the “tin-can tourists,” and Roberts conducted an extensive study concerning their habits, clothing, automobiles, and citizenship. His presentation was serious yet witty. His discussion of Tampa’s tin-can camp, for example, illustrated not only the Florida scene, but politics and human nature as well.

The most celebrated tin-can camp is DeSoto Park, East Tampa, on the shore of Tampa Bay. Hundreds of automobiles are lined up side by side throughout the winter in DeSoto Park. The camp, which is carefully regulated and policed by the municipal authorities, is free. A trolley line connects it with the business section of Tampa. In the center of the camp is a pavilion where entertainments are given. The camp has electric lights, running water, city sewerage, shower baths and an enormous hot-water tank. The tourists are permitted to send their children to its excellent schools on payment of fifty cents a week – which is too little.

Throughout his Florida writing, Roberts examined the specifics of Florida, Floridians and tourists. He consistently etched vivid sketches of his subjects, detailing both the positive and negative aspects of the state. Unlike most journalists who wrote about boom-time Florida, Kenneth L. Roberts produced responsible essays that allowed readers to better understand the state.

Roberts’ example aside, most of the formulaic, image-making devices that were used so successfully during the 1920s are still used today by Florida boosters. Tampa’s slogan, “Tampa – Where the Good Life Gets Better Every Day,” is a continuation of the shouting about Florida’s undeniable future, while promising a good deal today. The widespread use of such devices shortly after World War I played a major role in the advances that took place in Florida between 1920 and 1926, but such boosterism also fueled the state’s penchant for land development and speculation of all sorts. The results included grid neighborhoods designed to maximize profits, office towers and parking structures protruding from all quarters of the landscape, strip commercial developments lining virtually every major roadway, a lack of public open spaces and an



affection for the new while disregarding the past. Florida's boom-time heritage remains with us, and its impact was far from trivial.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1959), 13-37.

<sup>2</sup> "Florida Invites the Rich," *Literary Digest*, 83 (November 29, 1924): 15.

<sup>3</sup> Victoria H. McDonell, "Rise of the 'Business Politician': The 1924 Florida Gubernatorial Race," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 52 (July 1973): 45.

<sup>4</sup> Philip E. DeBerard, Jr., "Promoting Florida: Some Aspects of the Use of Advertising and Publicity in the Development of the Sunshine State" (M.A. thesis, University of Florida, 1951), 48.

<sup>5</sup> See Sidney Lanier, *Florida: Its Scenery, Climate, and History. With an Account of Charleston, Savannah, Augusta, and Aiken, and A Complete Handbook and Guide* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1875); Abbie M. Brooks used the pen-name "Sylvia Sunshine" when she wrote *Petals Plucked from Sunny Climes* (Nashville, Tennessee: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1880; reprinted ed., Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> See James Elliott Mackle, Jr., "The Eden of the South: Florida's Image in American Travel Literature and Painting, 1865-1900" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Tampa Chamber of Commerce, *Growth and Progress of the City of Tampa* (Tampa: Tampa Chamber of Commerce, 1931); DeBerard, "Promoting Florida," 51-52.

<sup>8</sup> Martha Gwendolyn Webb, "Ten Years of Florida Journalism from 1920 to 1930 With Special Emphasis on the Land Boom Period" (M.A. thesis, University of Florida, 1957), 84.

<sup>9</sup> L.F. Chapman, "Florida," *American Mercury*, 6 (November 1925): 340.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, D.P. Davis Properties, Tampa's *Unqualified Endorsement of Davis Islands, Tampa in the Bay* (Tampa: D.P. Davis Properties, n.d.).

<sup>11</sup> D.P. Davis Properties, *Life of Davis Islands, Tampa in the Bay: Florida's \$30,000,000 Development* (Tampa: D.P. Davis Properties, 1925).

<sup>12</sup> Tampa Board of Trade, *Tampa* (Tampa: Tampa Board of Trade, 1923), 1, 42.

<sup>13</sup> Tampa Board of Trade, *Tampa Board of Trade, The Community Powerhouse, Annual Report, April 1, 1921, to April 1, 1922* (Tampa: Tampa Board of Trade, 1922), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Tampa Board of Trade, *Tampa and Hillsborough County, Florida* (Tampa: Tampa Board of Trade, 1919), 33.

<sup>15</sup> The Gables Company, *Tampa: Florida's Greatest City* (Tampa: Tampa Board of Trade, 1925), 1.

<sup>16</sup> E.W. Howe, "The Old Visitors," *Saturday Evening Post*, 193 (February 26, 1921): 24.

<sup>17</sup> Roger W. Babson, "Florida's Future," *Review of Reviews*, 72 (November 1925): 447.

<sup>18</sup> Frank Parker Stockbridge, "Florida – The Pioneer State," *Review of Reviews*, 71 (May 1925): 246.

<sup>19</sup> J. Leroy Miller, "In the Land of the Realtor," *Outlook*, 142 (January 13, 1926): 69.

<sup>20</sup> "The Florida Boom Examined," *Literary Digest*, 85 (May 9, 1925): 72.

<sup>21</sup> Frank Parker Stockbridge, "Shall We Go To Florida?" *Review of Reviews*, 72 (November 1925).

<sup>22</sup> “The Florida Boom Examined,” 72.

<sup>23</sup> Felix Isman, “Florida’s Land Boom,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 198 (August 22, 1925):14-15.

<sup>24</sup> Howe, “The Old Visitors,” 24.

<sup>25</sup> Babson, “Florida’s Future,” 477.

<sup>26</sup> “A New National Migration Menaced By Land-Sharks,” *Literary Digest*, 87 (October 24, 1925): 5.

<sup>27</sup> Stockbridge, “Florida – The Pioneer State,” 501-02.

<sup>28</sup> Will Rogers, “Florida Versus California: A Debate Held Before the Prevaricators’ Club of America,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 198 (May 29, 1926): 10.

<sup>29</sup> Isman, “Florida’s Land Boom,” 141

<sup>30</sup> Miller, “Land of the Realtor,” 69.

<sup>31</sup> “A New National Migration,” 53.

<sup>32</sup> Isman, “Florida’s Land Boom,” 14.

<sup>33</sup> “A New National Migration,” 6.

<sup>34</sup> Isman, “Florida’s Land Boom,” 141.

<sup>35</sup> Barron Collier, “Florida: Land of Promise,” *Review of Reviews*, 72 (November 1925): 485.

<sup>36</sup> Will Payne, “Capturing the Simple Life; Or, The Boom in Florida,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 195 (June 20, 1925): 29.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>38</sup> Collier, “Florida,” 486.

<sup>39</sup> Kenneth L. Roberts, *I Wanted to Write* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959), 78.

<sup>40</sup> This and subsequent quotations from Kenneth L. Roberts, “The Time-Killers,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 194 (April 1, 1922): 6-7, 54, 60, “The Sun-Hunters,” *ibid.*, April 15, 1922, 27, 55, 57-58, 61.

## PIONEER FLORIDA: A PHOTO ESSAY

by Eirlys M. Barker

The presence of the frontier has long been regarded as a major force in American history. As early as the 1890s, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner formalized the ideas felt by many into a concrete thesis that the existence of a frontier had contributed to the character of both Americans and their brand of democracy. The frontier was responsible for lawlessness, coarseness and restlessness, but also for rugged individualism and a belief in freedom. Many of these traits were characteristics of early pioneers on the Florida frontier. To complete the parallel with the American West, Florida had its own Indians, and soon had its own cowboys.

Life was harsh for the earliest settlers, as they attempted to carve an existence from Florida's wilderness. The sea and navigable rivers were the major means of communication throughout the nineteenth century, for the railroads were slow to reach South Florida's cities. Tampa's link with the outside world until 1884 was the sea, as the closest rail link was at Cedar Keys. The roads were mostly trails which often washed away in the torrential rainstorms that came all too frequently to a land that was often swampy in the best of weather. When sea links were cut off, as during quarantine periods or hurricanes, a town worried about its food supplies, for at no time was it possible to be totally self-sufficient without serious harm to the body. Some west coast pioneers managed to make a good living for themselves by 1860, even to the point where many owned slaves. Many combined a profession with farming such as two local methodist preachers who owned both slaves and land in 1860. Most of the wealthiest people owned large areas of land, and many owned stores or ships. The opening of the cattle trade with Cuba made several, including Captain James McKay of Tampa and Jacob Summerlin of Polk County, prosperous by the 1870s. Some entrepreneurs experimented with different crops and methods of production, while turpentine and timber gave others income from clearing the virgin forests.

Florida's unique environment led to its early reputation as the nation's health resort, and by the 1880s, tourism was becoming a major source of income. To the pioneer families in the interior, however, the climate contributed to life's harshness. Women and children were particularly at its mercy. Doctors were few and far between, and the long hours at work making soap and candles, as well as the usual tasks associated with the housewife's lot, made a woman old before her time, if she was fortunate enough to survive childbirth after childbirth. Insects, snakes, strange animals and reptiles, all made life a constant terror for the more nervous of both sexes.

By the time photographers were busy capturing the past on film in this part of the world, many major changes were taking place. Life remained primitive for the poorer white "cracker" families and blacks. Very few Seminole Indians remained, and those were seen as picturesque anachronisms whom tourists wanted posed for a quaint souvenir photograph. The photographer's emphasis was not on capturing everyday life on film, but in making pictures that could be sold. A photographer carried about one hundred pounds of gear with him wherever he went, and the equipment cost money. The earlier cameras needed a fairly long exposure time, so that a picture was carefully composed in advance, and this factor accounts for the stem expressions and stiff

poses of the early portraits. More importantly, the events recorded were events that the photographer, or the person who commissioned him, wished to have recorded. Thus, there are many that show imposing homes, new business premises, or a very affluent-looking family group. Pictures of blacks, poor whites or Indians doing normal daily tasks are exceptions. Many photos are a tribute to hunting or fishing skills.

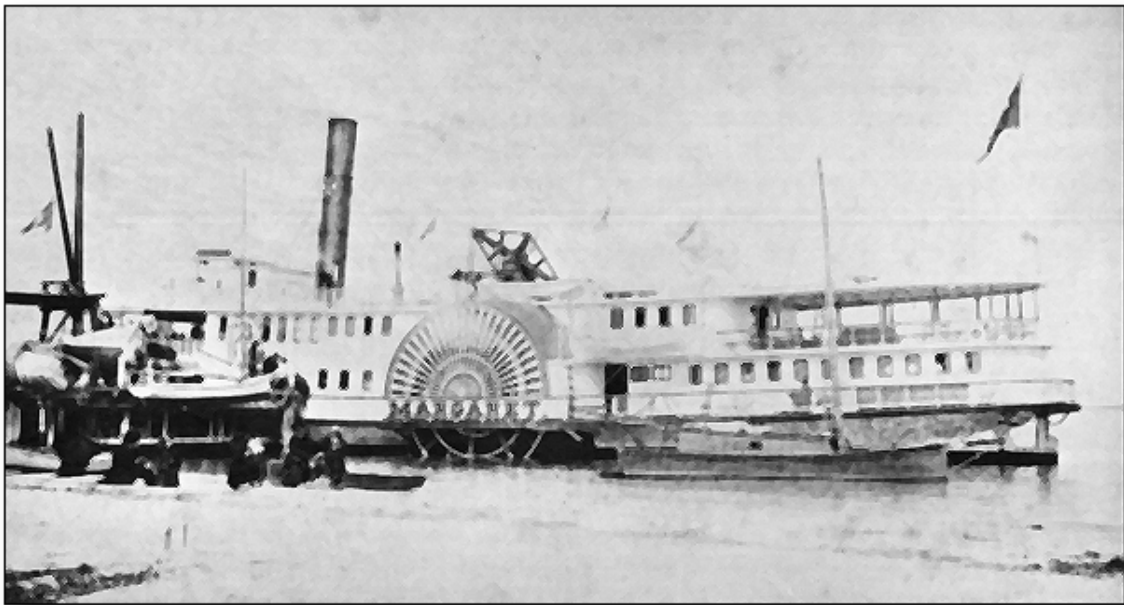
Nevertheless, a great deal can be learned from the old photographs that lie hidden in attics or are preserved in local museums and libraries. Some are tributes to the founders of our cities as they imposed order on the wilderness. Sometimes an incidental factor in a photograph can tell more than the original purpose of the photographer. These old pictures of days gone by are important historical documents, and people with old family pictures should look at their collections and write down what person or event is depicted there before it is forgotten. So many photos are thrown out when a local museum would delight in seeing them preserved as a part of a town's past. Even if you do not wish to donate a family album to your local museum or library, let them know what you possess, for it may help others recreate the past.





The sea was the route that brought most of the early settlers to Florida. Higells wharf at the foot of Main Street in Sarasota is shown here around the year 1900. From the town's founding in 1886 to 1902, when the Florida West Shore Railroad was extended to Sarasota, this dock was the town's link with the outside world.

Photograph courtesy of the Sarasota County Historical Archives.



Henry Plant supplemented his railroad interests with a steamship line. The *Margaret* was a Plant Line excursion steamer often chartered for trips to Mullet Key, Egmont Key and points on the Manatee River. It could accommodate one thousand persons, and according to the *Tampa Morning Tribune*, such a trip cost one dollar for adults and fifty cents for children in 1898.

Photograph courtesy of the USF Special Collections.



**Few structures have survived Florida's environment from the days of the Indian wars. However, roadside markers remind us of the time when forts were erected as the white man responded to the Seminole Indians' attempt to retain their independence and culture. Fort Carroll was a temporary stockade near the town known today as Bartow.**

Photograph courtesy of author.



**Fort Brooke, Tampa's forerunner, was known to soldiers in the days of the Seminole wars as a healthful, pleasant base under the shade of magnificent oak trees. It became the leading hospital for the inland garrisons in the 1840s. The former officers' quarters are shown here in the 1890s.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.





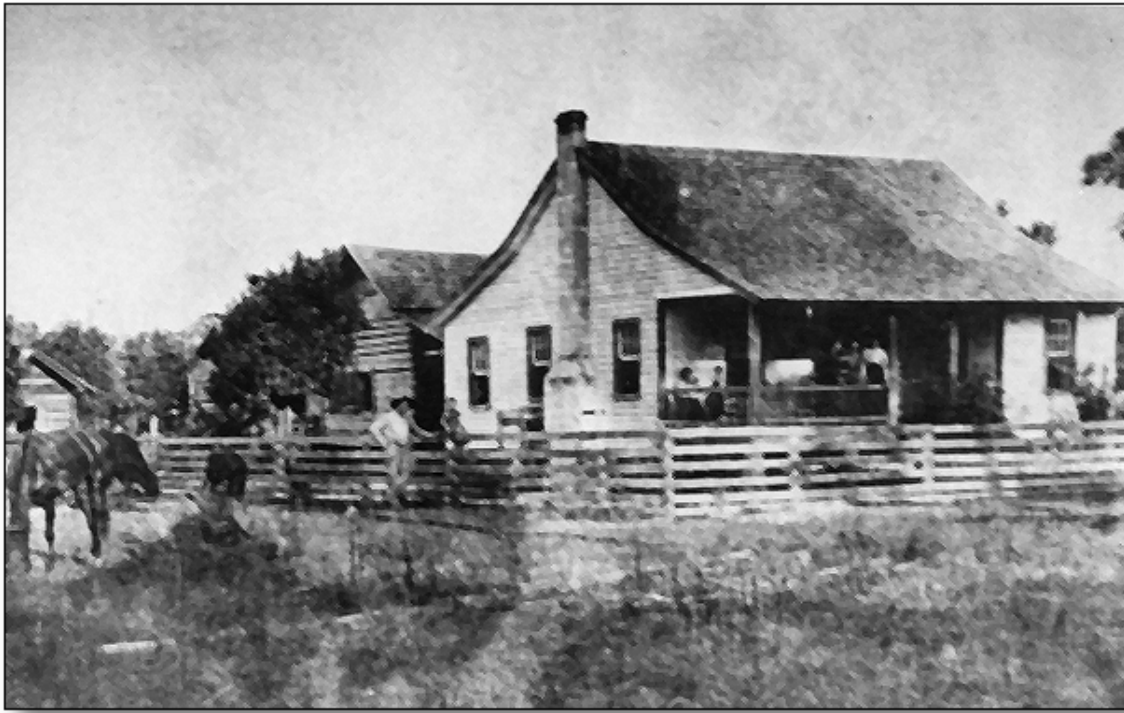
**By the 1890s, house styles in Florida varied considerably. This photograph from the Stokes Collection shows a typical “cracker” shanty, built of logs and rough-sawn pine with a mud chimney.**

Photograph courtesy of the USF Special Collections.



**Some Floridians could afford spectacular homes by 1896, such as this house in Tarpon Springs. It was owned by the Reverend S. B. Currie, who must surely have had a private source of income.**

Photo courtesy of the USF Special Collections.



**This photograph shows a typical home of a fairly well-to-do family in the central area of South Florida in 1897. The home belonged to the old Skipper family of Avon Park in Highlands County.**

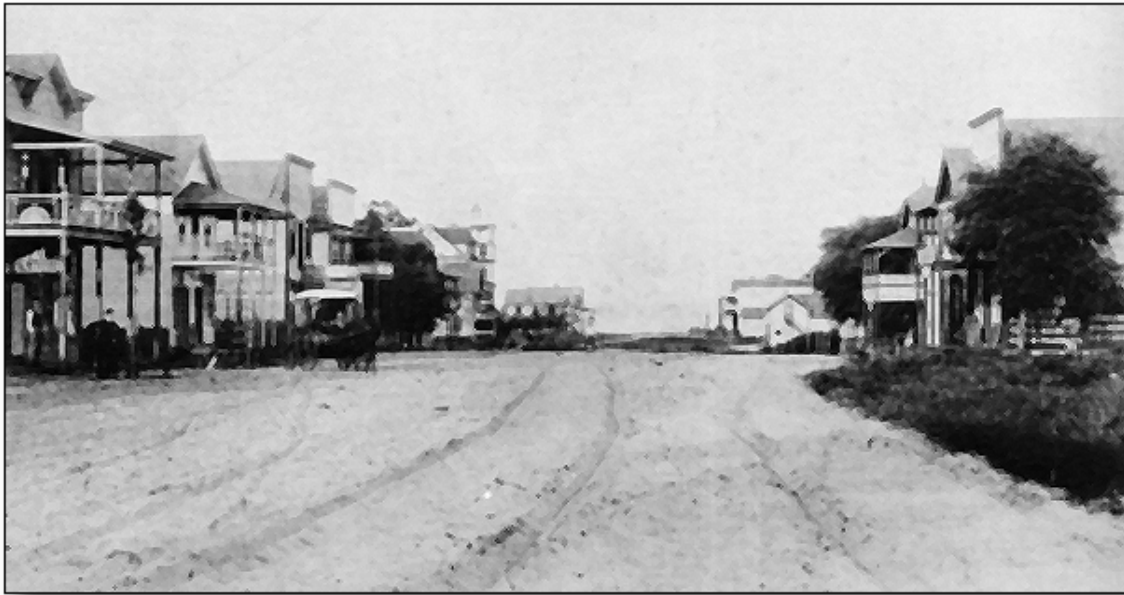
Photograph courtesy of the Avon Park Museum.



**Except for the trees in the center of the road, this photograph could be of a frontier town in the "wild west." It dates from the 1880s and shows South Broadway in Bartow, looking north from Summerlin Street.**

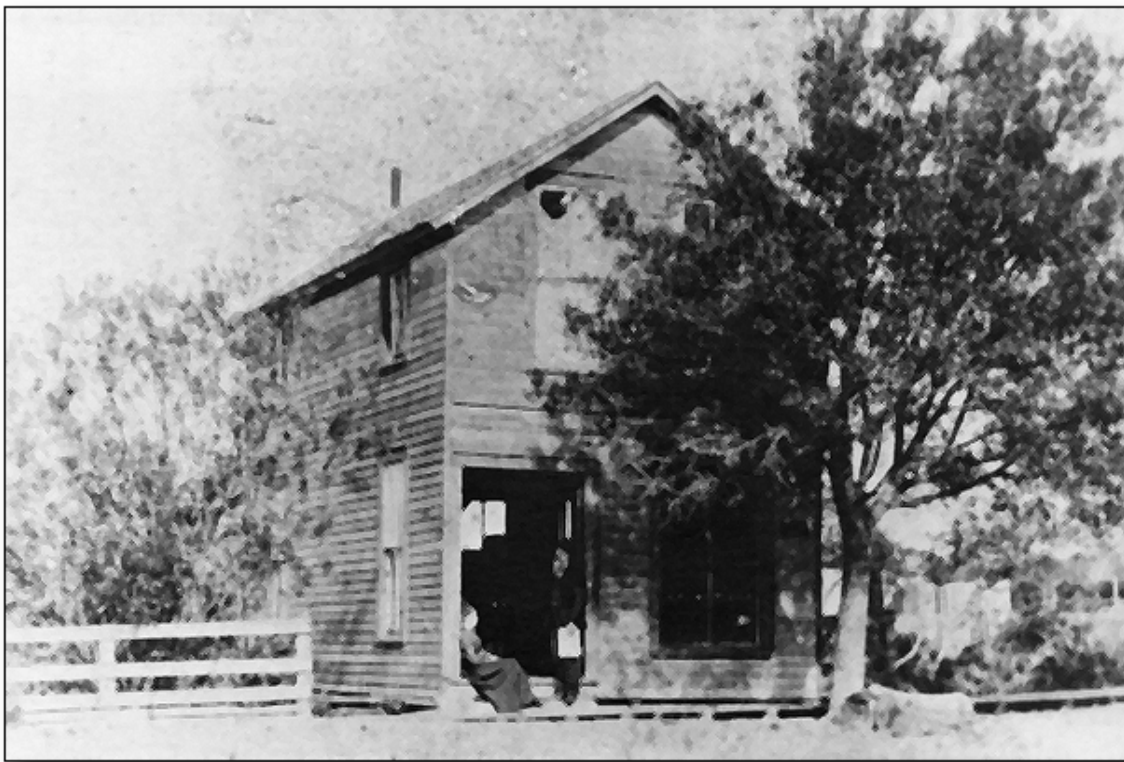
Photograph courtesy of the Polk County Historical Commission.





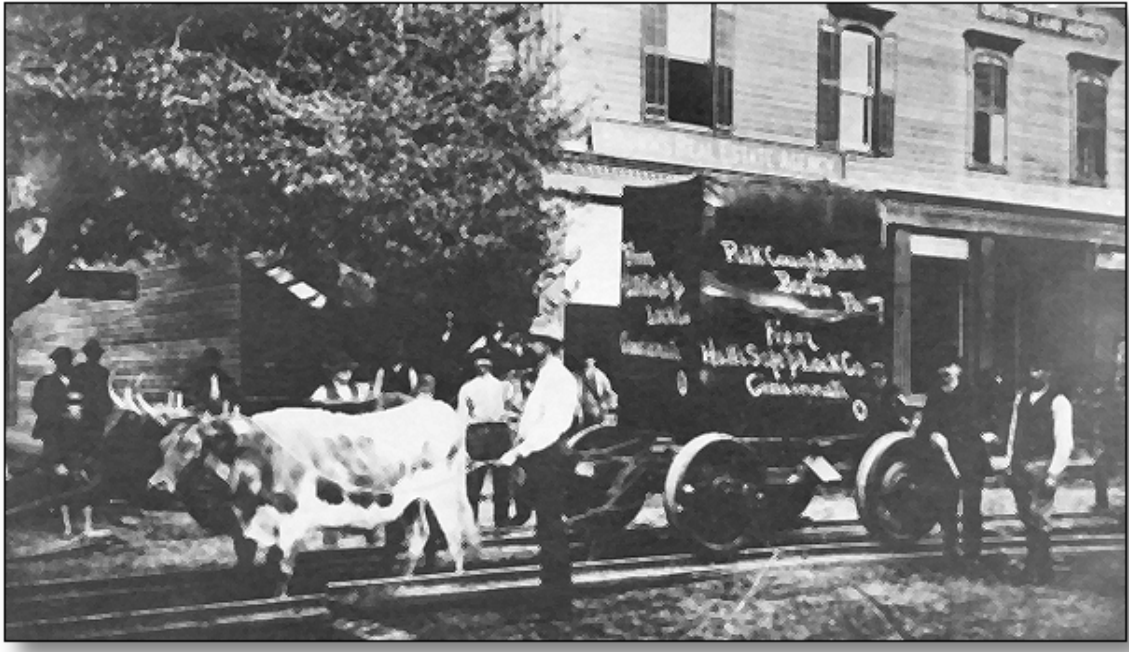
**Central Avenue, St. Petersburg's main street, around 1896. Founded in 1888, St. Petersburg already had many of the attributes of a city, including a drug store and general market visible in this picture. Down the deeply-rutted street can be seen a turret, which was part of the Hotel Detroit.**

Photograph from the Stokes Collection, USF Special Collections.



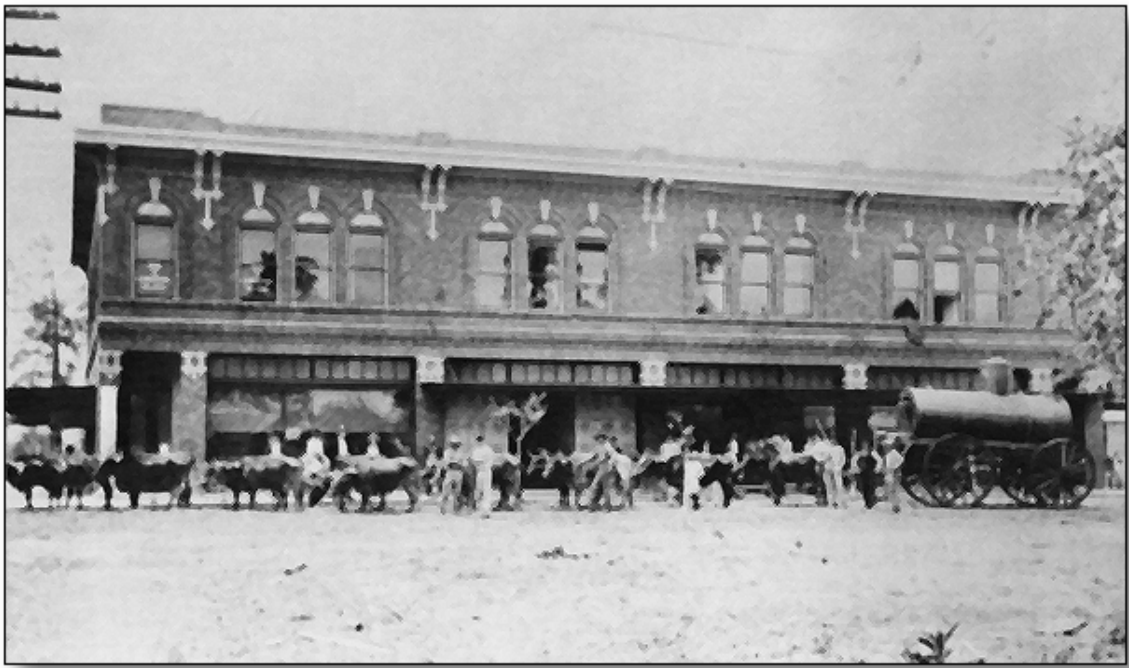
**Growth and promotion of isolated areas often depended on the local newspaper. This 1899 photograph shows the home of the *Sarasota Times* on lower Main Street, with the owner, C. V. S. Wilson and his wife at the entrance. Constructed in 1886, this building served as office and print shop until 1911.**

Photograph courtesy of the Sarasota County Historical Archives.



**Another sign of advancement was the founding of a local bank. Often pioneer ingenuity was needed to set up the establishment. The Polk County Bank, organized in 1886 at Bartow, used oxen to bring in its safe on a flat cart pulled on temporary rails.**

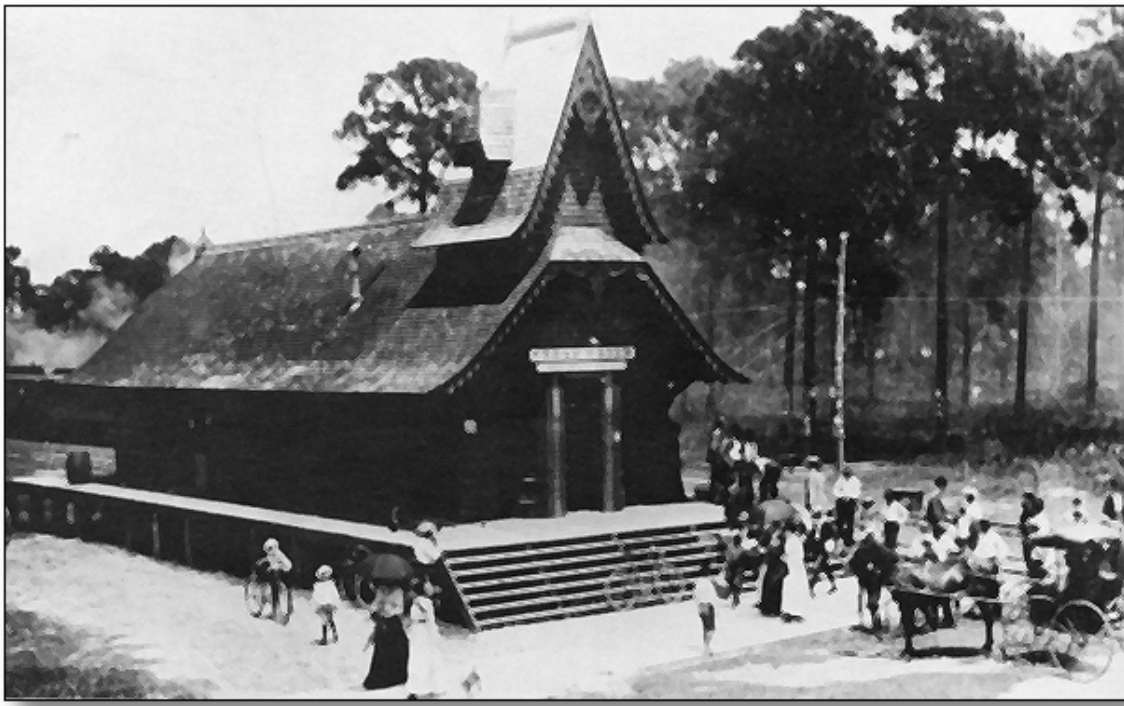
Photograph courtesy of the Polk County Historical Commission.



**It took eight yoke of oxen to move this huge boiler through Avon Park to a local sawmill during the last decade of the nineteenth century. In the background is the First National Bank, which failed in 1929.**

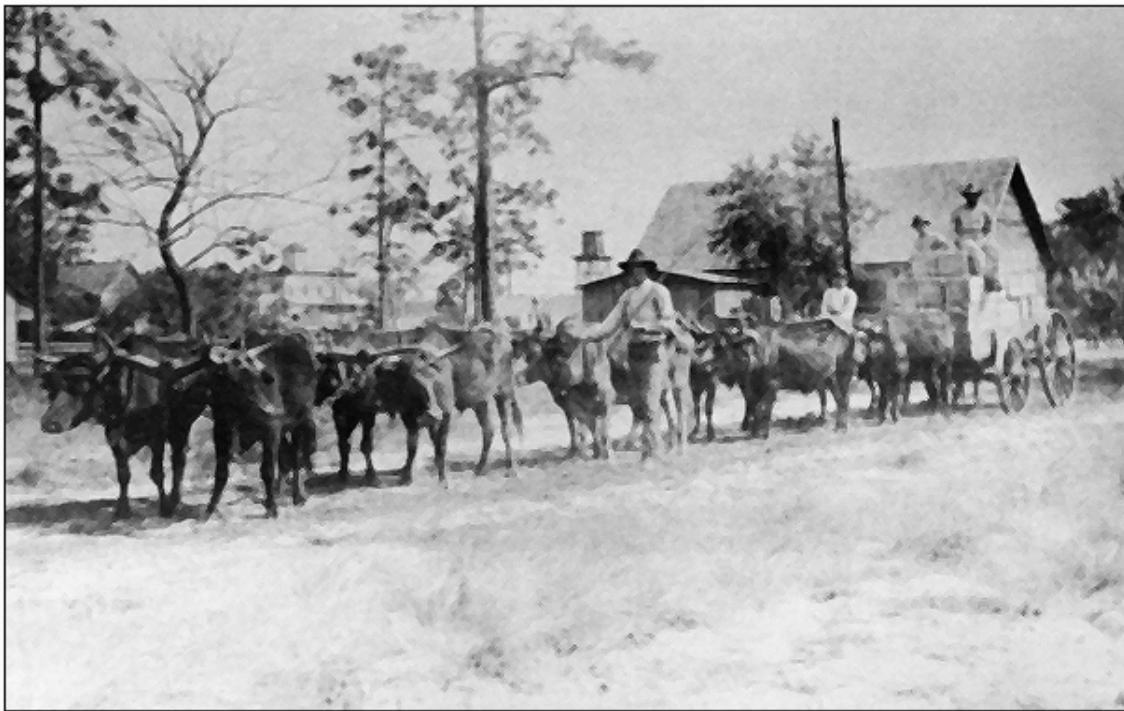
Photograph courtesy of the Avon Park Museum.





**The coming of the railroad was a major boost to towns along the lines. This is the Orange Belt Railroad's station at Clearwater around the turn of the century, with a train just pulling into the station.**

Photograph courtesy of the USF Special Collections.



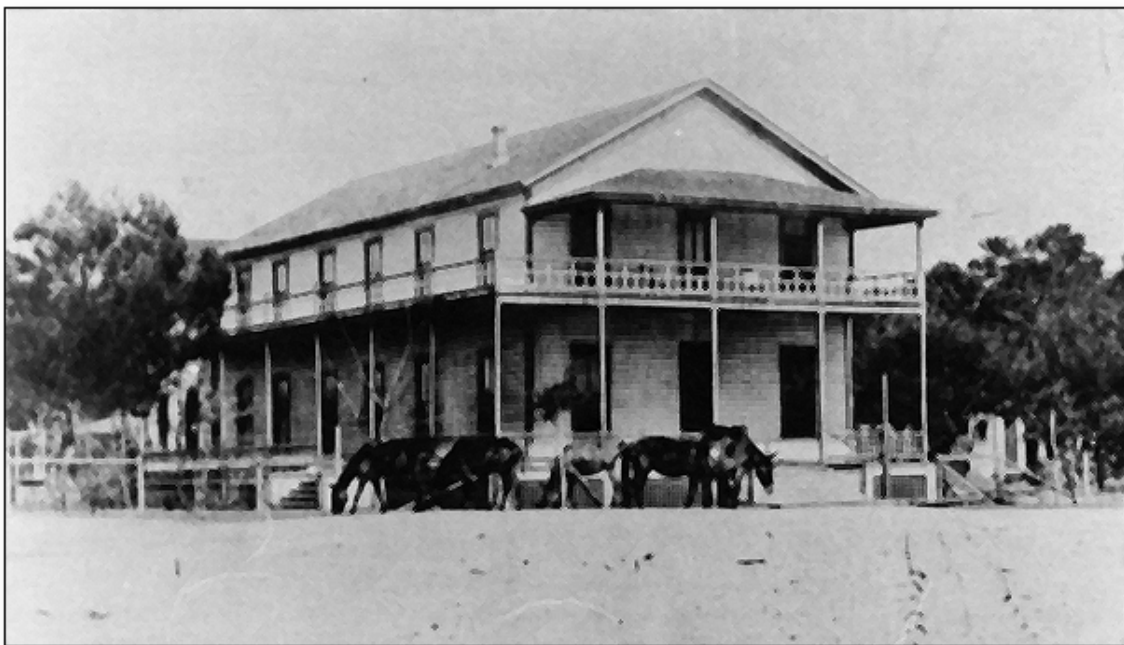
**Many small communities were not served by a railroad until well into the twentieth century. Despite the efforts of local leaders, Avon Park had to import its tourists and goods and export its local products by road as far as Fort Meade, which had been reached by rail in 1885. Here a load of local pineapples is pulled by oxen.**

Photograph courtesy of the Avon Park Museum.



**Avon Park's sawmill owner, J. C. Burleigh, needed a way to haul logs to his mill. He built his own railroad of hard pine tracks, and bought an old locomotive which he had shipped from Tennessee by rail to Bowling Green, and from there by flat cars on planks. Its maiden voyage in Avon Park was an occasion for a civic celebration on December 22, 1894.**

Photograph courtesy of the Avon Park Museum.



**The Sarasota House was built in 1886 as a boarding house at Five Points on Main Street in Sarasota. At the time of this 1902 photo, it was known as the Vincent House. The photo's original caption read "Whitaker mules."**

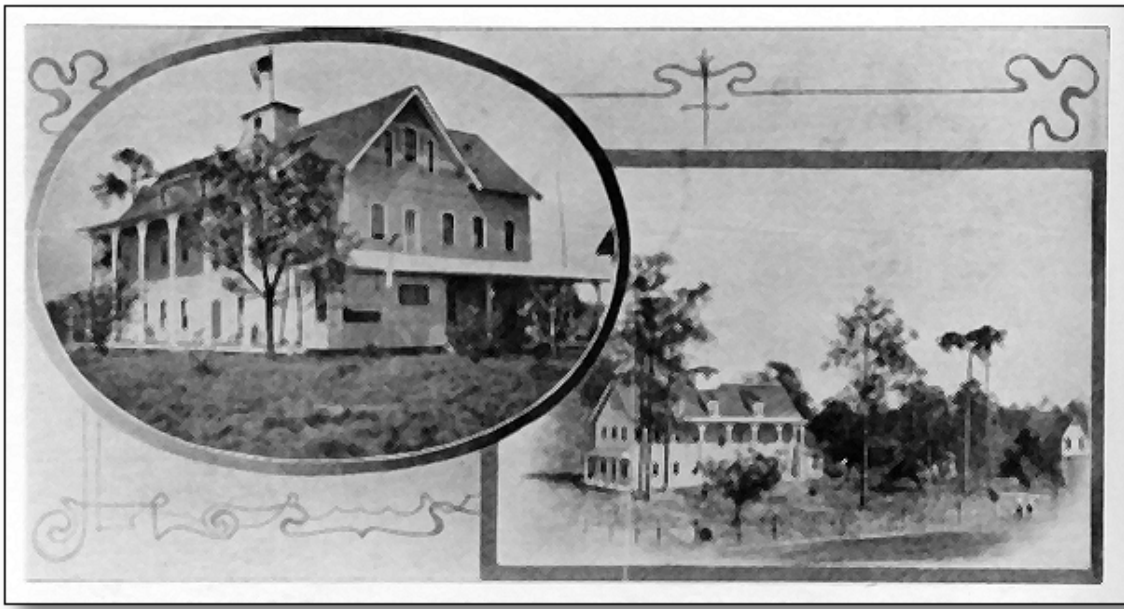
Photograph courtesy of the Sarasota County Historical Archives.





**By the 1880s, Florida was becoming known as a tourist area, especially for invalids. This photo from the Stokes collection is of an excursion dated around 1896.**

Photograph courtesy of the USF Special Collections.



**The Verona Hotel at Avon Park was built by the town's founder and publicizer, Oliver M. Crosby. He offered special rates to prospective settlers, who traveled by steamer to Jacksonville, by rail to Fort Meade and finally by road to Avon Park. The hotel was completed in the fall of 1889 and became the center of the town's social life. Remodeled as the Avon Hotel in 1919, it burned completely in February, 1927.**

Photograph courtesy of the Avon Park Museum.



**Prospective settlers pose for a publicity shot, showing the size of the local fruits.**

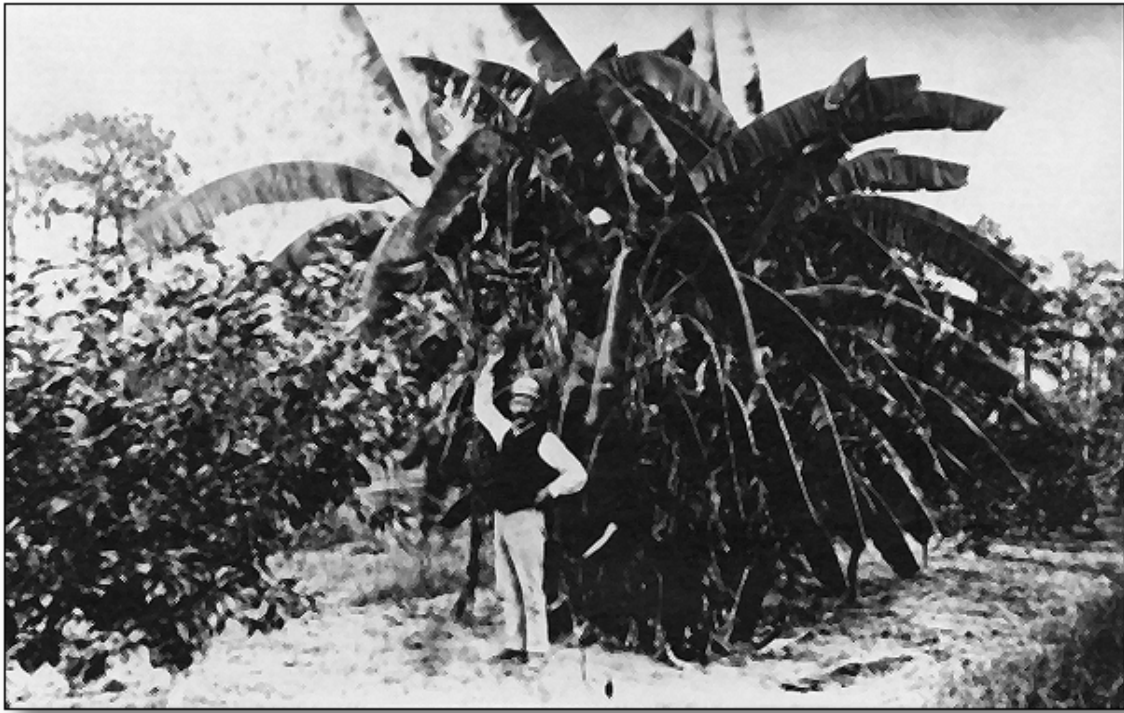
Photograph courtesy of the Avon Park Museum.



**This 1890s photograph is of a well-tended young orange grove in central Florida.**

Photograph from the Stokes Collection, USF Special Collections.





**Bananas were among the exotic crops grown in South Florida at the turn of the century.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.



**A “pinery” near St. Petersburg: “Enclosed and partially shaded from the sun by trellis, the fruit thus raised grows very much larger, more sweet and tender, and brings greatly increased prices,” according to *Facts ... of the Pinellas Peninsular*, published in 1896 in Philadelphia.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.



**In the early days of Florida's history, hunting and fishing were essential skills if one were to eke out a living from the land, but by the 1890s, the more affluent locals were regarding them as leisure activities, as this well dressed hunter shows.**

Photograph courtesy of the Avon Park Museum.



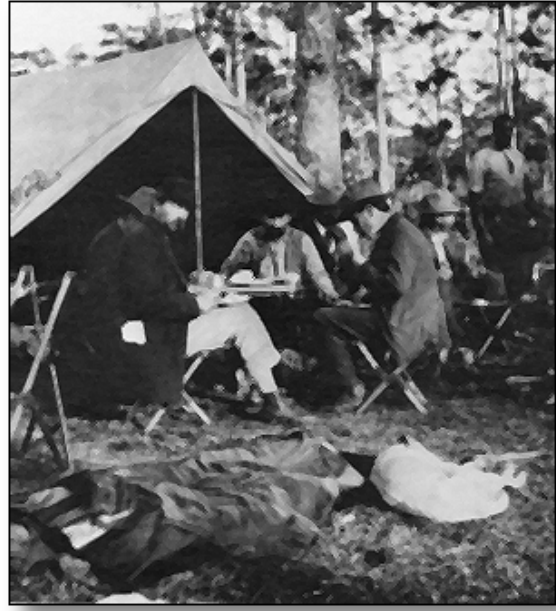
**Many tourists were lured by Florida's abundant fish and game. There was no limit on the number of animals that could be taken or on the number of fish caught. This dapper gentleman has returned from a successful sport fishing jaunt, and is justifiably proud of the magnificent tarpon that he caught.**

Photograph from the Stokes Collection, USF Special Collections.



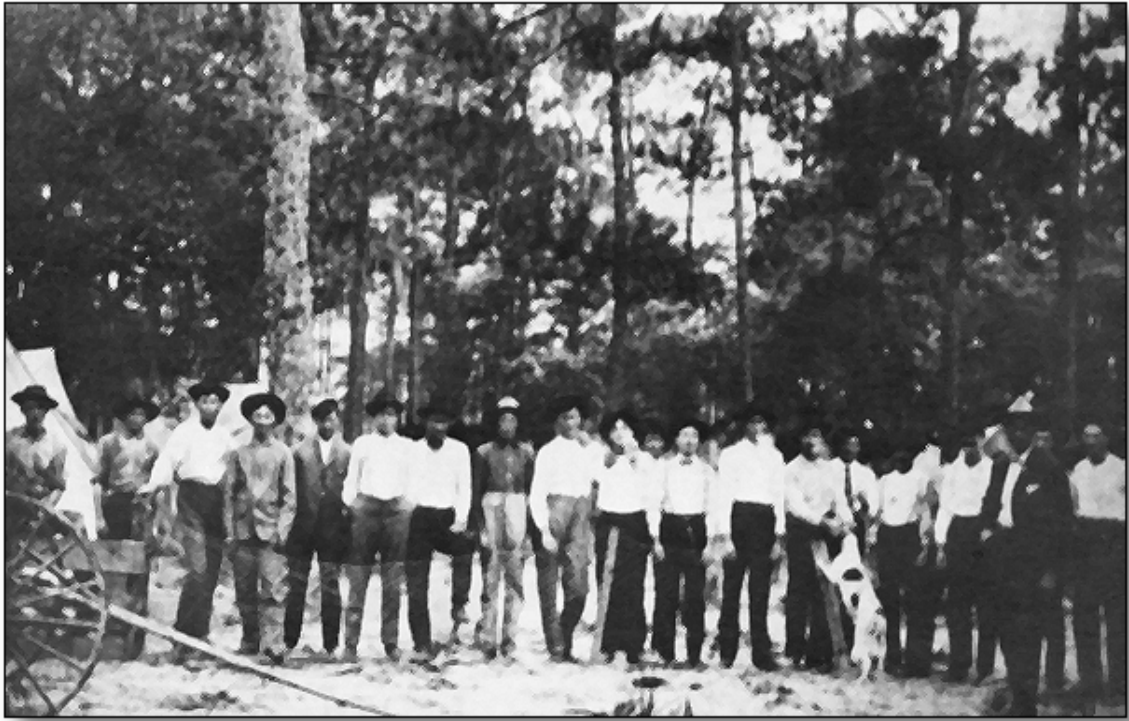
Many wealthy gentlemen, such as Judge John H. Caldwell of Tennessee, came yearly to Florida to hunt with friends. A hunting trip did not have to mean hardship or deprivation. In addition to folding chairs and tables, this picture of a 1901 expedition near La Belle shows the black cook, Randolph Hawkins, who went along to take care of the domestic arrangements.

Photograph courtesy of the Caloosa Valley Historical Society.



Early photographs usually show blacks only incidentally and often in menial capacities. This picture of a black family was taken around 1900 and features a typical log cabin built for a family at Hagan's turpentine still, located south of Avon Park in Highlands County.

Photograph courtesy of the Avon Park Museum.



**This group picture from around 1908 brought together the phosphate-processing crew at the Tiger Bay mine, west of Fort Meade in Polk County.**

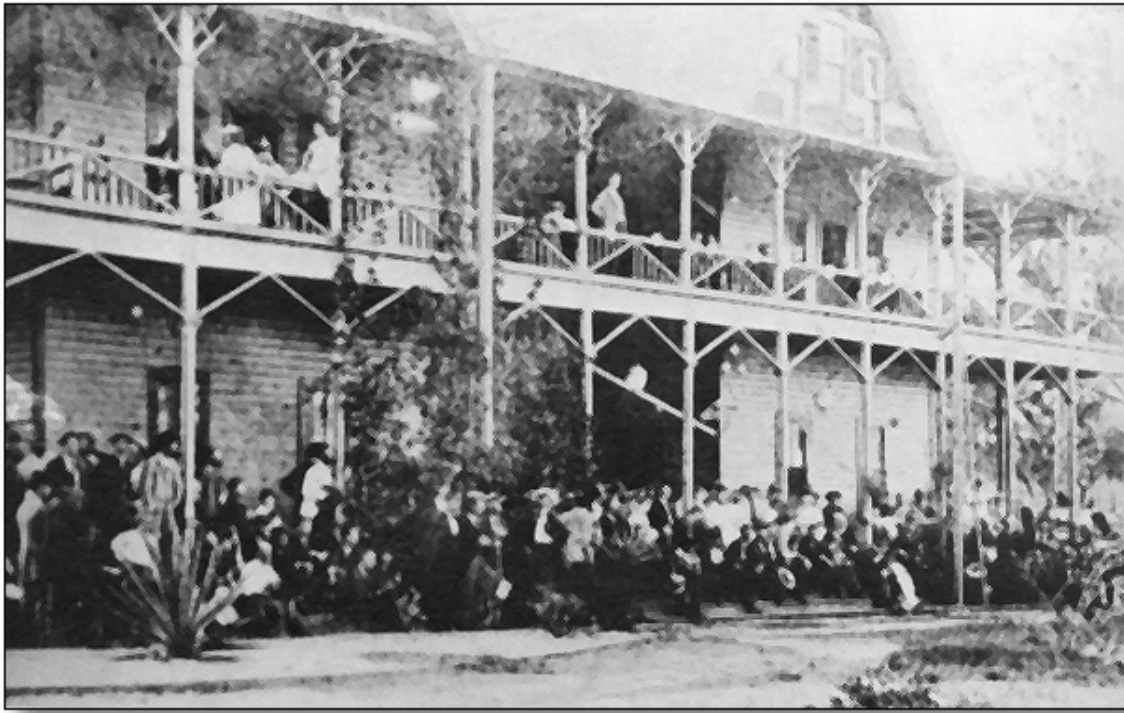
Photograph courtesy of the Polk County Historical Commission.



**The one-room school house had to serve the education needs of remote areas. Here the Polk Lake pupils posed with their teacher, Minnie York, around 1910.**

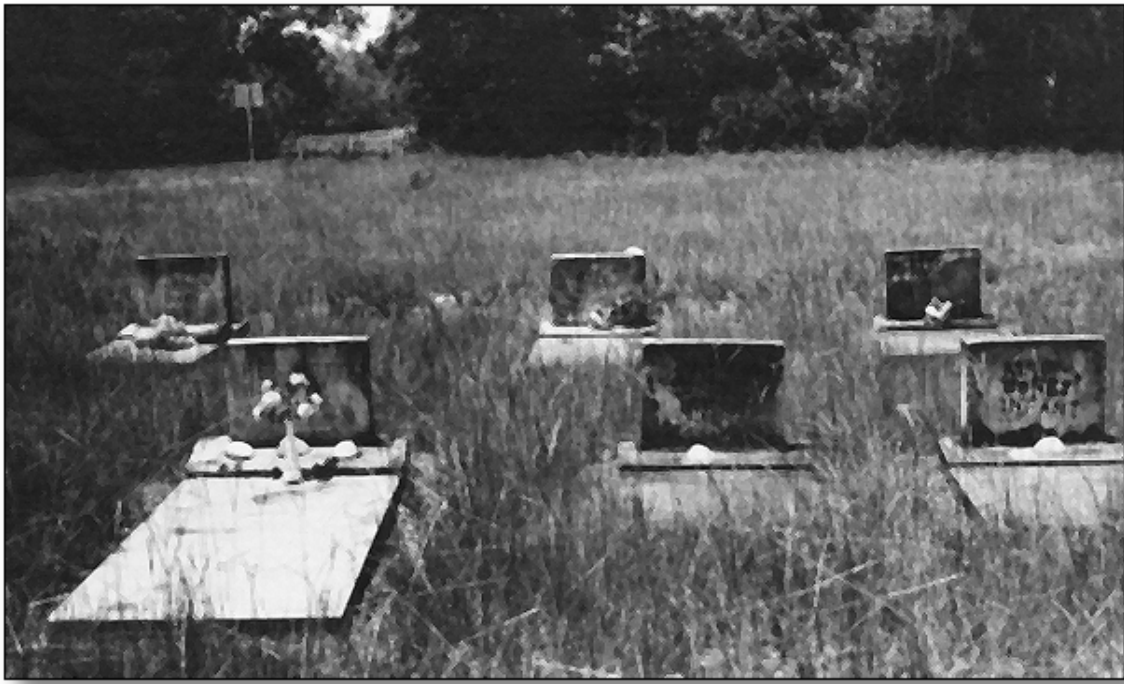
Photograph courtesy of the Polk County Historical Commission.





**Holidays provided an occasion for early settlers to gather together. On Thanksgiving Day, 1894, Oliver M. Crosby of Avon Park entertained the town's residents with dinner at his Verona Hotel.**

Photograph courtesy of the Avon Park Museum.



**Old graves, such as this one at the site of Fort Kissimmee on the present-day Avon Park Bombing Range, are poignant reminders of the bad old days of high infant mortality and high death rates as a result of childbirth. Many of the older markers record the family name, preceded by the word "baby" or "infant."**

Photograph courtesy of the author.

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## THE REMINISCENCES OF AN ITINERANT PREACHER

by Richard McKendree Tydings  
Introduction by Ruth S. Irvin

Richard McKendree Tydings, an itinerant Methodist preacher, served his church in Florida from 1851 until near the end of his life in 1890. His yearly mission assignments, broken only by seven years of service in Arkansas, took him from one part of Florida to another. After his return to Florida from Arkansas in 1880, he wrote his “Reminiscences” which appeared sequentially in the *Christian Advocate*, a Methodist publication. Tydings finished his “Reminiscences” in 1882 while living at Anthony, in Marion County, where he found a permanent home at last and continued his preaching. He died there on December 27, 1890.

Richard McKendree was the son of Richard Tydings, an itinerant Methodist preacher, who preached in Pennsylvania before moving to Kentucky in 1828. Born in Pittsburgh in 1828, young Richard grew up in Kentucky to become an itinerant preacher like his father. He was the grandson of the Reverend Wesley Adams, a regular Methodist minister, who had moved to the wilds of Florida in the Tallahassee area in 1827, when Florida was yet a territory. After suffering a loss of health in Kentucky, Richard (“a walking skeleton”) came to Florida to visit his grandfather during the winter season of 1850 to seek a cure.

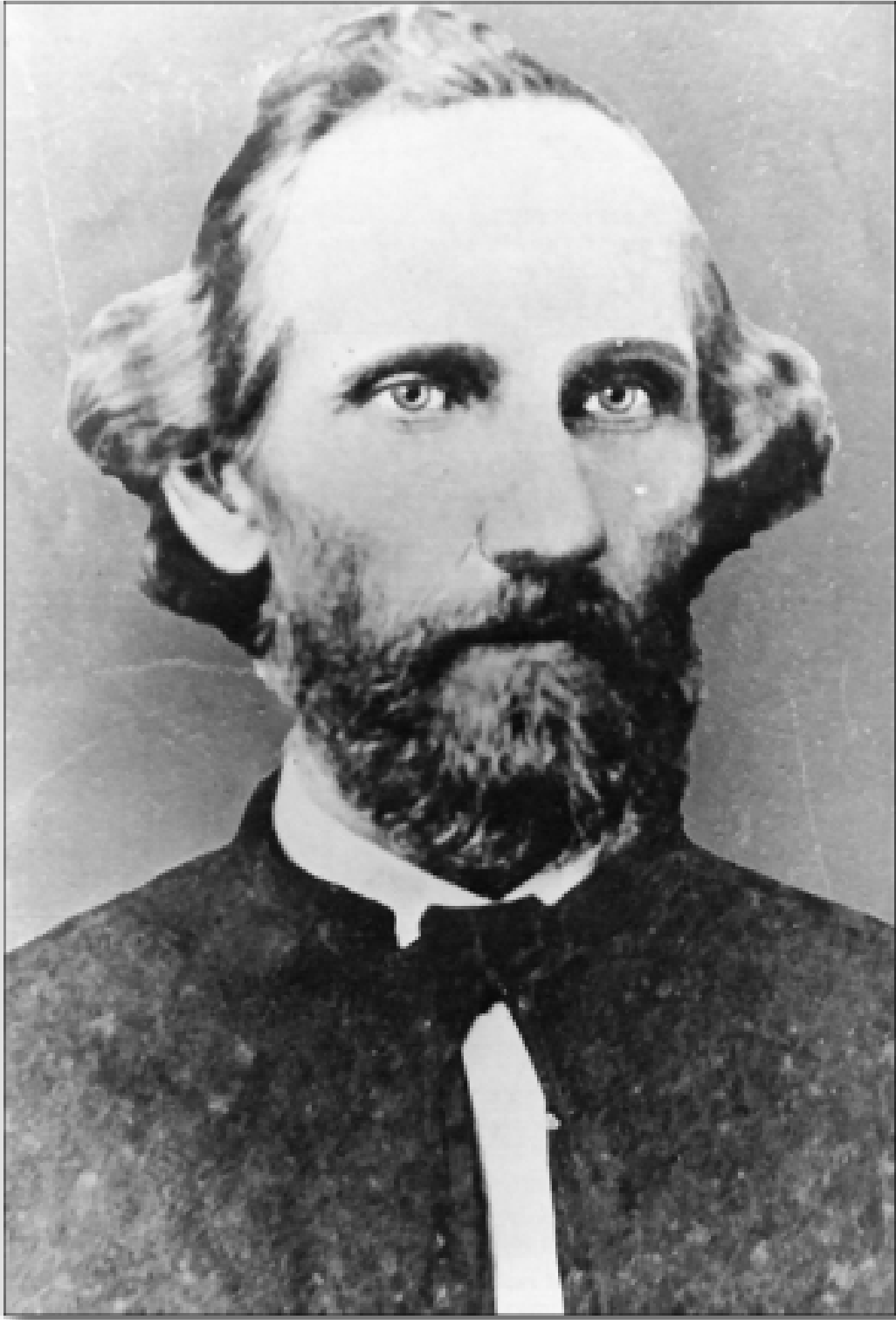
The infirmities of age and a partial paralysis of the tongue prevented Wesley Adams from preaching in his later years, but he and Richard made many pleasant excursions in north Florida, south Georgia, and the Gulf Coast area. Richard’s health improved greatly. It was then that he took up his work again, and only five years after Florida had become a state, he accepted an appointment to the Tampa-Manatee mission field.

In 1850 Richard began a series of yearly missions that took him to almost every part of pioneer Florida where settlers could be found. His experiences confirmed his love for the “land of flowers” and shaped his high regard not only for the people he served, but also for the friends he made in every walk of life.

Richard married Louisa Helen Bryant in 1860. “Loulie” was the niece of Colonel James William Bryant, founder of the St. Johns River town of Welaka. Richard’s yearly moves, from that time on, included his family. William E. Tydings and Mary Louise Tydings Whatley of West Palm Beach are his grandson and granddaughter. They have preserved an old family scrapbook containing his “Reminiscences” and also some of his yearly journals, on which he based his “Reminiscences.”

The account of Tydings’ stay in the Tampa-Manatee mission field reveals this sparsely settled area as he found it in 1851. The memoir also relates his travel experiences from Tallahassee to St. Marks, by steamer to Key West, back to Manatee and Tampa, and finally his return to Tallahassee during a big freeze in January, 1852. His “Reminiscences” are rich in description and





**Richard McKendree Tydings.**

Photograph courtesy of the author.

friendly encounters, many of them with well known historical figures. His mission concluded with the successful completion of the first church built in Tampa. Seen from the perspective of time, the entire account has a jewel-like quality, and it is truly a Florida pioneer odyssey, as well.

Richard, together with friends, took a steamer at St. Marks bound for Key West during the first week of February, 1851. The trip took six days. He stayed in Key West for three weeks waiting for passage to the Manatee-Tampa area, the most southern Methodist mission field in Florida except for the island of Key West. He left Key West on March 5, 1851, on the schooner *Sprague* and after a short and pleasant run up the coast landed at Manatee. His account of his Tampa-Manatee mission (including some errors in spelling and punctuation) follows.

\* \* \*

### **Manatee**

In my last letter I mentioned my arrival from Key West, at Manatee, and kind reception by the family of Rev. Franklin Branch, M.D.

This settlement being one of the regular preaching places on the mission, I subsequently visited it once a month, and always greatly enjoyed my visits, spending at least a week among my flock here each time. The Manatee is a broad, tide river, as far up as the writer ascended, and its mouth is east of entrance into the great bay of Espiritu Santo, at Egmont Key, so that the sea breezes from the Gulf have unobstructed passage up the stream. On the north shore was a large body of rich hammock land peculiarly adapted to the cultivation of the sugar cane, with few persons living on that side except the negroes who worked on the sugar plantations. On the south bank the land was higher and covered with pine woods, and here was situated the church building, being the principal settlement. There was no town there at that date, but the inhabitants were scattered along the pine bluff, with plantations in a light, high hammock, a short distance to the south.

The river derived its name from the fact that it was once a favorite resort of a very large fish, with an udder like a cow, called by the Spaniards manatee. It is still a great fish stream, and the mullet, caught with the cast net, constituted a daily article of diet here. During the year I enjoyed several fishing excursions down the river with the Branch brothers, John, Franklin and Orson. On one occasion the Doctor accompanied us on a trip to Terrace Bay. The mode of fishing was gigging. One pushed the boat with a pole slowly and smoothly along, while the rest of us stood with grains in hand, ready to send the barbed spear, or miniature harpoon, into any of the finny tribe we might discover feeding along the sandy and shallow margin. "Created! what a fish," and the Doctor's spear would go whirling after the darting fish, often capturing a rather diminutive specimen, notwithstanding his excited exclamation, as he made the strike. He certainly made double the number of strikes, if he did not capture more game than his more deliberate boys. We had fine success fishing, and also killed some pink curlews at Bird Island. It seemed to me that a large vessel might have been loaded with young birds of the various species that build on this island. The noise of the old birds, and the screams of the frightened young ones as we landed was truly deafening, for the report of our guns could scarcely be heard.

Many pleasant visits were made during the year, to the hospitable mansion of Dr. Joseph A. Braden. The building was of concrete, composed of sand, shells and lime, forming a wall that hardens by time. The lime was obtained by burning shells which are found upon the Manatee in vast beds. A Mr. Robert Gamble was erecting on the Northern side of the river a concrete building, the mortar being first formed into blocks and hardened in the sun. He was living, temporarily, in a small adobe, the only house of the kind, I suppose, in the State. The walls were composed of the natural soil surrounding it, protected from the rains by widely projecting eaves.

Dr. Braden, at the time I write of, was not connected with the Methodist Church, but subsequently he and all the family joined, and he became a zealous local preacher.

With such a local preacher as Dr. Franklin Branch, and such a leader as Bro. Ezekiel Glazier, (since licensed to preach) living in their midst, I need hardly say, that I found the society here in a healthy condition. Its white membership numbered only twenty, but some additions were made during the year. I remember that at a prayer meeting, one Saturday night, held in Bro. Branch's parlor, several souls were blessed with a sense of pardoning love, and on the night following, as no private house was large enough to contain the congregation, we assembled in the dining hall of Judge Josiah Gates' new hotel. The building was not quite finished and the family had not yet moved into it so that its first use was for divine worship. In the opening of the meeting, five of Judge Gates' children were baptized, and at the close, five persons joined on probation, the wife and eldest daughter of Mr. Gates being among the number.

I found Dr. Branch a very pleasant companion, and true friend, and became greatly attached to himself and family. It was with uncommon pleasure that I welcomed into the Florida Conference, Frank and Orson, the sons of Dr. Branch, and have watched with fatherly interest their careers. They have done good service. May God continue to bless and prosper them.

\* \* \*

### **Tampa**

The only mode of communication between Manatee and Tampa in 1851 was by the sloop, Mary Navis, Captain Bishop, which carried the mail, and that only once a week. When the sloop, during the summer, was being repainted, I had to take passage in a small sailboat. On one occasion, going down the bay, we were out all night.

Well, Tampa, in 1851, was a small village, which had grown up around Fort Brook [sic], at the mouth of the Hillsboro river, and is really not on Tampa Bay, but at the head of the Hillsboro Bay. There were no sidewalks then, and the sand was so deep that we young men would invite the girls to go wadeing [sic], as anything like graceful walking was impossible. The grounds around the garrison were set in grass, and beautifully shaded by large live oaks.

There was preaching by no other denomination but the Methodist, and that on two Sabbaths in the month only. A member of this society, brother John Whidden, dying, bequeathed five hundred dollars towards building a Methodist Church, to which had been added three hundred dollars on subscription, and the building was in process of erection. In the meantime we worshipped in the Courthouse. The membership amounted to nineteen whites, the list headed by the

name of Rev. Leroy G. Lesley, formerly a member of the Florida Conference. Brother Lesley had ceased to itinerate, and settled at this far distant point of our southern territory on account of disease of the throat. For this reason he could not assist me much in preaching, but I found him in full sympathy with my work, and a friend and brother indeed. He not only superintended the erection of the church building, but did much of the work with his own hands.

A little incident in connection with the building of this house I will relate as it is characteristic of the man, and the donor's name has since become so celebrated. I was on a visit to the keeper of the lighthouse, Dr. Jamison, on Egmont Key, when I was introduced by him to Major T. J. Jackson, U.S.A. As by his invitation we strolled up the beautiful beach, he informed me that he had been stationed for a long time in the interior, without religious privileges or associations. He had been in bad health ever since the close of the Mexican War, and the mild climate of Florida having failed to restore it, he had obtained a long furlough, and intended to try the benefits of travel. When we returned, after a long stroll, to the neighborhood of the Lighthouse, he begged me, if not too much fatigued, to continue our walk, stating that it had been so long since he had enjoyed the privilege of conversing with anyone on the subject of religion, that he feared he would weary me. I found from his conversation that he was a humble Christian. I believe he stated that he was a member of the Presbyterian Church. He was certainly a devout soldier, and loved to talk upon the subject of religion. He inquired with great interest all about my mission, and when I mentioned that we were trying to build a house of worship at Tampa, he begged me to accept of a small contribution towards it, saying that he wished to have some interest in so good an enterprise. His contribution of five dollars was in gold coin. I was not surprised to hear, during the late civil war, that Major General T.J. (Stonewall) Jackson was a man of prayer.

In those days the preacher had to board around. My first home was with a Mrs. Alexander Martin, the widow of a Methodist preacher, and a very pleasant home it proved to be. Next I boarded with Bro. Lesley, and then with a Bro. Andrew J. Henderson. Much of my leisure time was spent at the garrison, in the agreeable company of Lieut. Thornley S. Everett, who was in command of Fort Brooke, who although a member of the Episcopal Church, I found a warm friend and helper of the missionary.

### **The Sparkman Neighborhood**

The mission included a settlement seventeen miles east of Tampa, known as the Sparkman neighborhood. Once a month brother Henderson furnished me a horse and saddle, and I generally stopped for dinner and rest with a brother Jas. Goff, whose family now reside in Lake City. As there was no church building the meetings were held at the residence of Capt. S. Simon Sparkman. There were twenty eight names on the Church roll at this point, but scattered from the Hillsboro, along the Alafia, to the head of the Manatee. Of course I did not see some of the members often at the meetings, and having to ride one of brother Henderson's wagon horses, was necessitated to make my visits to this neighborhood short, and was unable to visit them at their homes. At the close of the year, thanks to the efforts of the Sparkman brothers, a log church was ready for occupation, and was dedicated on Christmas day. We named it Bethlehem. The country east of Tampa was, for about ten miles out, flat and quite poor, and at that time very sparsely settled. The settlers were small planters, but large cattle raisers. That region then, as now, shipped their beef cattle to the Island of Cuba. Those employed to load a vessel, would not



only gather up their own cattle, but any they came across, fit for shipment. This arrangement saved the cattle ship from unnecessary delay, and was well understood by the stock raisers. The marks and brands, (at Tampa) were taken by the county Clerk, which saved the contractors from difficulty when the owners of stock thus taken without their knowledge came to be paid. Things in general were after a primitive fashion in those days. Buggies were rare; carriages, none. The usual style was a cart, the driver astride the pony or mule, feet on the shafts, and knees nearly on a level with the head. The cowboys were daring riders; their usual gait, a lope; and they almost lived in the saddle. A facetious Northerner declared that all they cared about in the way of dress was “a shirt and a pair of spurs.”

\* \* \*

### **Trip to Fort Myers**

Sometime in the spring – I think it was April - I took, by invitation, a trip on the U.S. steamer, Fashion, to Fort Myers on the Caloosahachie [sic] river, one hundred miles south of Tampa. The only passengers aboard were the Paymaster, Colonel Harvey Brown, and the Indian Agent, General Luther Blake. Colonel B. was going to pay the soldiers at Fort Myers, and General Blake was to hold a conference with Billy Bowlegs, and other principal men about the Florida Seminoles, with regard to their emigration westward.

The mornings after our departure from Tampa, we came to anchor in Charlotte Harbor, and proceeded up the Caloosahchie, in the steamer's yawl, rowed by four lusty sailors. I think the distance up to the Fort was over ten miles. I was here the guest of Major John H. Winder, afterwards General Winder, who had charge of the Libby prison, at Richmond, Virginia during the war.

A few Indians came in to trade, but Billy Bowlegs and party did not make their appearance, as they had agreed to do, for conference with the Indian Agent. I saw Bowlegs afterwards, when on his way to Washington, in company with Johnie Jumper, a commissioner from the Seminoles, located in the Indian Territory, and old Abraham, the interpreter, (a full blood negro,) and when I mentioned my trip to Fort Myers, and disappointment that he did not come in according to promise, he gave me a knowing smile and the shrug of the shoulders so peculiar to the Indian, for answer. He evidently did not wish to see the agent at that time to discuss the removal of his tribe to the West. Billy pretended that he was in favor of removal but that Sam Jones, the head chief would never consent. That if the United States would let the Seminoles alone until Sam Jones, who was very old, should die, then they would leave Florida without giving further trouble. General Blake said that he was the last white man who had seen the old chief, and as that was some years previous he believed that Sam Jones was dead, and that Billy, not wishing to flatly refuse to emigrate, used this objection simply to gain time, as also this trip to Washington, to have a talk with the Great Father, the President. From his name, I expected to see a bow-legged man, but found him a well formed good looking Indian, stout built, but rather below the average height. He was named after his maternal uncle. The Seminoles, showing their opinion of the virtue of their women, by a law preferred a successor to the deceased chief a son of the chief's sister, to one of his sons who might possibly have none of the chief's blood in his veins.

Billy's politeness was excessive, he being apprehensive that as he passed through the states some white man whose relative had been murdered by the Indians should after the Indian code of morals, take vengeance, on him. He was a brave and wily chieftan, as the government found out to their cost for they never could drive him from the swampgirt home in the everglades, until in 1857, they turned this difficult enterprise over to the State government. The volunteer soldiers, fighting Indian fashion, penetrated their secret fortresses, burned their houses and destroyed their crops. Finding that the cowboys, as our troops were contemptuously designated were very different enemies to deal with from the soldiers of the regular army, the Indians gave up the unequal struggle, and emigrated westward.

The day passed slowly away at the Fort vainly awaiting the appearance of the Indian. A heavy rain at night prevented me from preaching to the soldiers, which was my main object in this visit. There was no army chaplain in this part of the State and no one had preached the blessed gospel to these poor soldiers in years. The mosquitoes were exceedingly numerous at this point, and I should have spent a sleepless night, but for the kindness of a stranger, D.P. Holland, who generously gave up his bunk and mosquito net to me. How he fared in the contest with the avenging pests that night, he never would confess. We left early next morning as the Fashion had to visit other military points and could wait for us no longer.

### **Return to Tallahassee**

The first of January, 1852, found your correspondent still in Tampa. The Conference was to convene in Tallahassee, and how to get there was a very serious problem in those days. The stage route was both tiresome and expensive, and there was no regular communication by ship with St. Marks; but a gracious providence provided. A young man – James McDonnell, of Early county, Georgia, who was on a visit to a sister in Tampa – very kindly offered me a seat in his buggy. He had to take with him as far as Lake Harris his little nephew – who had been attending school in Tampa – and who is now the proprietor of the celebrated grove on Orange Lake, in Marion County, (Harris' Grove) perhaps the largest in the State. Mr. Harris (McDonnell's brother-in-law) – after whom, I suppose, the Lake was named – had emigrated from Georgia to this part of Southern Florida for the benefit of his health. He had been a great sufferer from rheumatism. The change had effected a complete cure. Around his residence he had planted large sour orange trees, taken from the hammock adjacent, and budded to the sweet orange. On a beautiful inlet in the lake he had budded another grove, just where nature had planted the trees. Although it was now January, he had not yet manufactured his sugar crop, and the year before – if I remember right he had not finished grinding before the month of March. Many of the canes were in tassel; the first I had ever seen. Since my visit in 1852, Mr. Harris has sold his beautiful place on the lake and removed to Ocala, where he keeps an excellent hotel. Two years ago, while attending the Conference there, I had the pleasure of dining (by invitation) with Mr. Harris and his excellent wife, and talking over old times.

The day we left Lake Harris an exceedingly cold rain set in, changing in the afternoon to sleet. I vividly remember, to this day, how much I suffered with cold, and how welcome was the ruddy glare of a pine knot fire from the open door of the house we expected to stop at, as it was now some time after dark. There were few settlers on the road we had passed over, and about dusk we

had seen a large herd of deer gazing quietly at us as we passed by. Mentioning the circumstance to our host, he offered to lay a wager that he could show us forty deer the next day if we would remain over and go hunting. The next morning the sleet-covered forests displayed a scene of dazzling beauty.

In passing the scene of Dade's defeat Mr. McDonnell pointed out the position of the U.S. soldiers in the open glade as they fought the ambushed foe hidden in the tall grass on the border of a small lake. In obedience to military tactics, here these brave men stood until all but one was massacred, and he was left on the field for dead. He also mentioned that a piece of cannon had been found recently in the shallow lake, where the Indians – not knowing how to use the big gun – had hidden it.

Florida is remarkable for its underground streams – a chain of “sinks” indicating their mysterious course. These sinks are formed – I suppose – by the wearing away of the upper crust of soil until it becomes too weak to uphold the superincumbent earth, it suddenly sinks into the cave formed beneath it. We passed one of these sinks somewhere on the route through Marion county formed across the road Mr. McDonnell had travelled the winter before. A considerable area had instantly given way, and sinking to such a depth that the tops of several tall pines were just visible above the water, which now filled the sink. Fortunately, no person was passing the road at the time.

From the day we left Mr. George McClellan's, eighteen miles west of Lake City, until my journey's end, the cold was the severest I have ever witnessed in this latitude. Between Madison and Monticello the small streams were frozen over so hard that they bore up horse and buggy in passing. We were almost frozen when we stopped at the pleasant home of my uncle, D. Williams, in Monticello, for dinner, but in the afternoon we pushed on to the home of my dear old Grandfather, Rev. Wesley Adams, where I and my generous friend, James McDonnell, parted company.

The Conference met in Tallahassee, where I was elected to Elder's orders and ordained by Bishop Andrew. When the appointments were announced my name was read out for St. Mary's Georgia.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Photographs of Alvan S. Harper, Tallahassee, 1885-1910*. Ed. Joan Perry Morris and Lee H. Warner. Tallahassee. 1983. Florida State University Press. Photographs. Pp. xii, 140. Cloth. \$30.00.

When Alvan Harper came to Tallahassee, perhaps with the encouragement of Judge J.T. Bernard whom he had met in his native Philadelphia, it was not much of a town. It was even less of a state capital. Off the beaten track, selected as the seat of state government in a compromise between rivals Pensacola and St. Augustine, it dozed in the piney woods of North Florida. Tallahassee must have seemed incredibly small and sleepy to Harper and his wife after the hustle and bustle of Philadelphia where he had operated a successful studio. Whatever his motivation for coming South, or his initial reaction to his new home, Harper began photographing almost at once and continued to do so until shortly before his death in 1911. As the text of this volume makes clear most of Harper's work has been lost in the all too usual, but nonetheless heartbreaking, ways photographic collections have disappeared all over the country. We are left to judge Harper based on a tiny fraction of his work which did just happen to survive. There is no way of knowing if the 1600 negatives from which this book was made are representative of the large and now forever lost whole, but they are quite good. Harper was a good journeyman photographer who saw to it that the job was done properly. If we are astonished by the quality of his work presented in *The Photographs of Alvan S. Harper, Tallahassee, 1885-1910*, it may be because we underestimate the accomplishments of local photographers throughout America in this period. Many were outstandingly good and Harper may have been, too, but without more of his work we must reserve judgment on that point.

Harper's photographs are presented in this reasonably priced and handsome volume both as documents of the history of Tallahassee and as fascinating images in their own right. After an introductory essay outlining Harper's life and work by Joan Perry Morris a selection of 101 photographs is reproduced, one image per page. The reproduction and selection are excellent, but the captions are maddeningly grouped together earlier in the volume. One must constantly turn back to that section to see what if anything is known about the picture. After a few pages the average reader will give that up and just leaf through the pictures. The illustrations are grouped according to subject beginning with portraits and ending with a variety of scenic views. Following the photographs comes an essay on Tallahassee's history by Lee Warner. Warner's essay is probably the best part of the book. If most people will buy this volume for its photographs, they will value it for Warner's essay which relates the views presented to the state capital's peculiar history. He skillfully weaves the photographs into Tallahassee's story, but once again the thoughtful reader must leaf back and forth between cited plates and text. As the photographs and text have no common organization one must jump all over the illustrations (say from plates 3 to 83) to follow the text. Many readers may not bother. This is a real shame because the text really makes the pictures come alive as historical documents.

*The Photographs of Alvan S. Harper, Tallahassee, 1885-1910* is a beautifully printed volume which would have benefited from better coordination of its several parts. As it stands, it is a fine



coffee table book which might also have been an excellent visual history of Florida's capital around the turn of the century.

*Michael Thomason*

*The Other Side of the River: Historical Cape Coral.* By Betsy Zeiss. Privately published. 1983. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. Pp. vii, 215. Cloth.

*The Other Side of the River: Historical Cape Coral* is an interesting, albeit rambling, account of the life of the early settlers on the north side of the Caloosahatchee River. Two-thirds of the book is devoted to a look at the development of the broad area reaching from Pine Island Sound to Alva and other upriver settlements. The last eight chapters sketch the history of Cape Coral. The time span covered by the book is from the late 1800s to the 1980s.

A lack of background material and definite geographical information gives rise to difficulties in getting an overview of the area and in locating homesteads, ranches, schools, etc. of earlier periods on today's maps. The range covered in the book is so widespread that some of the information does not seem to be relevant to the history of Cape Coral.

The principal source material used was the reminiscences of the early settlers and their descendants. These are invaluable in the preservation of local history, and they provide an aura of authenticity and a dash of color to the book. However, they need to be reinforced, amplified and coordinated with events from historical sources. The reader would have received a clearer understanding of the area's history if the author had followed a more orderly, chronological account of events and growth.

Chapters fifteen through twenty-three give a delightful glimpse of how Cape Coral began, its early struggles, and its growing pains as it became a city. The author touches lightly but accurately on how drastically the land was changed as development began: "Early days at Cape Coral found a plethora of wildlife and a paucity of people. Those who were there manned draglines and dredges, land movers and graders, and they leveled the earth's silhouette of picturesque pines and stubby palms against a bleak, wintry sky to a skinned, barren, and truly desolate scene. They created canals where none had been....They disturbed rabbit warrens and fox dens and rattlesnakes living in the dense growth and ditches bordering Harney Point Road." (pp. 150-151) However, the author does not deal with many of the serious problems and legal questions involving sales promotions and law suits.

The book closes with an upbeat look at the continuing growth of the city and gives a veiled promise of a rosy future.

*Alberta C. Rawchuck*

*Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980.* By David R. Goldfield. Baton Rouge. 1982. Louisiana State University Press. Illustrations. Photographs. Maps. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xiv, 232. Cloth. \$20.00.



Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

Measured by the percentage of the population living in the cities, the South long lagged at least a generation behind the rest of the country in urban growth. Whereas the majority of Americans lived in cities by 1920, the South did not reach that mark until 1950. This lag has also figured in the study of southern cities which have only recently attracted the systematic attention of historians. As with every other aspect of southern civilization, urban historians have had to confront the question of distinctiveness. Are southern cities simply delayed copies of their northern and western counterparts or are they somehow different?

David R. Goldfield, one of the pioneers in this field, tackles this question in his book, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980*. As the title suggests, Goldfield sees the southern city as “a unique environment within our national midst” (p. xi). Beginning with the observation that “the southern city is different because the South is different,” he argues

persuasively, “In that region, the city is much closer to the plantation than it is to Chicago and New York” (p. 3). In the “lengthy essay” which follows, the author explores the impact of three features related to the plantation economy that have dominated both the southern countryside and urban life since the founding of Jamestown. According to Goldfield, the worlds of both the cotton field and the skyscraper were shaped by the rural traditions of staple agriculture, race relations and a colonial economy exploited by outsiders. Goldfield’s provocative and readable exploration of these themes draws on an excellent grasp of wide-ranging sources which he discusses in a bibliographic essay.

Anyone curious about what Goldfield’s hypothesis has to do with Florida will be glad to learn that he recognizes the diversity that has existed within the South. He observes, for example, that Florida cities such as Tampa and Jacksonville owed their growth to something other than King Cotton. However, while serving other masters, these cities shared the regional pattern of a dependent economy and a biracial society. The ways in which sunbelt cities may have recently begun diverging from this historic pattern remain to be investigated.

Goldfield’s insightful overview of several centuries of southern urban history should interest both informed scholars and general readers.

*Robert P. Ingalls*

*Edge of Wilderness: A Settlement History of Manatee River and Sarasota Bay.* By Janet Snyder Matthews. Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1983. Caprine Press. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. Pp. 464. Cloth. \$21.50.

Janet Matthews has written what is destined to become the definitive, narrative history of the Manatee River-Sarasota Bay region. She ranges in her coverage from the mound people of about 5000 B.C. to the Sarasota “assassins” of the mid-1880s. The author has mined a wealth of primary sources, permitting the individuals who are coping with the forces of change to speak for themselves. Especially effective is the deliberate omission of “[sic]” when quoting such material. This permits the basic datum of recorded history – the individual – to speak without interpretive alteration.

The author is to be commended for her detailed coverage of the establishment of the Spanish ranchos (fish camps) which existed during the British period. This sets the scene for her narrative of the arrival of American William Bunce during the U.S. territorial period. This influential pioneer of Hillsborough County developed an economically profitable rancho at the mouth of the Manatee River. Unfortunately, Bunce's enterprise was subjected to the vicissitudes of the Second Seminole War as were his “mixed blood” workers, who were the victims of both Indian raids and the disgraceful and discriminatory government policy administered by General Thomas Jesup.

Janet Matthews is at her best when evaluating the Armed Occupation Act of 1842 and its relationship to the influx of new settlers into the Manatee River-Sarasota Bay area. Her analysis of the motivations of the middle Florida planters such as the Gamble brothers, the Braden brothers, and William Wyatt, who became the pioneers of the sugar cane and cattle industries on



**John Greene Webb, from *Edge of Wilderness*.**



**Eliza Ophelia Graves Webb, from *Edge of Wilderness*.**

Florida's newest frontier, is especially cogent. Furthermore, Matthews' meticulous description of the Gamble brothers' sugar mill operation at present-day Ellenton is technically and statistically definitive.

The Manatee County historian is equally effective when she turns her attention to the post-Civil War arrival of Northerners, such as New Yorkers John and Eliza Webb and sailor Frank Guptill of Maine. They farmed, boarded tourists and became central figures in the coastal trade between Sarasota Bay, Key West, Tampa and Cedar Key. They and their descendants, together with newly arriving Southerners such as Confederate veteran Robert Griffith, helped to develop and expand the economy of then vast Manatee County.

The book concludes with a colorful narrative of the developing enmity between the economically depressed "crackers" of Sarasota Bay and prominent northern resident Charles Abbe, whose landholdings included 120 acres of present day downtown Sarasota. This animosity resulted in the murder of Abbe by Charlie Willard and others who were part of an infamous



organization known as the Sarasota Vigilance Committee. An exciting posse chase, resulting in the capture, trial and conviction of eight of the “thugs”, returned law and order to the Sarasota area in 1885.

Although Janet Matthews’ work represents a fine piece of state history, this reviewer takes strong issue with the statement that: “Grover Cleveland...brought the Reconstruction period officially to an end” (pp. 319-320). C. Vann Woodward and others have clearly demonstrated that it was the election of Hayes as a result of the Compromise of 1877 which brought Reconstruction to an end. Furthermore, Edward Williamson clearly documents, in *Florida Politics in the Gilded Age*, that the election of George “Millionaire” Drew in 1876 ended Republican rule in Florida. Thus, Matthews’ assertion that the election of General Perry in 1884 represented the first defeat at the polls for northern Republicans is clearly erroneous.

Nevertheless, this reviewer looks forward to a sequel covering the Manatee River-Sarasota Bay area from 1885 to the present.

*Richard Matthews*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

The *Journal of Popular Culture* is planning a special issue on popular culture in Florida. Anyone interested in contributing to the project should contact: Jerome Stern, Editor, *The Florida Issue: The Journal of Popular Culture*, Department of English, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida 32306.

Regular meetings of the Manasota Genealogical Society are held at 10:00 a.m. on the fourth Wednesday of each month, October through May, at the Manatee County Central Library, 1301 Barcarrota Boulevard, Bradenton. Everyone is welcome to attend. Dues are \$6 per year.

You can become a charter 1984 member of the Old Punta Gorda Association, which is dedicated to recreating a street of the old town as it was in 1915. Individual membership is \$3, family \$5. Send to Old Punta Gorda, Inc., P.O. Drawer 1508, Punta Gorda, FL 33951.

The Fort Myers Historical Museum announces the following upcoming exhibits for 1985. January 2-February 1: "Circus Posters"; February 5-March 1: "Edison's Lesser-Known Exhibits"; January 8-February 5: "An Artist Views History" (Mark Appleby's paintings, collages, and drawings inspired by his work with local history); February 5-March 1: "Perfect in Her Place" (the world of the working woman from 1850-1940); March 5-May 10: "Adding It Up" and "Hunt and Peck" (office machines and typewriters from the museum's collection); March 12-May 17: "Wish You Were Here" (selected cards from the postcard collection). The Museum is located in the former ACL Rail Road Depot, at 2300 Peck Street. Hours are 9-4, Tuesday-Friday, and 1-5 on Saturdays and Sundays.

Manatee County Heritage Week will be held from Saturday, March 23 through Sunday, March 30, 1985. The theme of Heritage Week will be "Early Transportation in Manatee County." Some scheduled activities include open houses at Gamble Mansion, the Manatee Village Historical Park, DeSoto National Memorial, the South Florida Museum, and the Manatee County Art League, and walking tours of Braden Castle Park, Cortez, and downtown Bradenton. For more information contact the Manatee County Historical Commission, 604 15th Street East, Bradenton, Florida 33508, or telephone (813) 747-9664.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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COVER: A 1901 hunting party near La Belle in Hendry County. The group included Judge John H. Caldwell (kneeling) of Tennessee, John A. Caldwell (left) and Dick Currey (right). Photograph courtesy of the Caloosa Valley Historical Society. See photo essay page 58.

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## CRACKING DOWN ON SPEEDERS

"It shall not be lawful for any person or persons to ride a horse, mule or any stock or to drive a Horse or Horses, Mule or Mules or other stock attached to any vehicle, or to drive ... other animals through or in the streets of this city at a greater rate of speed than the rate of *Eight* miles per hour...." Tampa City Ordinance, October 31, 1866.



## JUVENILE DELINQUENCY?

"The assemblages of boys of both or either color in the Streets for the purpose of play, upon the Sabbath day is considered pernicious and demoralizing to the youth of the city, and is earnestly recommended to those interested to interpose their proper parental authority and put an effectual stop to this growing evil." Tampa City Ordinance, November 13, 1866.

### FOR WANT OF A HORSE

"The mail-carrier between this place and Brooksville, lost his horse on Saturday night, and, consequently, we are without any mail this week." Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, April 5, 1871.