

Selected Excerpts

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Foreword

The Sebring Historical Society was chartered in June, 1967 and its officers lost no time in appointing committees and putting them to work. The Publications Committee, of course, was charged with the responsibility of notifying the new members of the meeting dates and to do this at the lowest possible cost because the dues had been set at \$1.00 for members, which allowed very little for printing and postage of the notices.

This problem was overcome by the generosity of Shultz Printing, Inc., who furnished the paper stock and permitted Culp Dottery the use of its presses without cost. This arrangement continued for years.

By the end of the first year of the Society, the Directors envisioned the need of a "house organ" so they authorized the issuance of a brochure which would serve as a trial balloon to determine its value. The response was spontaneous and generous as well as informative.

From the comments that were returned, a format was determined that would recognize that in the 200 charter members, interest was divided among some who were interested in:

- 1) Pioneers and their life styles and ways of living.
- 2) Seminole Indians, their habits and families.
- 3) Seminole wars, battles and forts.
- 4) Road, trails and water transportation facilities.
- 5) Pioneer's recreation and amusement.
- 6) Politics.

Acting on the suggestions that were received, the publications committee tried to put together a brochure which, when printed and distributed quarterly, would have something of interest for all members as nearly as possible. But, there were some problems -- mostly financial.

A cooperative membership overcame most of them. One member had a small press which eliminated the cost of printing, except for special type and pictures. Here, again with George Shultz to the rescue. He furnished this service below cost at a figure which was easily met by a member.

Had it been necessary to distribute these by mail, the whole idea would have been sunk but Ruth Dottery and Louise Cameron delivered them by car and saved the Society all the cost of local mailing.

The first "Bulletin" was published in April 1969. It was continued on a quarterly schedule by practically the same committee until April 1987. In that period of time there were fifty-five issues printed and distributed covering approximately 393 subjects in 1380 pages.

After all those issues and all those years under the influence of almost the exact same committee it was felt that a change would be refreshing and so - - a complete change has been effective in a gradual replacement. The completed committee replacement has proven to be not only beneficial but also welcomed by the members of the Society.

In this collection some twenty articles have been copied from the first 55 "Bulletins" as they received the most comments from the readers. It is probably proper to explain that for many months in the 1970's and 1980's, Park DeVane, Culp Dottery and Allen Altvater set aside Wednesdays to visit the areas that were the sites of the events of history in Central Florida. They visited the location of Chokonikla and Paynes massacre; Oak Creek, where the panther carried off the child; the battleground at Okeechobee and other points about which they wrote. They personally knew Senator Murphy, Congressman Peterson and Rex Beach and they rode out the storm of 1926. With these facts in mind, it is easy to understand why they and other members of the committee would appreciate the efforts of other committee members.

We hope you have enjoyed the "Bulletin" and that you will take a few moments to express your approval to the committee members who have made such marked improvements to it. Even the name, *The Historian*, is more up-to-date and interesting.



Allen C. Altvater
November 1993

Editor's note: Prior to Allen's death, he had written the above foreword for this collection of articles. Two sets of the following twenty or so articles had been photocopied from Bulletins and placed in an envelope, and it appeared that this work never made it to the print shop. (By 1993, Papa was no longer able to operate his multigraph press, so we feel certain that he had intended to have it reproduced by some other means.) Upon completion of this publication it was discovered that one xeroxed copy, printed in 1993, had been placed in the Archives (but we are unsure if any other copies were ever made).

Altvater Creed

“I will strive unceasingly to quicken the public’s sense of civic duty. Thus, in all things will I transmit this City, not less, but greater, better and more beautiful than it was transmitted to me.”

“Ever work unselfishly for the advancement of the community in which you live. It is unfortunate that we are so often strongly under the impression that to do a piece of work and not get credit for it, is little less than a calamity.”

“By doing the thing for which you may receive no credit, you are building certain qualities which cannot be hidden.”

Chapter One

The Massacre at Paynes Creek

From the De Vane collection

State of Florida, County of Hillsborough - Personally appeared before me, Judge of Probate, in and for the county and state aforesaid, William McCullough, who having been duly sworn according to laws says that he was hired by Messrs. Kennedy and Darling on the third day of July, 1849 and arrived at their Indian Store on Peas Creek and remained there until it was burned by Indians on the 17th or 18th July 1849.

On 17th July about noon Echo Emathia Chopka and three squaws came to the store bringing a large quantity of watermelons of which Capt. Payne purchased some nine or twelve, at the same time telling the Indians that he would have purchased them all but he did not think the melons would sell in New York to advantage. The Indians also brought venison, sweet potatoes, skins and bees wax, all of which was purchased by Capt. Payne.

Echo Emathia Chopka stated that he would be returning a pony he had recently purchased as not being such as he had ordered. These Indians went away about 3 or 4 o'clock of the same day. During the time they remained at the store they behaved well, in fact appeared more friendly than usual.

About half hour before sunset the same day, four other Indians came to the store, all men, without anything but their arms. These men came to the store with a quick step carrying rifles on their shoulder, muzzle foremost, locks covered, and appeared more bold than usual. Otherwise I did not observe anything uncommon in their conduct, except that they brought no trade with them, which was unusual.

They told Capt. Payne they had a large pack of skins on the east side of Peas Creek and wanted his boat to get it across. Payne told them that after supper he would assist them in getting the pack across. The Indians then desired permission of Capt. Payne to stop in the store and were refused, Capt. Payne stating to them that Indians were never allowed to sleep in the store.

The Indians then went out of the store and Capt. Payne closed the store doors and windows, and he and Dempsey Whidden went out at the end of the store and sat talking with them until supper time. It was now early twilight.

We all sat down to supper, the Indians were sitting at the end of the store next to the eating room quietly smoking their pipes. We had scarcely got seated at the supper table when they fired in at the door from the outside, one Indian standing on either side of the door and two in front, one behind the other. By this shot Capt. Payne and Dempsey Whidden were killed, dead, and I received a bullet in my left shoulder.

I was shocked for an instant but saw Payne spring up and fall back on the floor. Whidden fell forward his face and hands resting on his plate. I sprang to the door and shouted when the Indians gave back reloading their rifles. My wife was closing the shutters of the windows but I told her our only chance was to leave the building. My wife then took her child and started for the bridge which was about a quarter of a mile from the store.

Previously, however, to my wife's starting I had taken down a loaded rifle that hung on the wall and had examined Capt. Payne and Dempsey Whidden and found they were both dead. I followed my wife with the rifle.

I had gone more than 30 yards from the store when the Indians again shot at me and missed. At about 20 yards further on they fired another shot at me and missed. At about half way from the store to the bridge my wife and child fell down and I had just got them up and started again when the Indians fired on me again, a ball passing through the flesh of my right thigh, the same ball passing through the leg of my wife near the knee, but no bones were broken.

We then passed on across the bridge when we left the road and hid. About two minutes after we had concealed ourselves, three Indians passed up the road running and in earnest conversation, apparently searching for us. In a few minutes two of them returned and passed us in the direction of the store and the other I have never seen since but I suppose he intended to cut us off on the road.

As soon as it was dark we took to the woods and on the following Friday about noon, without food and almost naked, we reached the settlement on the big Alafia a distance of 20 or 30 miles, having lost my way and wandered a good deal in the woods.

On Wednesday morning I saw a bright light in the direction I supposed the store to be in. I think the store was burned at that time. About 3 o'clock Wednesday morning I heard the report of several guns. Also while I lay concealed near the bridge after the two Indians had gone I heard the report of one gun.

We lost everything we had and among other things some papers worth 100 dollars and my other property such as wearing apparel, bedding, furniture and farming utensils, building and crop both at the Indian store and at my place on the Alafia which I was compelled to abandon in consequence of my wounds in worth 300 dollars. Only the assets at the Indian store has been destroyed which are valued at 200 dollars. As far as I know the Indians have not disturbed my place on the Alafia but am not able to look after it. I think the buildings of Messrs. Kennedy and Darling at the Indian station were worth 1500 dollars. I cannot say how much the goods were worth that were in the store when it was burned. There were shelves on two sides of the storeroom which was about 22 ft. square and on the shelves which were pretty well filled there were five tiers of shelves. There were rifles, brass kettles, beads, blankets, tinware, domestic goods of every description, powder, lead,

flints, tobacco, knives, red broad cloth, spurs, bridles, bits, a saddle, looking glasses, files, a full chest of tools, Indian shawls, handkerchiefs, hoes and hatchets, grindstones, combs and binding, a large quantity of salt and whiskey, corn and provisions and a quantity of deer skins in hair, also bear skins in hair, moccasins, kitchen and mess furniture, a large canoe, etc.

The store was complete, upper and lower floors of pitsaw lumber, chimney and floor to the kitchen. I have also 19 hogs valued at \$2.50 per hear at large on the south side of the Alafia.

(This article is reprinted from *Bulletin Number Thirty Three*.
Sebring Historical Society, July 1981. Pages 955-956.)

FORT CHOCKA-NICKLER

In the late 1840's, Kennedy & Darling, army sutlers from Fort Brooke, (Tampa) erected a store and trading post on the banks of Charlo-popka-hatchee-Chee (Seminole - meaning Little Trout-Eating Creek). This store or trading post was run by Capt. George Payne and Dempsey Whidden. On July 17, 1849, both were killed by the Seminoles and the building and contents were burned.

About three months following the killing, the Army Engineers established a fort with a blockhouse on or very near the site of the burned store. The engineers named the new fort Chocka-nickler (Seminole words meaning "burnt store"). This fort was erected October 26th, 1849. The creek on which the fort was erected was after this time called Payne's Creek as it is known today.

From the surveyor's notes, the fort was located about a half mile north of the monument erected to Capt. Payne and Dempsey Whidden in Section 9 Township 33 South, Range 25 East, west of the section line between sections 9 and 10, about half a mile north of Payne's Creek. The blockhouse was on Peace River on Section 15 on a line between sections 10 and 15, now the property of J. K. Albritton. An old military map shows a bridge at this site.

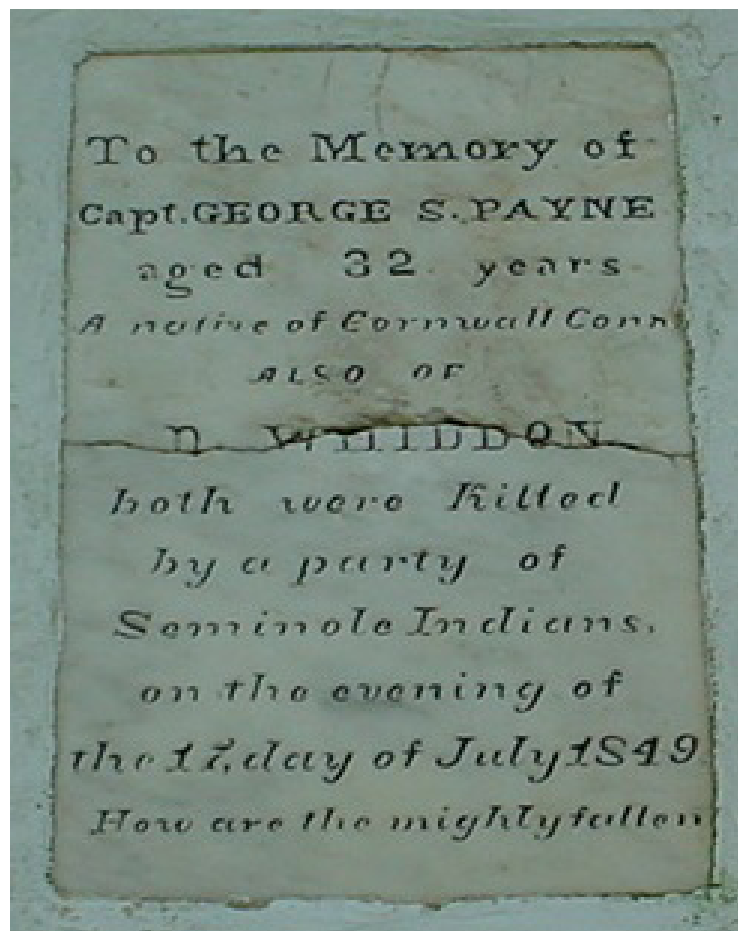
This fort being the first one established south of Fort Fraser (Bartow) and east of Fort Hammer on Manatee River, it became a very large and important headquarters in the prosecution of the Seminole War. About one month later, Fort Meade, Fort Green and Fort Myacca were established, Fort Hartsuff one year later.

Fort Chock-nickler later became known as Utica in the 1880's, later taking the name Bowling Green.

(This article is reprinted from *DeVane's Early Florida History, Vol. 2*.
Sebring Historical Society, September 1979.)



Bowling Green, Florida



Chapter Two

Chokonikla

By Park DeVane

The second Seminole Indian War was declared ended in 1842. It was decided in Washington that a reservation for the Indians would be set aside in Southwest Florida for their use. The act stipulated that no white settlers would be allowed to settle in this area. Neither would traders be allowed among them on the reserve.

The same year (1842) the Armed Occupation Act was passed in Washington that allowed veterans of the Indian wars to make application for a homestead of 160 acres in Florida. Many of the men who had fought the Indians all over Florida during the years 1835-42 recognized the possibilities of settling on good land that lay within this area.

The boundary of this reserve was very roughly described as follows: Beginning at the mouth of Peas Creek (Peace River) and up the river to Big Charlie Creek - up this creek to the south prong. Up this South Prong and east to the eastern shore to Istokpoga Creek to Kissimmee River. Then south on Kissimmee River to its mouth on Lake Okeechobee. South through Lake Okeechobee and the saw grass to Shark River on the southern coast. Then along the western coast a few miles inland to the point of beginning.

The Indians were not allowed to have any ocean coast line within the reserve, the reason being that they traded with the Spanish fishermen in past years and they were the source of their supply of guns and powder during the Indian Wars.

Another stipulation of this treaty was that the government would allow licensed traders to erect trading stores just outside the reserves' northern and western boundary. These stores would stock the supplies needed by the Indians and would be traded for animal skins, melons, corn, dried meat, etc.

The settlers began to move further south and paid little attention to the boundary lines and some began squatting within the reserve. Billy Bowlegs was resigned to accept the reserve and would, in all likelihood, live up to the agreement if left alone and not molested by white settlers. He tried very hard to keep peace among the members of the tribes that bitterly opposed accepting the reserve.

The trading houses were built and stocked by a trading firm from Tampa Bay named Kennedy and Darling, licensed by the government to trade with the Indians.

It appeared that everything was working out well for awhile but then tragedy struck on July 17, 1849. Some hot-headed Indians killed Captain Payne and Lott (Dempsey)

Whidden at the store on Paynes Creek (Bowling Green). The settlers in South Florida immediately left their homes and gathered at the nearest fort for protection. They petitioned Washington to send military forces into the area.

General David Twiggs was sent to Fort Brooke, Tampa, to take command of the forces and it was decided by the military authorities to build a series of forts across South Florida. These forts were to be no more than 15 miles apart. Gen. Twiggs built the first of these forts on the upper Manatee River at the head of navigation. (This is near present day Ellenton). This fort was named Fort Hammer. Then, from 10-15 miles apart going east, the following forts were erected:

- Fort Crawford
- Fort Myaca
- Fort Green
- Fort Chokonikla (Creek language translation - burned store or house)
- Fort Meade
- Fort Clinch (at Frostproof)
- Fort Kissimmee
- Fort Arbuckle (at Bombing Range)
- Fort Drum
- Fort Vinton
- Fort Capron (north of Ft. Pierce)

These forts were garrisoned by U.S. regular troops and a constant patrol was made between them day and night.

After a few months, Billy Bowlegs made contact with Capt. John Casey, the Indian agent at Sarasota and he told the captain to tell Gen. Twiggs that in a short time he would bring in the guilty Indians who killed Payne and Whidden. As he promised, he brought in to Fort Brooke, four Indians who took part in the killing and he also brought along the severed hands of another Indian who refused to be captured by him. He expressed his deep regrets for the trouble and hoped they could live in peace again.

After this, the forts were gradually abandoned. Some were active only a few months. The Indians moved deeper into the Everglades and would have remained in peace except for the actions of more unscrupulous white men in 1855, which is another story.

Park DeVane

The story of Chokonikla is reprinted from *DeVane's Early Florida History*.

(This article is reprinted from *Bulletin Number Thirty Three*.
Sebring Historical Society, July 1981. Pages 957-958.)

Chapter Three

Another Account of the Battle of Okeechobee 25 December 1837

By Allen C. Altvater

One of the greater thrills in the life of the amateur interested in history, is the opportunity to talk to an “old-timer” or an area pioneer about his early experiences. The expressed memories are often radically different from documented history of the period or from impressions handed down from one generation to another. It is a commonly accepted fact that, for some people, as they advance in age, the recollections of their youth become clearer even though they may have difficulty in remembering what happened yesterday. It is tragic that most of the stories told by the pioneers of Florida have been lost by the passing of those who told them.

It was my good fortune, in 1916, to work for “Uncle Billy” Varn who was, at that time, well past “middle age.” But his memory was keen and, as we rode around Central Florida in his model T Ford, he related many experiences of his youth and also tales passed on to him by relatives who had come to Central Florida in the 1840’s and before. These relatives had been the real pioneers, some had fought in the Indian wars. Their progeny are now leaders in their communities.

It is not surprising that a boy, still in his teens, would listen breathlessly while Uncle Billy (#) told stories of the Seminole Indian Wars as related to him by his relatives who had been engaged in them. Billy painted an especially graphic picture of the engagement near Okeechobee on Christmas day 1837 when, he said, the Indians lured the U.S. troops under Col. Taylor, into an ambush and had “mowed them down,” administering such a stunning defeat that Col. Taylor spent several days gathering his casualties and carrying them back as he “retreated up the Kissimmee River.”

Remembering these stories, quite some confusion was generated later when I read Col. Taylor’s official report of the battle and also when I read the inscription on the monument near the battle site which reads, in part, “In these woods on Christmas day, 1837, was fought the battle of Okeechobee in which a large band of Seminole Indians, under Chiefs Wildcat, Alligator and Sam Jones, was routed by - - .”

Which is the true picture of the outcome of this engagement? Were the Indians “routed” by the troops or were the troops “defeated” by the Indians?

(#) Willian Varn filed on his homestead (Sec. 34, R 35, T 29) at what was then called Kuhlman, in 1906. Here he established a large citrus nursery and furnished trees for most of the early groves in the area. He was appointed postmaster of Kuhlman in 1907.

In his official report, (*) Col. Taylor remarked “ - - and the enemy driven in all directions.” Before this and before the account of the battle, he wrote, “Here another young Indian was captured. He pointed to a dense hammock on our right, about a mile distant in which he said the hostiles were situated and waiting to give us battle.”

Indeed, the Indians were waiting and prepared. They were in a hammock, behind trees and logs, facing a sawgrass marsh through which the troops must wade in knee-deep mud and water. The Indians had cut the grass on their side of the march so that when the troops emerged, they were in full view of their enemies. Some excerpts from Col. Taylor's report will give a quick view of the initial engagement which involved 1,100 U.S. troops and about 300 Indians.

“Moving in the direction of the hammock, after proceeding about a quarter of a mile, we reached the swamp which separated us from the enemy, three quarters of a mile in breadth, being totally impassible for horses and nearly so for foot, covered with a growth of saw-grass, five feet high and about knee deep in mud and water, which extended to the right as far as the eye could reach, and to the left to a part of the swamp and hammock we had just crossed, through which ran a deep creek. - - - .

“On reaching the borders of the hammock the Volunteers and spies received a heavy fire from the enemy, which was returned by them for a short time, when the gallant commander, Colonel Gentry, fell mortally wounded. They mostly broke -- nor could they be again brought into action - - - .

“ - - until their gallant commander, Lieut. Colonel Thompson, and his adjutant, Lieut. Center were killed and every officer with one exception, as well as most of the noncommissioned officers, including the sergeant major and four of the orderly sergeants, killed and wounded of those companies, when that portion of the regiment retired a short distance and were again formed, one of their companies having but four men left untouched. - - - .

“The action was a severe one and continued from half past twelve until after 3 p.m., a part of time very close and severe. We suffered much, having 26 killed and 112 wounded, among whom are some of our most valuable officers. The hostiles probably suffered, all things considered equally with ourselves, they having left 10 dead on the ground besides doubtless, carrying off many as is customary with them when practicable.”

Park DeVane has indicated that there are strong reasons to believe that Col. Taylor's forces were lured into a dangerous position, and that, far from defeating the Indian enemies, the troops under Col. Taylor came off second best.

(*) The entire report of Col. Taylor, as well as the diaries of two of his officers, are given in full in Vol. 2 of DeVane's Early Florida History.

Mr. DeVane has made studies in depth, of the several Seminole Indian Wars, the causes, the sites, the treaties, the Indian strategies and even the thinking and reasoning of the Seminoles as applied to their military operations. He notes that there are certain salient characteristics in their battle tactics that can be traced through all the campaigns.

- 1) Since the numbers of Indian fighters were severely limited as compared to the greater numbers of Federal troops, it was necessary for the Seminoles to choose the battlegrounds most advantageous to them. It was their custom to use the element of surprise to the greatest degree possible; inflict as much damage as they could on the first onslaught and then withdraw by scattering and just disappearing. (In addition to the battle of Okeechobee, it will be noted that these tactics were used at the battle of Withlacoochie and Dade Massacre.)
- 2) They did their damage from behind trees or logs or other protections - not in organized ranks. After firing, they dropped to the ground and rolled to one side, then reloaded their muzzle loaders while in a prone and protected position.

Park DeVane is intimately acquainted with every square foot of the area covered by Col. Taylor in his march toward the Okeechobee battle ground; the area where he camped the night before the engagement; the route taken by the troops and the movements of the Indians. He can even point out the trees into which the soldiers fired their slugs when they replaced the charges before going into battle to insure that the powder was fresh.

There are several salient points in the accounts of events leading to the Okeechobee engagement, all of which must be considered to prove or disprove the theory that Col. Zackary Taylor had been hoodwinked by the Indians at Okeechobee. First in the sequence of events was the fact that several days before Christmas, while the troops were between Ft. Gardner and Ft. Bassinger, several Indians had allowed themselves to be captured and interrogated. The information they gave whetted the fighting appetites of Col. Taylor and his men.

On Christmas morning, two more were captured and they volunteered directions to the hammock and Col. Taylor followed those directions, disregarding the suggestions by Col. Gentry that the approach to the hammock that concealed the enemy be made by a circuitous route on high, dry land. Taylor laid a course pointed out by the Indians that led through a practically impassable swamp. Upon emerging from the swamp, he found that the Indians had spent much time and effort in preparing the site by cutting down the vegetation, leaving the troops without any shelter from the deadly fire of the Indians from the safety of the trees in the hammock.

The fighting lasted several hours and the initial official report listed 26 soldiers killed and 112 wounded. Others died later from wounds received. The same report noted that 10 Indians were killed. Here, there is some incongruity in the report made by Col.

Taylor. In one place he stated “ - - The hostiles probably suffered, all things considered, equally with ourselves, they having left 10 dead on the ground besides, doubtless, carrying off many more as is customary when practicable.” In another statement he noted “ - - and the enemy driven in all directions.” Their fight was either well organized or they didn’t remove very many casualties.

The entire series of events seems to follow the pattern described by Park DeVane. The Indians had prepared a position chosen by them at Lake Okeechobee. They employed a series of decoys who directed the troops into the position that was favorable to the Indians and perilous to the Federal troops. They inflicted damage so long as they had the advantage and then melted away into the woods or, as Taylor described it, “in all directions.” They were not pursued further by Col. Taylor and his command who buried their dead and transported their wounded back to Ft. Bassinger. Col. Taylor soon continued on to Ft. Brooke (Tampa).

I am inclined to agree with the impressions of Park DeVane and “Uncle Billy” Varn.

(This article is reprinted from *Bulletin Number Thirty Four*.
Sebring Historical Society, October 1981. Pages 983-986.)



Chapter Four

Hog Drives & Cane Syrup

From the DeVane collection

Lake Placid, Florida
June 18, 1967.

Mr. D. B. McKay
2405 Bayshore Blvd.
Tampa, Florida.

Dear Mr. McKay:

I am enclosing two articles on interview I have made that I thought perhaps you could use on the Pioneer page. I do not recall whether your page has touched on early hog drives or not.

After talking with the very old timers, they tell me it is equally as fast as a cattle drive and if cool weather, much faster. Willie Williams tells me of another hog drive of 200 head from Ft. Center on Fisheating Creek to Punta Rassa when there was cool weather with a sprinkle of rain. The drive was made one day ahead of the cattle, both starting from the same point at the same time.

It has always to me seemed hard to believe the narrators' story of DeSoto's march through Florida driving their hogs along with the march, but now knowing what the early old-timers tell me, I no longer doubt the accuracy of their journal. In fact, hogs have been driven from Georgia to Hillsborough County before railroads.

Ceylon Carlton of Lake Placid, who has lived in this vicinity since 1906, tells me he has made many drives from this area with from one to three hundred head, to both Zolfo Springs on the railroad and to Punta Rassa on the Gulf.

Kindest personal regards to yourself, your family and staff.

Sincerely,

Albert DeVane

In a recent interview with Willie Williams and his wife of Sebring, who have recently celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary attended by their nine children and grandchildren, I found they were both born in Polk County over 80 years ago and relate many pioneer stories of the frontier. Their fathers both fought in the last Seminole War; also the Civil War. Their Grandfathers both fought in the Second Seminole War.

I shall now relate a story as told by them. (A. DeVane)

In the latter part of the 1890's in Hernando and Pasco County, a feud existed between the Whiddens and the Ashleys, which finally resulted in the killing of one of the Ashleys by Tillet Whidden. Immediately following the killing, Tillet Whidden and family moved to DeSoto County on Deadman's Branch, about five or six miles northeast of LaBelle. Judge Ziba King of Arcadia gave him a job riding his beef pasture fence which ran from south Okeechobee Lake by Bear Hammock to the Calloosahatchee River. This was known as the stockade pasture.

Joe Ashley, brother of the slain Ashley, with his family also moved from Pasco County to DeSoto County. Some say to avenge his brother's death. Be as it may, he and his sons hunted alligators and plume birds for a living. A few months passed and one day while riding the fence when passing Boar Hammock, Whidden was shot with a rifle. His horse dashed and he was able to stay astride of him until his horse carried him home, about eight miles away. He was laid up for a while but recovered.

Rations began to run low and it became necessary that a trip be made to the store for groceries and feed. Yoking up his oxen to the wagon, also his horse to the Jersey wagon, he and his 17 year old son started out for Fort Myers. On the following day, the wagons being loaded with groceries and feed, the trip home began. Everything went along fine until when about five miles from his home "calamity struck."

The boy, who was driving the horse and wagon, was about half a mile in the lead ahead of his father who was driving the oxen. Someone hidden in ambush walked into the road after the boy had passed, slipped up from behind poking the gun between a barrel of grits and a barrel of flour and shot the boy; then fled into the woods. His father heard the shot and saw someone leave the wagon and run into the woods. He correctly guessed that someone had shot his boy mistaking the boy for himself.

Leaving his oxen, he ran to the boy, finding him badly shot but still alive. He fired a few shots from his rifle into the thicket where the assassin had fled. He then got into the wagon with the boy starting for his home at a double pace and left the team and supplies to themselves.

After about a mile he met Willie Williams, Jerry Whidden and his son, Charlie, who were driving 200 head of hogs to Punta Rassa, 50 miles away, to sell to the Spaniards for the Cuban trade.

It was just before night and they were making plans to feed the hogs and bed down for the night when Tillet Whidden and his boy drove up. He wanted Willie to go to LaBelle, phone for a doctor and Frank Tippens, the sheriff. Tillet gave him a sack of shorts bran he dumped into a palmetto patch for the hogs. Willie, Jerry and Charlie left for LaBelle to telephone. They returned to Tillet's home. Willie gave the boy a dose of morphine. The doctor arrived on horseback about 4 A.M. Frank Tippens, the sheriff, and his deputy, about an hour later.

After an examination by the doctor, he said the boy would recover.

Daybreak came. Willie, the sheriff and others visited the scene of the shooting but were unable to get much evidence. The oxen and wagon were about 300 yards from where he left them. Willie, Jerry and his son Charlie, rounded up the hogs, having accounted for all of them and again started their hog drive for Punta Rassa. The hogs were sold for 5 cents a pound.

On the way back they stopped at Ft. Myers, purchased a load of groceries and returned to their borne on Grasshopper, six miles east of Venus. Tillet Whidden was later killed from ambush while riding fence.

The Ashleys moved soon after to the East Coast near Hobe Sound. Through unscrupulous dealings, killings and robberies they became known as the Ashley Gang. However, through the energetic police work of Sheriff Bob Baker of Palm Beach County, the gang was killed, captured or imprisoned, thus ending the outlaw sagas of the Everglades.

A recent interview with W. Gettis Driggers of DeSoto City, the youngest and only living child of Jacob Driggers, Jr., and his wife, Ella (Underhill) Driggers, disclosed they were early pioneers into Polk County prior to the last Seminole War. Gettis tells a most interesting story of experiences as a young man one I shall relate.

In 1906 while in Key West, J. Edd Watson, known as the “Notorious Watson” of the Ten Thousand Islands, came to the city to recruit labor to make up his crop of sugar cane into syrup and the skimmings into moonshine whiskey.

Watson offered him a job. He replied, telling him he was a first class steam engineer. (His former experience firing a coffee pot sawmill.) The pay offered was good. Being large and much of a man, full of vim and with a craving for adventure and with much self-confidence, he accepted the challenge to match wits with Watson and took the job as chief engineer.

With a 45 Colt pistol and a cardboard suitcase, he and the other recruits went aboard the boat and headed for Watson’s island on Chatham River. Except for a few fishermen and some escapees of the law, the only settlement for miles was on Chokoloskee Island, 16 miles to the north.

On Watson’s Island built upon a shell mound, was a large two story house painted white, where Watson resided. There were also houses for laborers; a large shed for the steam boiler and steam engine; a steam-powered cane mill, a syrup house with a 250-gallon open kettle fired by buttonwood. Also on the inside of the kettle was a steam coil used as an auxiliary in the process of syrup making. There were ten acres of cane and one acre used for gardening.

The boiler was fired up and syrup making began. The skimming's were saved and made into moonshine whiskey. In three and one half months the job was completed. 10,000 gallons of syrup had been made, and much moonshine whiskey was stored away in quart fruit jars. The hardest season was over -- and payday. Those wishing to go to Ft. Myers were Cox, Waller, Walker and Freeman (the syrup maker.)

After spending the night on the boat, Watson went to the bank the next morning, got the money and paid them all off. Watson and Gettis who had worked hard with no questions asked won the admiration of Watson. When paid off he gave him a ten dollar bill extra, telling him to visit his people and then come back and work for him; that he would give him an attractive interest in the business. He never went back.

Gettis stated that from previous stories and hearsay he heard about Watson, in fairness to him he had never been better treated by an employer. However, four years later, in 1910, the tragic climax of murder on the island happened. A woman was found, who had been killed, with some iron boiler grates tied to her body, by some clam fishermen. They went immediately and reported it to the residents of Chokoloskee. A party was formed to investigate. They also found the bodies of two men who had been killed. The evidence seemed conclusive to them as to who was the killer.

Watson, at the time, had gone to Marco to have Capt. Collier do some work on his boat. He started home the following day, going by Chokoloskee to pick up his mail. He was met at the dock by the residents. He was asked to surrender his gun by McKinney, the storekeeper. His reply was shooting McKinney.

Almost instantly, a volley of bullets from the enraged islanders riddled his body killing him instantly, so ending the role in life of the mystic man of the Ten Thousand Islands. The only evidence left of this once famous farm and hideout is a large Poinciana tree marking the site of Watson's home. A tree of beauty; a sentinel of peace in the islands for almost a half century.

Albert DeVane

(This article is reprinted from *Bulletin Number Twenty Two*.
Sebring Historical Society, January 1977. Pages 671-674.)

Chapter Five

An Eye for an Eye & Violence

Although the Sebring Historical Society has the following story on tape in Mr. Skipper's voice, a perfect record was made by Mr. Nixon Smiley, a staff writer for the Miami Herald, where it appeared on September 6, 1965. Here is a copy of the article...

JUSTICE WAS "EYE FOR AN EYE" DURING FLORIDA'S EARLY DAYS

Crewsville - "Sure: the recollection of Nelson Lockler's shooting has stuck in my memory, even though it did happen three-quarters of a century ago."

C. A. Skipper, a 79 year-old cattleman who lives on State Road 66 near this Hardee County community, was calling up to memory a slaying and a lynching that took place in the 1880's.

"I remember the Lockler killing so well," Skipper added, "because it illustrates how justice was meted out in Florida during those frontier days after the end of the third Seminole war."

"Naturally, I didn't see either the shooting or the lynching. I may have been only two or three years old. But it was a much-talked about thing when I was a boy, and for a long time afterward."

Skipper, born and raised in this cattleman's country southwest of Sebring, knew the pioneer families for miles around. He knew the Crews family for whom Crewsville was named. He knew Harvey and Irwin Lockler, brothers of the slain man.

"Nelson Lockler lived at Charlie Apopka, a fellow named Durfey, had some words.. No, I don't remember Durfey's first name and I don't even remember what the argument was about. But Durfey evidently got to thinking and decided to have it out with Lockler. So he loaded his gun and went to Lockler's home. Lockler came out and Durfey leaned his gun against the house while they talked.

"Well, the talk turned into an argument and Lockler switched out a knife and made for Durfey. Durfey ran, with Lockler chasing him. Durfey cut around the house, grabbing his gun in passing. He cocked the trigger, then turned and fired point-blank, killing him.

"Durfey must have realized that he was in for trouble. Both of Lockler's brothers would be out to avenge his death. It was an eye for an eye in those days. So Durfey headed across the prairie, with the idea of fleeing the country.

"A posse led by Dempsey Crews took after Durfey and caught him in the prairie near Sweetwater (Sweetwater's not on the map anymore) just south of Crewsville. Durfey had managed to get no farther than six or eight miles from Lockler's house.

“Crews put one end of a rope around Durfey’s neck and the other end to his saddle horn. He made Durfey trot all the way to Crewsville, where they chained him to a tree and set a guard over him.

“They wanted my father to help guard Durfey, but somebody warned him against it. ‘Don’t get mixed up with it’ my father was told. ‘We’re going to fill Durfey full of holes.’

“But somebody got Jack Scarborough to stand guard - until later that day a bunch rode up on horseback - all of them armed. ‘Look out Jack,’ Charlie Crews shouted at Scarborough, ‘they’re going to start shooting.’ Scarborough ran and got out of range just as the shooting started. Every man in the bunch emptied his rifle. Durfey was riddled with holes.”

Skipper stood up. “I got to go,” he added. “Lots of work to do.”

“One minute, please,” I asked. “There’s something I don’t understand. Lockler took after Durfey with a knife. Didn’t Durfey shoot Lockler in self-defense?”

“Maybe he did,” Skipper said. “But Durfey went to Lockler’s house looking for trouble. Furthermore, Lockler had a lot of friends. And that made a lot of difference then, just as it does now.”

Skipper put on his hat.

“Come back to see me again,” he said. “I’ll tell you some more stories about life on the Florida frontier.”

While this type of action may seem unnecessarily harsh, it must be considered that courts, lawyers and peace officers were almost nonexistent. This fact, in itself would have been ample justification for the practice of homespun justice. But it was probably not the primary reason why the pioneers took stern measures to ensure prompt and positive control.

The underlying motive behind local group action in enforcing homemade codes, was to protect the results of months of backbreaking work necessary to set up their ranches and businesses. This was rough country, settled by rough characters. Proof is readily available that several of the more prominent land and cattle barons had fled the law in their former homes. Many of the men working for them, having been professional army men, held life very cheap and, in some cases, were hired for this reason.

(This article is reprinted from *Bulletin Number Five*.
Sebring Historical Society, April 1970. Pages 184-186.)

Violence

Sebring's first sixty years have been remarkably free from any great number of major crimes but some of the few that were committed were of such a bizarre nature that they made front page news stories around the nation and even the pages of police story magazines.

One very unusual "racket" had its beginning in Sebring and, over a period of several years, was operated successfully by two people at many widely separated points over the United States.

The first incident took place at the Sebring office of the telegraph company where a young lady, employed in this office, teamed up with a young lineman of the same firm. It was later learned that he had tapped the telegraph lines entering the city and had sent a fake money order which the lady cashed and pocketed. Even though the company investigated thoroughly, there was no evidence to connect the incident to either of the culprits as the office clerk told that she had received the wire, delivered it to the person to whom it was addressed and later cashed it, stating that the recipient had produced satisfactory identification.

The affair went off so smoothly that, after waiting a reasonable period of time, the couple visited a town several hundred miles distant where she registered in at a hotel, disguised as a rather elderly lady. Her partner climbed a pole some miles from the city and sent another fake money order which was delivered to her and which she cashed. The couple immediately vanished.

This modus operandi was successfully repeated many times before the pair was caught and convicted. They received national publicity but never returned to Sebring.

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On a lazy afternoon in April 1930, a call sent police, firemen and ambulances to a home at Kenilworth Drive and Rainbow Avenue.

The first to enter the house were met by a neighbor who was helping a man wash blood-stains from a shirt, at the kitchen sink. She directed the, police to a bedroom where a woman and her two year old son had been killed by a man wielding a hatchet wrapped in a sock. A younger baby lay asleep in a playpen.

To reach the bedroom, the visitors had to step over the body of a young colored man who lay in the doorway. He had a small caliber bullet hole in the exact center of his forehead and it was noted that a couple strings of cheap jewelry hung from his pocket.

A coroner's jury was quickly assembled and, to them, the husband told a sad story. He had been taking an afternoon nap in one bed room while his wife and children slept in another. He had left the colored boy washing the noon meal dishes. When awakened by his

wife's screams, the husband dashed to the room where he saw the boy attacking his wife with the hatchet so he went back to his bedroom to get his pistol with which he shot the boy as the latter tried to escape.

The sympathetic coroner's jury quickly returned a verdict of justifiable homicide, but some of them had other thoughts after they took time to remember some of the facts which they saw. Questions came to their minds. Although there was much blood splattered on the wall and ceiling, why was there no blood on the colored boy? How did the blood get on the back of the husband's shirt even allowing for his anxiety to rush to the aid of his stricken wife? Why would the Negro boy try to escape by an interior door when he was thoroughly familiar with the fact that there was a door in the bedroom that led to the outside? And, what man, seeing his wife and child being bludgeoned to death, would take time to leave the scene to get a gun instead of jumping at once, to her defense, especially when the husband was a much larger man?

The jury reconvened, reversed its verdict and the husband was arrested. So, the famous Carver murder trial began.

William Raymond Carver retained W. D. Bell of Arcadia who, at that time, was the leading criminal defense lawyer in Central Florida. Little time was lost in bringing the case to trial for, on May 12, 1930 (scarcely more than a month after the murders) the trial started on one of the three first degree indictments. On May 21st, the jury brought in a verdict of guilty with a recommendation of mercy.

Judge Bell promptly filed for a retrial on the grounds that there was such an air of hostility in Sebring that his client could not get a fair trial. (Sixteen other counts were cited.) Really, there was a very pronounced air of hostility and many rumors. It was brought out in the trial that Carver was the beneficiary of a \$ 10,000 life insurance policy which carried double indemnity for accidental death and rumor had it that a former wife, also insured for \$10,000 and doubled indemnity, had died in a boating accident to which there were no witnesses.

As may be imagined, the courtroom was filled to capacity at each session and, because there were rumors that violence would follow a "not guilty" verdict, armed guards were posted in the courtroom and around the building. Even the fire department was alerted to lay large hose lines which could be used to dampen the ardor of a crowd if it got out of hand. But none of the precautions were needed.

Carver was remanded to prison to await sentencing and a review by the Supreme Court which, a year later (May 1931) ordered a rehearing and in November of 1931, granted a new trial with a change of venue, on the grounds of insufficient evidence to convict.

The second trial was all to the advantage of the defendant with the change of venue as the most important piece of strategy. The trial was moved to Arcadia where attorney Bell

was held in the highest esteem as attested by the fact that he was, at times, elected to the state senate and to a judgeship. The prosecution's case was further damaged by the death of two of its most important witnesses, in the interim between trials. Hence, when a verdict of "not guilty" was returned by the jury in March of 1932, after less than a week of testimony, few people were surprised.

The end of the trial was not the end of the rumors, however. The most widely circulated and the most persistent was that Mr. Bell charged a fee of \$ 25,000 and that he had to sue Mr. Carver to collect it.

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The collapse of the Florida boom and the subsequent failure of many banks and the stock market, may not have been the cause of the rash of criminal acts designed for profit but these disasters certainly didn't discourage crime. One of the more popular ways of making a dishonest dollar in the early 1930's, was to "sell out to the Yankees." This was a synonym commonly used to describe arson because all fire insurance companies were northern firms.

By strange coincidence, just an hour before the Carver murders took place, the Grand Jury returned a true bill indicting Dan Ranahan for attempting to burn his home to collect insurance. And, a year and a half later, the same edition of the local newspaper that told of the action of the Supreme Court granting a new trial for Carver, had one headline on the front page telling of another arson attempt in Sebring and an account of a bank holdup in Lake Placid.

Be it said that over a period of about eight years of this depressed era, only one of the five suspected arson cases in the Sebring area could be considered successful. The Lake Placid holdup too, was a dismal failure as both active participants received life sentences and one of them took a charge of buckshot in his shoulder. Justice was swift in this case. The attempt was made on September 30, 1932 and convictions were returned on November 10, 1932. All the money was recovered.

Everything considered, "crime for profit" in pre-depression days in Sebring, did not yield much profit. Even though he was acquitted in court, Carver spent far more on defense than he collected on insurance (if, in fact, he did). Ranahan posted a heavy bond which was entreated when he left town. Another arsonist was badly burned when gasoline splashed on his clothes and was ignited when he touched the match. Only one firebug collected insurance.

(This article is reprinted from *Bulletin Number Fourteen*.
Sebring Historical Society, July 1973. Pages 449-452.)



Original Fire Station. In use 1914 to 1921.



Second Fire Station, Built in 1921. Used until 1927.
Left to right: "Dutch" Kutz, Harry Kline, Allen Altvater, Eph Sidders

Chapter Six

Arson

In the few years immediately following the end of the Florida boom, it was clearly evident that the development of the efficient personnel and the modernization of the equipment, was to pay handsome dividends. Many people had overextended themselves in the purchase of property for which there was no resale and on which payments were coming due. All over the state there were many fires of mysterious origin the most of which strongly supported a suspicion of arson. These were generally referred to as “selling out to the Yankees”, as the insurance firms were principally northern businesses.

Several such fires “happened” in Sebring. The insurance companies sent their investigators but, in most cases, the fires were carefully planned so that there was not enough evidence to make a case. One instance of this type of fire occurred in the small hours of a very foggy morning. A home on the west shore of the lake, burned to the ground. The owner had been in the process of moving to another town and had already taken away his personal gear so “was not in town when the fire started.” However, according to his story, his most valuable possessions were still in the house (but the fire must have utterly consumed them) - He had “burned some trash in the fireplace and that must have caused the fire.”

No charges were filed in this case although there were strong suspicions of arson but, in a way, the event was a boon to the Sebring Fire Department because it brought to town, Mr. Edw. S. Davies, special investigator for the Underwriters. His specialty was examining fires of probable incendiary origin and he spent a great deal of time explaining to Sebring Firemen what a “fire bug” thinks, how he works and what to look for at every questionable fire.

He pointed out that the owner of the home that was so successfully burned, probably got his inspiration from a fire that occurred a few weeks earlier in Sebring (Highlands County) under somewhat similar circumstances but which had not been quite so successful. Mr. Davies also stressed the fact that it is important that the department officers should learn the true cause of EVERY fire as the repeated listing of “cause unknown” and “probably electric wiring” has a psychological effect on the mind of the potential fire bug. To the contrary, if he feels that firemen will not be satisfied with surface appearances but will probe deeply for the real cause, he will probably be afraid to take a chance.

Mr. Davies did not have long to wait to test how well the firemen had absorbed his teaching. The proof came in this manner;-

Mr. R was deeply in debt but his home and its contents were heavily insured. Picking a night when it was logical to assume that most of the people in town would be attending a special dance party, (to which he also took his family) he sneaked home and applied the match. By an exceptional stroke of fortune, the Chief left the dance early and smelled the

fire when he passed the house. Fresh from the classes of Mr. Davies, the Chief's suspicions were aroused because the window shades were tightly drawn across every window, upstairs and down.

Therefore he waited for the trucks to arrive and lay the lines before allowing anyone to enter the building. When the door was opened, the back-draft actually knocked down the first two men. On entering, the firemen found seven separate fires; 3 on the lower floor, 3 on the second floor and one in the attic. Streamers connected these locations; the beds had been soaked with kerosene and the curtains had been nailed across the windows to give the fire ample time to get a good start before it would normally be seen from the outside.

However, Mr. R had done his work too thoroughly and had failed to recognize the underlying principle that a fire must have oxygen. In his effort to delay detection, he had sealed the house too tightly and, after the initial flare up, the flames died down for the lack of supporting air. Given another few minutes, the heat would have broken a window and the fire would have gone up in one big, uncontrollable puff, but the breaks were with the firemen and the fire was held exactly as they found it. Photographs were made and later presented to a Grand Jury who brought in an indictment.

As a final result, Mr. R received no insurance, and, it was reported that he lost his home and grove when he put up his equity in making bail bond and subsequently leaving town to escape prosecution.

Luck again reacted in favor of the Firemen when they arrived at another fire in time to save all evidence that the owner had thrown gasoline into the attic but, in the process, had spilled some on his clothing and when he applied the match, his clothes also caught. After the fire, it was learned that he ran to the doctor's office to have his serious burns treated.

Following these two episodes, the Department was not plagued with this type of fire as were some other Florida cities. Naturally, Mr. Davies was highly pleased and took every possible opportunity to tell how proud he was of the Sebring Firemen. They, in turn, elected him as one of their first honorary members and, up to the time of his death, he attended all annual meetings and other special events.

(This article is reprinted from *The Story of the Sebring Firemen*.
Sebring Historical Society. Pages 27-31.)



Two views of the Ranahan fire, January 1930.





Billy Bow legs and Albert DeVane



Chapter Seven

Panthers

By Albert DeVane

As there has not been a panther story (or, as the pioneers called them, tigers or painters) I shall tell one I have known for 33 years, and which is a true story, having known the woman caught by the panther personally.

The story is the experience of Eli P. Whidden and his wife Lavenia. Eli was born near Tampa, in what was then Alachua County, in 1828, six years before the creation of Hillsboro County in 1834. Descendants on Alafia River say he was the son of Maxfield Whidden, Sr., whose wife was Sophie Crews. They moved from Lowndes County, Ga., prior to 1828. In 1849 Eli married Lavenia Platt, daughter of Peter Platt, who had a large plantation in the Hichipucksassa section, now known as the Midway Community, about five miles northeast of Plant City. His grandson still lives on a part of the old homestead.

After his marriage he moved to the southeastern part of Hillsboro County, in the vicinity of Forte Meade. Being a small cattleman and farmer, also doing some hunting and trapping for the market for a little cash to furnish the few necessities, and being of an adventurous spirit, he was always looking for greener pastures.

During the last Seminole War of 1856 to 1858 he served in Capt. F. M. Durrance's company, having scouted the area from Okeechobee's west side to the Caloosahatchee River, to the Baron River and back up to Fort Myers.

After the war when Billy Bowlegs and his party left Fort Myers May 4, 1858 aboard the steamer Gray Cloud for Arkansas, he returned home, still having the desire to move again farther south.

His next move was to what is now called Sweetwater Community, south of east of Wauchula on Oak Creek, having looked the area over while in the service. There he went with his ox team and family to start a new homestead out of the forest.

He built a temporary camp, splitting rails to fence in a small field and cow-pens. He cut the logs for his home, dragging them to the homestead, peeling them, having split out his cypress shingles, all being on the site.

At the next big church meeting the announcement was made for a log rolling at his place. The neighbors came from far and near. The house was erected, the women cooking a great feast, and he had a house - except for a floor. He began splitting and planing the logs for a puncheon floor, having only about one half of the space floored as the process was very slow, using only an ax, broadax and foot-adz for the shaping.

One day right afternoon, he was taking a nap in the house, his wife was at the spring washing. His daughter Laura, 12 years old, was washing the dishes on a table in the yard and her little baby brother Bob was playing under the table.

A panther came from the woods and caught the baby by the foot. Laura grabbed the child, tearing it away from the panther, which jumped on her. The screams of the child and her screams brought her father and mother and the two dogs, who attacked the panther, which then released her and ran under the puncheon floor.

Eli grabbed his gun to kill the panther but soon realized he might kill one or both of his dogs, which in those days were as valuable as any gun. He grabbed the foot-adz he had been using that morning, the dogs having cornered the panther under the floor. He raised a puncheon which had not been made fast and killed him with the foot-adz. The only panther ever known to be killed before or since with a foot-adz.

Laura and the baby were badly bitten and clawed by the panther, but soon recovered. She later married Billy Hair, an Indian fighter. I knew her personally. She died in 1923 at Hen Scratch, the place made famous by Steve Turnbull of the Miami Herald. She was buried in the Whidden Cemetery four miles south of Highlands Hammock State Park near Sebring in Highlands County.

One of her daughters, Ida, who married Henry Collier, now lives in Lake Placid, as do many of the grandchildren. John Keen, the oldest living resident of the City of Lakeland, confirms this story.

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The above story by Albert DeVane, Highlands County's most famous historian, needed no confirmation; it merely needed documenting, which he did most authentically. It has been related many, many times when pioneers gathered. Mr. DeVane wrote the article for the Tampa Tribune where it was printed as one of the many tales of historical interest in a weekly page edited by D. B. McKay, a former mayor of Tampa. The article appeared on February 13, 1955.

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Ches Skipper would tell the story of two Indian fighters who were on scouting patrol in the western section of what later became Highlands County. They began to run short of food but as they were trailing a band of Indians, they dared not fire their rifles even though game was plentiful.

They took cover when they heard a violent crashing through the brush. The racket was caused by a huge panther chasing a buck deer and his jump was made within a few yards of the men who waited until the cat had killed and started to skin his prey. Then they chased the panther away and replenished their rations with the deer carcass.

(This article is reprinted from *Bulletin Number Eight*.
Sebring Historical Society, April 1971. Pages 277-278.)

Chapter Eight

Park Trammell DeVane

Born:- September 11, 1912 - Plant City, Hillisborough County, Florida.

Father - George Albert DeVane, Sr.

Mother - Annie Margaret Wheeler DeVane

Attended School at Plant City and graduated in 1929.

Came to Highlands County in 1930 -married Alma Louise Morgan in 1933. They have four children. Resident of Sebring 40 years.

He is proud of his heritage. His ancestors were French Huguenots. Great-great-great grandfather came to America in 1715. His ancestors have been traced and documented back to 1635. His great-great-great grandfather and great-great *grandfather* were both prominent officers in the American revolution in North Carolina. His great grandfather was in the War of 1812 and his grandfather, Benjamin DeVane was with General Lee's army when it surrendered at Appomatox in 1865.

He is a charter member of the John DeVane Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution and served three years as its president.

He has been interested in history since childhood. He has done much research in Florida history and has done research at the National Archives and Library of Congress in Washington and has researched old records in many of the Southern States' capitols. He has searched old Army records, not because he is particularly interested in military history but because these records are the only documented records that exist of a particular area.

He has pinpointed almost every Indian War fort and traced every early road in South Florida, The Peace River Valley Historical Museum in Zolfo has on display a detailed map showing these forts and roads. His collection of artifacts found at fort sites is quite large. He has collected over 400 old army uniform buttons, some dating back to 1812.

He has worked with and exchanged information with many of Florida's great historians.

The late Father Jerome, St. Leo Abby

Dr. James Covington, University of Tampa

The late Col. D.B. McKay, Tampa

Dr. Carlton Tebtau, University of Miami

Dr. John Mahon, University of Florida.

His most rewarding endeavor was the facts that he and his brother were able to furnish the state pertaining to the Paynes Creek historical value. Due to their efforts the state has purchased this entire tract of land and plans are now underway for a state park.

September 5, 1974

Mr. Park DeVane
P. O. Box 1566
Sebring, Florida 33870

Dear Park;

I am sure you will be interested in knowing that the state historical and recreational people have recommended and the state has purchased the entire tract southeast of Bowling Green. I know that you and Mr. Albert were both interested in this project. No doubt the material you sent me was the deciding factor since it proved beyond a doubt all the pertinent facts.

You will never know how much I personally appreciate the part you had in it, nor how much the county as a whole appreciates it.

Be sure to stop by to see us the next time you are over this way.

Sincerely,
(S) Jack
Mabry (Jack) Carlton

(This article is reprinted from *Bulletin Number Twenty Two*.
Sebring Historical Society, January 1977. Pages 675-676.)

Chapter Nine

Senator Henry Murphy

by Allen C. Altvater

It was always a privilege to spend some time with Senator Henry Murphy. Of course, it is a well-known fact that he was very serious in his duties in the state senate and was the author of much important legislation including the never-to-be-forgotten “Murphy Act” which has been the solution of the perplexing problem of collecting taxes since the great depression in the 1930’s.

But the great joy was to observe how he handled difficult situations by the use of stories and anecdotes.

One example occurred during the campaign when Herbert Hoover was running for reelection on the republican ticket and a group of democrats had formed an organization which they called “Hoover Democrats” or “Democrats for Hoover.” At the meeting of “The Young Democrats of Highlands County” the Senator commented on the Hoover Democrats.

“Farmer Jones had made a deal with Farmer Smith for a pig and sent his man, Sam, to bring home the pig. Putting the pig in a potato sack, he headed for the Jones ranch but stopped for a cold drink and a chat with ‘the boys.’ But they decided to play a trick on Sam and replaced the pig with a puppy.

“Naturally, Farmer Jones was not happy when the puppy fell out of the sack so he sent Sam on the return trip but Sam just had to stop at the store and tell ‘the boys’ what had happened. Again the switch was made.

“When the pig fell out at the Smith ranch, Sam looked at it and said, ‘I don’t care if you are a pig or if you are a puppy but I want you to be the same thing every time I look at you.’”

At the same meeting of the Young Democrats, the senator warned them against making any suggestions that might lead to any thought or conclusion except the positive points that the speaker wanted to drive home. A case in point;-

“The mother of several children said, ‘I’m going into town and, while I’m gone, I don’t want any of your children putting beans up your noses.’

“ ‘Why mother, we would never think of anything like that.’

“ ‘Probably not but remember what I told you.’

“So she started off to town but, remembering some detail she had overlooked, she returned home to find every child with a bean in his nose.”

PLANKS AND PLATFORMS

The dictionary defines a “platform” and “a declaration of principle and policies adopted by a political party” and it describes a “plank” as “one of the separate articles in a platform of a party.”

Unfortunately, we Americans are such a trusting people that we are often “taken in” by aspirants for office who make extravagant promises in their efforts to gain votes. We are so aware of this failing that it has become a standard source of many jokes and, even though a successful candidate fails to make good his campaign promises, the public is prone to overlook this shortcoming. In fact, the public seems to forget the promises as quickly and completely as does the candidate.

A typical Henry Murphy handling of a situation took place in the 1930’s, the incumbent senator (Henry Murphy of Zolfo) representing the section of Florida which included Highlands County, found his bid for reelection opposed by the Honorable E. J. Etheredge who had served some years previously in the senate. .

They toured the campaign trail, often speaking from the same “stump” and in these instances, Etheredge spoke first as his name began with a letter which preceded Murphy’s in the alphabet. The debating atmosphere was invariably friendly and the speeches followed an almost set pattern so that each candidate almost knew beforehand what the other would probably say.

But, along toward the final days of the campaign, it began to appear that Murphy was gaining a slight edge. Without prior publicity, Etheredge brought out a completely new approach at a gathering in southern Highlands County. He stated that, so the voters might clearly know his attitude on various matters he had drafted a platform and, for half an hour, he explained his platform and all of the individual planks in it.

At last, came the time for Murphy’s turn. Although these may not be the exact words but they are the exact sense of his rebuttal

“I was born and reared,” he said, “near a small crossroad community west of Arcadia, and was pretty good size when my father took us to a big town to show us the sights. As we knew a church only as a very small frame structure, in the settlement, we were astounded when he took us past the huge brick Methodist Church and we were awestruck at the size of the city stores and the crowds going into them. We were be-addled when viewing the tremendous packing house and court house.

“Our tour ended at the railroad station and, as we passed the waiting train,

Dad carefully explained the functions of the various components; the engine which furnished the power; the baggage car which carried parcels and mail; the coaches where passengers sat quietly while traveling from one point to another, with scarcely any movement during the trip.

“Dad called our attention to the PLATFORM and explained that it was by way of the platform and the steps or planks of the platform, that passengers got on the coach and that, once they had gotten on, they seated themselves comfortably (sometimes even going to sleep) and then thought nothing more about the PLATFORM until it was time to take another ride.

“Dad emphasized the fact that, on the PLATFORM, in large letters, was a sign ‘WATCH YOUR STEP’.”

That ended Murphy’s oration for that meeting. A few weeks later he was reelected.

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Sebring Historical Society, January 1970. Pages 121-122.
And *Trivia*, October 1985. Pages 46-47.)

Chapter Ten

Congressman J. Hardin Peterson

by Allen C. Altvater

It has been my privilege to have met quite a few important and interesting people - some intimately, some friendly and some casually and some just in passing.

In all probability, my experiences in this direction have been no different from those of others. At first, I was awed or overwhelmed when I met a person of special note but Congressman J. Hardin Peterson cured this, in a great degree, by the application of the following prescription;

I had occasion to go to Washington in an attempt to get the Sebring Air Terminal designated as a "Port of Entry" to try to attract trade via air traffic with South America. One contact was to be with the Immigration Service. Congressman Peterson called that Bureau and set up an appointment with Frank Dow, a principal in that Service, for nine o'clock in the morning.

When Mr. Peterson arrived at the office the next day, I was there waiting but my heart sank when he told me that he had to be on the floor of the House that morning and could not go with me to meet Mr. Dow. I was almost panic-stricken and I suggested that we postpone the meeting but Mr. Peterson assured me that Mr. Dow would treat me just as cordially as he would if the congressman were there to introduce me, but I told him that I was "scared to death," as I had never met the head of a department of the government of the entire United States.

"Nonsense," he said. "Look at it this way. You walk into his office and there he sits behind a huge desk with not a paper on it; leaning back in his chair; his hands folded over a well-rounded abdomen; a jovial smile and a pleasant manner. He is eager to make a good impression on you.

"Now, you mentally close your eyes and imagine him at home, rushing around the house, trying to get ready for breakfast; his wife fussing with the children who are raising a racket and he trying to find the morning paper but getting no help from the rest of the family. Under these conditions, he will look like any other man that you know.

I went - alone - found everything just as described by Mr. Peterson - and met Mr. Dow who was “just like any other man I know.”

We talked for quite a while in a warm, friendly and unrestrained atmosphere on several subjects of mutual interest (except immigration). I regretted it when he ended the conversation by directing me to the office of a man who had been advised of my problems and who would give me some help. Mr. Dow smilingly told me to look for a sign over the door, down the hall, marked “Harry Cryme, Assistant to the Assistant Director.”

Mr. Cryme was also a very willing and cooperative bureaucrat with a great sense of humor. My lesson in meeting people in power was successful.

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There could be no finer teacher than Congressman Peterson. He had every desirable attribute for a man in politics or private life. When I first met him, he immediately commanded my respect. As I knew him better, a profound admiration developed and to this was soon added a genuine love for the man.

His prowess as a politician was definitely proven by the fact that, after he was first elected to Congress, he was only contested a couple times for as long as he chose to stay in Congress.

“Mr. Pete” as many of his friends knew him, had many qualities that insured his claim to his seat. One was his almost uncanny memory. If he met a person and learned his name and if they discussed even a trivial subject, even though they didn’t meet again for years, Mr. Pete would call the person by his first name and would recall the subject they had previously discussed.

I learned of this unbelievable quality soon after I came home from my stint in the Service. My friend called and asked if I would like to go with him the following day (which was a holiday) and act as his secretary. You may believe that I was on time to get him to the first date he had to fill at a well-attended affair at Winter Haven. The congressman was besieged by constituents who posed all manner of requests, most of which had reference to men in the Service or to material shortages and ration

restrictions. I stood behind him and, as best I could, took notes on the names and problems of the citizens.

We left Winter Haven in time to get to West Tampa for a lunch at which he was to speak. Here, again, the crowd had numberless questions and they also had Spanish names that I couldn't pronounce, much less spell, for my notes. But Mr. Pete called their names without hesitation and inquired about their relatives (which he would name) or their pets or businesses.

On to Oldsmar, later in the afternoon, where we met Senator Holland and, together, they participated in a ribbon-cutting ceremony and speeches to a good-sized audience. I made more notes.

After a late dinner in St. Petersburg, we finally went to the hotel where there were half a dozen men waiting for conferences and long winded conversations with their friend. By midnight I was certain that I would never want to be a member of Congress but Mr. Pete took it all very serenely as though that was the normal pattern of life and he seemed as fresh as he did in the morning.

To prove my value as a secretary, I produced my well-filled and voluminous note book and asked into what form I should put the items for his use. Here, he proved that he had two salient political qualities. First, diplomacy. He complimented me on their completeness and then very diplomatically (so as not to hurt my feelings) told me that he would not need my notes; that he could remember all the details of the day. This proved to be true and also the second qualification - an infallible memory.

Sometime later, I had an opportunity to ask the congressman whether his memory was a gift or the product of study and effort. He explained that it was the sum of both - one must have a natural gift and then he must develop it. But he modestly protested that, compared to his father's ability, he was a rank amateur. The father was a conductor on a freight train and he could walk the length of an ordinary train and go to the desk in the caboose and write down the numbers of the cars in their order in the train.

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As a political figure in Washington, he commanded and received undiluted admiration of all his colleagues. His philosophies of conduct in government differed

greatly from the general run in the Capitol City. He did not feature fiery speeches on the floor of the House nor did he court flamboyant publicity. While others were spending their time on foreign trips, he was visiting his congressional district which was quite large as compared to present day area. His standard greeting to a person he had not met before was, "Hello, I'm your congressman, Hardin Peterson. Is there anything I can do for you?"

In Washington, his buddies were men like Charles Bennett, Congressman from Jacksonville. We had dinner with him one night and later, Mr. Pete explained that Mr. Bennett's two canes and specially built car required no foot controls. It seems that, as a captain in the second World War, in the Pacific Islands, he contracted Polio which left him handicapped. He was awarded a generous disability allowance which he accepted and devoted entirely for purposes in the national interest.

I was in the congressman's office one day at lunch time when a couple with two children, from Florida, came in. Even though he had never seen these people before, he insisted on taking them to lunch. His secretary told me that this was standard practice.

But he wouldn't willingly receive similar favors. In fact, he had rigid rules against accepting anything of value under any pretext, including contributions to a "campaign fund." One of his office personnel once told me that Mr. Pete had found a legal source of sugar which was in short supply after the war which was critically needed by the maker of candy bars. The businessman was so delighted that he wanted to make a substantial contribution to Mr. Pete's campaign fund.

"No way," was the answer. "If you want to do something for me, put your next new office or factory in my district, when you expand your business."

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On another occasion, I was invited to take a trip to Washington and I accepted without hesitation. After he completed a Saturday morning parade appointment in Lakeland, we took off by automobile for Washington. While en route, he explained the nature of the trip, as congress was not in session and he said we would be away for less than a week.

For some years, Congressman Peterson had been the chairman of the House Public Lands Committee and, as such, was a strong power in the affairs of forming the governing body of the island of Guam, following the war. The newly formed regime was so appreciative of the efforts of Mr. Peterson in their behalf that their first action was to pass a resolution of thanks to him and to direct that a tree be taken from the “place of liberation” (the point where the American troops landed in the capture of the island from the Japanese) that it be taken to the home of Congressman Peterson and planted on his property as a perpetual token of their thankfulness. The president of the Guam Senate was assigned this duty.

We arrived in Washington on Sunday and Mr. Pete took care of some business on Monday morning and in the afternoon we met the man from Guam. He was short, rather heavy-set man - I guessed in his late 30’s or early 40’s. He had a most engaging smile and a warm disposition which was entirely the opposite of his name - Leon de Guerrero - which he said translated to “Lion Fighter.”

One Tuesday morning, we all four started for Lakeland - Mr. de Guerrero, Mr. Peterson, myself and the TREE. The tree became the focal point of the trip. When we went into a restaurant, the tree went with us. At night, it went into the hotel carried NOT by the bellboy but by its special envoy, the President of the Guam Senate. It was never out of his sight.

Later in the week, in a special ceremony in Lakeland, it was planted on the congressman’s lawn.

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The National Park Service was one of the bureaus which were under the Public Lands Committee of the House of Representatives and, at one time, Mr. Conrad Wirth was the Director of the NPS. As such, he became a very close friend of Congressman Peterson and, on one of his trips to Florida, he was a guest in the Peterson home in Lakeland. He spent the day and night of December 12th there and I was to pick him up on the morning of the 13th and bring him to Sebring where he had a speaking engagement at Harder Hall.

While we were all comfortably sitting on the wide veranda of the Peterson home and were leading the conversation toward the final farewells, Mr. Pete dropped

a bombshell. To Mr. Wirth, he said, “Connie, if you have any important legislation in mind, shape it up and be ready for its introduction as soon as congress convenes. This will be my last year in Washington.”

We were all stunned by the statement but, at that point, Miss Iris June Hart, Mr. Pete’s secretary, came out of the house and called him to the phone. After he left, Mr. Wirth asked Mrs. Peterson if he was serious and determined.

She replied, “He’d better be or else get a new family.” And, pointing to the citrus grove on the adjoining hillsides she continued, “When we first went to Washington, we owned all those groves - now, I believe we are down to about ten acres and I’m not sure we have clear title to that.”

The next was his last year as Congressman Peterson of the First Congressional District of Florida, of which he was so proud.

He was a truly remarkable man!



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Also found in *Sebring Air Terminal*, December 2005. Pages 75-80.)

YOU'RE AN OLD-TIMER IN SEBRING if you can remember when...

Every home in Sebring had a fence around it and another fence completely surrounded the town as a protection against wandering cows and hogs.

Many families had a pen of chickens in the back yard.

Winter visitors practiced saying “y’all,” trying to make it sound natural.

There were many backyard gardens with not only vegetables but also bushes of guavas and cassava.

There were very few dooryards that did not support a ponderosa lemon tree. One joker called them “Texas lemons.”

You could walk all the way around Lake Jackson on a white sand beach. There were no weeds in the lake and the water was so clear that you could see bottom at 12 to 15 feet.

All boats had inboard motors. Outboards were unknown until the 1920’s.

All tourists came by train and they were greeted at the station by a large segment of the town’s population.

All business houses closed on the afternoons when the baseball team played at home.

There was only one movie show a week - on Saturday night. The theatre could boast of only one projector so there was always a pause while the operator changed reels (one reel of comedy and the four reel “feature”). During these pauses a slide was flashed on the screen, “Just a moment please. The operator is having a fit.”

The police department consisted of one man and the only criminals were cows and hogs.

YOU'RE AN OLD-TIMER IN SEBRING

if you can remember when...

Dan Andrews was an artist on any musical instrument - piano, trumpet, banjo, etc. These and other talents and qualities made him an idol of all the ladies in town.

“Chufas” were nutty-tasting little underground tubers a little bigger than a pea, planted by farmers to fatten pigs but they found a ready market in replacing peanuts at ball games. They tasted good.

Those who were fortunate enough to have electric services, enjoyed them from 6:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.. At 10:45 the lights blinked and, if the party was not over, there was a mad rush for the kerosene lamps.

If you had a roast or pies to bake, you used the little portable sheet iron oven that could be put on the top of a two-burner oil stove.

The railroad station was at the end of North Commerce.

Traffic between Sebring and Wauchula was so heavy that when Smitty lost his rifle on a trip from Wauchula, he found it the next afternoon in the middle of the road where it had fallen off his car.

One of the Gearing boys (was it Herbert or Bill) had a lot on North Lakeview planted solidly in pineapples and on all four sides, signs, complete with skull and crossed bones, warned “These pineapples are poison.”

All the meat sold in Ben Pollard’s market was produced locally. When a beef was offered for sale to Ben, the hide, complete with the owner’s brand had to be checked by a designated county official. Swine carcasses were required to have the heads attached so that the official could check the owner’s identification marks in the ears.

Ice cream and cake “socials” were a popular method of raising money for church and civic projects. They were fun, too.

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Chapter Eleven

REX BEACH, SEBRING CITIZEN

Now it can be told, although during their lives, Mr. and Mrs. Rex Beach would not permit any information to even “leak” out regarding their many acts of charity and/or civic effort assistance.

When they first came to Sebring, they were merely winter tourists at one of the two luxury hotels. Their presence was noted in the local paper but created no stir inasmuch as it was no uncommon occasion for the hotels to host people of wealth or national prominence to spend the season here.

Evidently the Beaches liked the location for, after spending several winters at the hotel, they purchased a home and some farm property in the county and, in a very conservative way, became a very important part of the community. A few of the local citizens were accepted as close friends and it was a great privilege to be included in this circle although it was not a “snobbish” group. They often invited guests of no particular social standing or no financial stature, for an evening visit.

Mr. Beach enjoyed a game of poker and, although he was a man of ample means, the Saturday evening sessions were limited to five and ten cent bets and were usually restricted to orthodox stud and draw and to what was known as “pauper poker”. This meant that when a player had lost his two dollar stack of chips, he could stay in the game for free until he won a hand. Thus, he could lose no more than two dollars in an evening. And, when eleven o’clock sounded, the game stopped. No all night sessions. Those were pleasant, companionable evenings!

The household included “Mimi” and “Geeky” Shurtliff, relatives of Mrs. Beach. These were also lovable people. Geeky was taken into the hearts of the volunteer firemen and he spent most of his evenings at the fire house although he was too advanced in years to answer alarms so he was classified as an associate member. He wanted to be a part of the organization and to do his share in the projects of the department. As one instance of this desire, he volunteered to sell or collect tickets on the rides or shows at the Firemen’s County fair. Promptly, at the appointed times, the chauffeur-driven Beach limousine would stop at the fair entrance and drop off its passenger and then return hours later and wait for Geeky to finish his tour of duty. And Geeky always sold his allotment of tickets for minstrels, carnivals and other firemen’s fund-raising projects. Each Christmas and Easter, the Firemen received a substantial check from both Mr. and Mrs. Beach to “help their civic projects” and, upon the death of Geeky, they wanted to preserve the memory of his association with the Firemen which has been adequately accomplished by the presentation of a game table for the meeting room. This table has a most unique top with Geeky’s name inlaid.

Other relatives joined the Beach family in Sebring and they were influenced by Rex and Gretta to use their artistic talents to help in promoting worthy enterprises and contribute to the cultural development of the town. In the late 1920's and early 30's, the Hattons (who were close relatives of Mrs. Beach) organized the first of the "Little Theatre" movements.

While the Beaches were still living at Harder Hall, they were joined by Fred Stone who was a recognized star of the first magnitude on the stage and in movies. He had suffered a broken leg and, while recuperating in Sebring, he developed a dance routine publicized nationally as "the crutch dance" because he presented it while still on crutches. Later, on his periodic visits to Sebring, he appeared on several of the Firemen's annual minstrel shows as well as special benefit performances, giving his talents without cost. He had a wide range of showmanship abilities and, in addition to character parts for which he was nationally known, he was adept in the use of a twelve foot long "bull whip." He was a fair hand at knife throwing and had a bag of magic tricks. He was especially proud of his levitation act. Fred Stone could stage a full evening of variety features. He did just that on time when the Firemen needed funds to finance the - promotion of a State Fire College in Sebring.

(Television viewers of the 1960's and 70's will recognize the doctor in "Gun Smoke" who is a member of Fred Stone's family)

Sebring was visited several times by Fred Stone's three daughters who were billed nationally as the "Stepping Stones." They were a superlative dance team and (no doubt inspired by Mrs. Beach) took an intense interest in the Girl Scout movement in Sebring; then sparked by Sophy Mae Mitchell. The Stone sisters helped promote a drive and also contributed financially to a fund to build a Girl Scout home which has since borne the name "Stepping Stones" in their memory and honor.

Other important and renowned personages of worldwide prominence followed Rex Beach to Sebring. Among these was the famous movie star, Marjorie Rambeau, whose husband was a senator from North Carolina. She, too, aided in civic affairs to some degree (probably influenced by the Beaches.) Whenever a world traveler, a lecturer or other individual of interest visited the Beach household, they would give benefit appearances the proceeds from which would be given to some worthy cause.

On more than one occasion, Mr. Beach arranged with producers who made movies of his stories, to stage the world premiers in a Sebring theatre. This was both a financial and cultural boon.

It was but natural that the people who were associated in the same professions as the Beach family, would be interested in having winter homes in Sebring. The stage and screen celebrities were acquainted on Mrs. Beach's side but Courtney Riley Cooper (a good friend of Rex) had gained his fame by his writings, principally short stories of circus life and books on life in New York City. Although Mr. Cooper was not exposed to the public in Sebring, his wife was active in a way. They bought one of the better homes in town but Mrs.

Cooper interested herself in building several “model homes.”

Mr. Cooper and Mr. Beach were good friends and both had imagination and a sense of humor. Among Sebring folks of that era, Mr. Cooper is universally remembered by the fact that he installed several wooden ersatz fire plugs around his spacious lawn. He had several fine hunting dogs.

Robert Fox (Mr. Beach’s secretary) tells of an episode with which he helped. Mr. Cooper had installed on his lawn, one of those familiar hitching posts in the form of a stable boy. At a time when the Cooper family was away from home, Rex and Robert used a mattock to chop up the lawn around the hitching post so that it would appear that a horse had tethered there. To make the hoax more realistic, they placed some stable refuse at the scene. Mr. Cooper never solved the mystery.

Mr. and Mrs. Beach were both compassionate and generous. Not only did they give lavishly to civic projects; they also provided the necessities of life to many individuals and families in Sebring but these folks never knew the source of their windfalls. There were some who tried to impose on their generosity but there were secret ways of checking so they were seldom duped.

One project in which Mrs. Beach took a personal interest, was the construction of a market place for small vendors of garden produce. In the late 1920’s, the lot on the corner of the Circle and South Commerce was vacant so several of the homesteaders set up a market at which they sold produce several days each week. The fixtures consisted of orange crates and packing boxes and there was no shelter from either sun or rain. Recognizing the value of such a market and the need for suitable facilities, Mrs. Beach offered to pay for a building and the owner of the lot (Ed Hainz) gave his permission for its use, rent free. The building served for many years and, as this was the period of deep depression, it helped the gardeners make a living and made it possible for citizens to buy good, fresh vegetables at a reasonable figure.

The depression of the 1930’s plunged many folks into dire need. The story is told that some of Mr. Beach’s friends who had had ample money, were wiped out in the stock market crash and that they had been helped by Rex and Gretta. It is definitely known that, in Sebring, some people who could not find work, were fed until their fortunes were bettered. At times, the water and electric bills of from 20 to 30 families were paid secretly by Mr. Beach.

Many of the palm trees on the streets and dooryards of Sebring were grown on the Beach farm east of Avon Park and given by him, gratis.

He was probably attracted to the Highlands of Florida by the excellent facilities to indulge his favorite hobbies- hunting and fishing- at which he was an expert, He had a wonderful collection of hunting guns and dogs.

Since he was naturally modest and retiring, he avoided public appearances as much as possible and did not join any civic or fraternal organizations but he did lend his time, efforts and talents to organizing the group that was responsible for the establishment of Highlands Hammock, for which he has never received the recognition that is due him.

In 1929, he was joined by other men of means, to form the Tropical Florida Parks Association, of which he was named president. He wrote publicity items and the text for brochures and, by his executive ability, inspired the association in such a manner that others saw the possibilities of the area. Because they had confidence in him, they provided the money necessary for procuring and preserving the area. He even contributed a complete, autographed set of his books for the competition of selecting the accepted name for the park.

Among his writings, is his autobiography which is recommended as interesting literature but it does not mention any of his philanthropic activities nor does it give even a hint of the respect and love that his Sebring friends held for him and his family.

In June 1931, the Sebring Firemen were hosts to the Florida Fire College and, as they needed substantial funds for the project, Rex Beach and Fred Stone offered their services. Much local talent was employed in producing a variety show but, of course, Fred Stone was the feature attraction. Mr. Beach introduced him and his remarks in this connection formed a part of the evening's entertainment.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

This is the toughest spot on any bill and, as usual, the worst actor opens the show.

This entertainment is advertised a benefit for the Sebring Fire Department but, as a matter of fact, it is for you. Every dollar that goes to the firemen benefits you and me ten dollars worth. That's the kind of a Fire Department we have here. It is the most unique fire department I ever saw. It is more than a fire department: it is also a civic body and in some ways the most important and the most efficient in our city. It leads the way in every public spirited enterprise. If you have a new idea for the betterment of Sebring, take it round to the Fire-house. You'll get quick action!

Who built a splendid athletic field and dedicated it to the free use of the public? The firemen did most of that with their own hands. Who wears Sebring's baseball, basketball and diamondball uniforms? Most of the boys are firemen. Who made the first energetic move towards cleaning up and beautifying our city and who volunteered to plant and beautify a part of the road into Highlands Hammock? The Firemen! At the formal opening of that park they handled their share of the intricate details so that there wasn't a hitch. They led in the movement for fish and game conservation and for the protection of our county from forest fires.

If you want something done in Sebring, call the Fire Department. If your oil stove, or your Frigidaire or your husband won't work, call a fireman. If you quarrel with your girl friend, call a fireman and if she's good looking you'll have no more trouble with her. And girls! If you can't find a parking space, call a fireman. They know all the nice dark ones.

If Junior swallows a fish bone, don't yell for a doctor. These firemen will get up anything at a moment's notice. Take this show, for instance. Fred Stone has been out of work for several months and boarding with me. We're closing the house tomorrow and he had to get back to New York so he decided to put on this benefit. He was afraid it might flop so he called in the department and said, "Firemen, save my show." Did they respond? There are ten firemen, ten, count them, in his first number. And how those boys act! It's scandalous.

The other artists on this bill have also volunteered their services to help Fred out of town and get him into the theatrical profession. I hope you will be generous with your applause. Now a word about Fred- Some of you may not have met him and this account is taken from dependable sources but without his knowledge or consent. For your benefit I'll briefly sketch his career. He is a full blooded Seminole Indian. He was born in Hicoria, with a full beard, which he still wears, He learned to speak English when he was eighteen years old while attending the Crewsville College of Veterinary Surgery. He graduated with high honors due to his ability to utter bird songs and imitate the cries of wild animals.

He was full of pranks, like any wild Everglades child. I'll never forget one day he hid himself in the branches of an orange tree growing on the campus and imitated the love song of the Mediterranean Fruit Fly. He did it in such a lifelike manner that the good professors cut the tree down in order to keep him from spreading. Those were the happiest days of Fred's life. As punishment for this practical joke he was sprayed with Bordeaux mixture and sentenced to live for seven years in a cave. There he opened a day nursery and school of tattooing which gave him his start in the business world.

When the boom came along he moved to Palm Beach and went into the real estate business. He traded town lots for arrowheads and fish hooks, and did very well at it. Soon he had tons of arrowheads and hooks in every bank in town and was considered the richest Indian in Florida.

Then came the bank failures and in a single night he was wiped out. All he had to show for his industry was one rusty fish hook which was embedded in his left heel. With this he returned to the old family estate on Fish Eating Creek and began life anew.

One day while doing window shopping in Palmdale he dropped in at the principal theatre and heard his first grand opera. It was a turning point in his career. After hearing that singing he decided to become a dancer. Let's hope he makes good here tonight. His name isn't Fred Stone, at all, you know. He took that as a stage name after Dorothy and Paula Stone, my nieces. His real name is Elmer Upsalquitch, which in Seminole means Horace Short and Dirty. His courage and perseverance are proverbial. He is the only man in the world who learned to like cauliflower. Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce the famous Indian guide, harmonica player and wart doctor, Fred Stone. Let's give the young redskin a big hand.

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Rex Beach

Chapter Twelve

THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE CHARACTER I'VE MET

By Louis Nizer

Attorney, author of "What to Do with Germany,"

"Between You and We," and other books

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There were no doctors in Atwood, Mich., in 1877 when Rex Beach was born. His father, a farmer, merely got the scissors and a piece of string and proceeded to usher him into world. Almost from that moment until Rex's death 72 years later, his life was filled with excitement and achievement.

He was one of the most versatile men of his generation. He won two Olympic medals for swimming, was captain of his college baseball team, he was a football and water-polo star on the Chicago Athletic Association teams. In later life he played golf in the low 70's, and was an expert fisherman and a big-game hunter.

In business he excelled as a scientific farmer, a large-scale grower of gladioli and Easter lilies, and a cattleman.

Above all, of course, he was a writer. He wrote 33 novels, hundreds of articles and short stories, and two successful plays.

This versatility came to him easily. He seemed slow, relaxed and lazy. He said about his writing. "I am slower than a turtle with corns." In spite of his virtuosity and tremendous success, he was always completely modest and unassuming.

He stood out in any company. He was six feet three, with an athletic, 240-pound body. His broken nose (from his Alaska gold-digging days) and his square jaw and twinkling eyes helped make him conspicuous. He had the qualities of an elephant's trunk: so powerful it can uproot a tree and so sensitive it can select and pluck a blade of grass.

Never, throughout the many years I knew him, did his inexhaustible fund of knowledge and exciting reminiscences fail to fascinate me, as they did all his hearers. He was a charming talker, and his conversation was liberally punctuated by picturesque phrases. "I seldom get a cold, but when I do it lasts as long as a wristwatch," he remarked.

Few ever learned of his accomplishments from him. Even his autobiography gives almost no intimate information about himself. When he did mention an exploit, it was disguised in humor. He described a grueling experience while gold mining on the seashore at Nome: "My hired men shrank from getting wet and shrieked like Vassar girls when the cold surf engulfed them, so for weeks I battled with it practically single-handed. Constant immersion turned me blue; I took on the coloring of a tuna and got so I darted at schools of bait."

Of gold miners in inland Alaska he wrote: "We ate heartily of baking- powder bread, underdone beans and fat pork. No sooner were these victuals down than they went to war on us. The real call of the wild was not the howl of the timber wolf, the maniac laughter of the Arctic loon or the mating cry of the moose: it was the dyspeptic belch of a miner."

Florida became Rex's adopted state early in life. One night, after being outdoors for 18 hours in below-zero weather, Rex's father vowed that he would seek a warmer climate. Rex's mother decided that she liked the color of Florida on the map, so they went to Tampa. Rex's father fenced a tract, built a small house, and they became squatters under the Homestead Act.

Rex, his two older brothers and his parents somehow survived the backbreaking farmwork, and by the time Rex was 14 the family was able to send him to the prep department of Rollins College at Winter Park, Fla. He earned his tuition by running a laundry. Each month his father sent him a check for \$3 as spending money. In his will, Rex left \$ 100,000 to Rollins College and \$ 50,000 to Notre Dame College in Wilcox, Saskatchewan, Canada, to be used as student-loan funds.

Rex left Rollins College one year before graduation because he wanted to study Blackstone in Chicago. He later related his brief experience with the practice of law: "One of the first things I discovered was that all plaintiffs in personal injury suits smell like wet St. Bernards. When such a party of the first part and/or his witness in said complaint were confined with me in a closed room, sinus trouble became a blessing.

Rex worried about how to earn his living while going to school. By chance he learned about the Chicago Athletic Association, he wrote later: "The club supported a football team composed of former college stars, offering them, under guise of athletic membership, a postgraduate course in legalized mayhem. The club kept a training table where it flung meat to its pack, and at the news my mouth watered. Somehow I procured a letter of introduction to the captain of the team.

"Where have you played football?" he inquired.

"Football was not played in Florida at that time and I had never seen a game, but I answered, 'In the South.'

"What position did you play?"

"Not knowing one from another except by hearsay, I confessed to having played all positions. The captain looked stupefied. He suggested that I take a dip in the club pool. Luckily, I could swim well and do fancy diving. So he said he would try me out."

For a season Rex played football while he studied law, then he became a star in water polo. The following summer - 1897 - news of the gold discovery in the Yukon threw the country into a fever. Borrowing money from his brothers, Rex bought a sleeping bag, rifle and mandolin and joined the rush.

Of his experiences he wrote: "For three years I worked for myself and other people, stampeding to the scene of new discoveries, prospecting here and there and turning my hand to anything that offered. Once I helped, write a playlet for a Nome variety theater. I could sing and dance in a crude way so I wrote some sketches and played in them."

Those were colorful years, full of adventure and fun. On his return to Chicago at the age of 24, Rex decided not to follow the law. He began to write. McClure's Magazine bought his stories and the editor suggested that Rex write a novel.

He wrote *The Spoilers*, an exciting story of adventure in the gold-strike days. He was paid \$ 5,000 for the serial rights; the book became a best-seller in 1906, ultimately reaching 700,000 copies. Rex later turned the novel into a play. Another novel; *The Ne'er Do Well*, also became a stage triumph.

The movies were just beginning to be important. William N. Selig wanted to make a photoplay of *The Spoilers*. Rex astutely refused to sell outright, but demanded a royalty of 25 percent of the gross receipts. Later the picture was remade seven times - probably a world's record. Another producer took Rex's second novel, *The Barrier*, at an unprecedented 40 percent.

Rex now organized a company and wrote and produced his own pictures. He negotiated an arrangement whereby Goldwyn Pictures financed and distributed his productions, paying him 50 percent of the net profit.

Fourteen of Rex's novels and 16 original scenarios were made into successful movies. He was the first to establish the value of authors' names in pictures and to demand screen credit for them. At the age of 71 he received \$ 100,000 for the movie rights to his last novel, the highest price ever paid by a motion picture company for an unpublished manuscript.

Everything about Rex's life was unusual. He even met and married his wife in an unusual way. Blonde, vivacious Edith Greta Crater was the daughter of a prosperous insurance man in Denver. She and her sister Allene (who later married Fred Stone, the dancer and comedian), stirred by the stories of the North, went to Nome with a party of friends. The country fascinated Greta and she decided to stay.

She bought a small hotel and ran it. It was there that Rex met her. They were married in New York in 1907, just after Rex finished *The Barrier*. They became dependent upon each other in a love-friendship relationship which ended only with her death in 1947.

When Rex had conquered the film frontier he went on a hunting trip to Alaska with his brother-in-law, Fred Stone. A guide took them to an uninhabited island which was crawling with giant Alaska brown bears. One of them woofed in Rex's face and, as he remarked later, "sprayed me as if I needed ironing." He was an intrepid hunter and had a wonderful time.

In middle age he had an impulse to go back to the soil. "Instead of strangling that impulse," he said, "I allowed it to grow and become more malignant." He ended by buying 7,000 acres of land near Sebring, Fla.

It soon became evident that farming was not the simple occupation it had been when he was a boy. "Science," he said, "had conjured into being a bewildering horde of plant pests which could be controlled only by gassing and guessing, spraying and praying." For a time he had to dedicate the proceeds from his books to the support of seed houses, fertilizer firms and makers of motorized equipment. But Rex was soon out of the red. Apart from his writings, he ultimately made more than a million dollars in his various business ventures.

Growing Easter lilies and gladioli commercially was then unknown in Florida but Rex learned new techniques and developed a big industry. In one season he sold \$200,000 worth of lily bulbs. As he gained in experience he bought 2,000 acres at Avon Park and operated one farm for the midwinter and one for the spring crop.

"Strange, isn't it," he asked, "that one should pick up the very occupation he hated as a kid? My wife loves flowers and I often bring home so many glads and lilies that I look like an open grave."

Having demonstrated what could be done with flowers, Rex sold the farms to his superintendents and looked for new challenges. He turned to cattle. He pioneered in growing pasture grasses and clover on sandy land, and with the addition of the minerals which Florida soil lacks. He eradicated ticks. Thus he was a leader among the pioneers who founded Florida's enormous cattle industry.

Rex was democratic to the core. His servants and assistants were treated as companions in a common effort. He was a profound individualist, and believed that the lazy and incompetent were entitled to no subsidies. "God gives every bird its food," he once said, "but He doesn't throw it into the nest." He quoted Emerson: "The best lightning rod for your protection is your own spine." He thought charity ought to stem from the giver's good heart and not from the receiver's claim that he had been unjustly treated by fate or society.

"Life isn't easy or painless." He once said. "That's what makes it a swell adventure. If you remove competition and deny man the rewards of his individual efforts, you reduce life to a monotonous ordeal out of which nobody can take pride, pleasure or profit." He detested socialism because it destroys freedom. He liked to tell of the mother mockingbird who, finding her young in a cage, would sometimes bring it poison berries, for it was better to die than live in captivity. He was profoundly religious and sincerely attempted to LIVE his religious precepts.

Toward the end, Rex found himself gradually descending to helplessness. He was going blind, despite four cataract operations. Soon he could recognize people only by their voices.

Now cancer invaded his throat. For two years he had to breathe through a tube inserted in his larynx, and was fed through a tube inserted in his stomach. He could not turn his neck, or bend, or speak. Still he valiantly finished four fifths of his last novel, *The Woman in Ambush*.

He was, of course, constantly tormented by pain. To ease his agony the doctors tried nerve-block surgery. He wrote, "I never had anything hurt so and I've done some big hurtin' off and on. The best I can say for a 'nerve block' is that it's awful while it's going on and is about as uncomfortable as the original pain after it's done."

Special injections were tried - the last hope. When they failed, he calmly determined to end his life. In his case it was not an act of weakness; he was seizing the helm when the ship was dashing on the rocks. He had almost choked to death several times on his breathing tube. If he was to die soon, as he knew he must, then he would decide the hour, and triumph at least in being master of the end. On the morning of December 7, 1949, Rex shot himself.

Rollins College buried his ashes, together with his wife's, on the campus. Atop a white marble column, his bust - inscribed to the "Victor Hugo of the North" - will be enshrined to remind us of man who displayed in his strong character and modest manner the virtues of a great American.

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Chapter Thirteen

FOOTBALL

The notable score of 9 wins and 2 losses for the Sebring High School Blue Streaks football team led one enthusiastic booster to observe that 1937 was one of the most successful seasons in the history of the game in Sebring. This remark sparked a search of previous school team records and revealed the fact that 1937 was probably the banner year. That year, the squad was invincible in regular season play and, had they been content with the conference schedule, they would have finished with a perfect record.

Reference to the newspaper files gives a very clear picture of the prowess of the 1937 team. After each of the games, the results were proclaimed in headlines on the front page with full columns and spilling over in other pages with complete play-by-play accounts. They were so graphically recounted that little was left to the imagination.

The first string players were:

John Freeland	Amos Freeland	Junior Bates	Milton Parnell
Lamar Hancock	Leonard Cholette	Judson Twitty	Malcolm Watters
Frank Pollard	Eddie Albritton	Howard McDonald	Ike Hart
Lewis Butler	Paul Thomas	Fred Pollard	William Young
Bob Bever			

A recap of the scores show:

Sebring 20, Arcadia 6; Sebring 7, Ft. Pierce 7; Sebring 6, Mulberry 0;
Sebring 6, Brewster 0; Sebring 6, Lake Wales 0; Sebring 32, Frostproof 7;
Sebring 12, Avon Park 0. Season totals: Sebring 89, Opponents 20.

Fired up with their successes, the team took on a post season game with Plant City - a member of the then "big ten." Sebring went down to defeat 21 to 6.

Practically all of the members of this remarkable team graduated in June of 1938 and only a very few of the "stars" carried over into the 1938 season. Contrast with 1937 can be described only by use of superlatives. Of the seven games played in 1938, none were shown in the *win* column. In fact only two touchdowns were put on the score board (both by Clarence Campbell - an end) one in a game with Frostproof in a 7 to 6 loss and the other in a 38 to 6 contest with Lake Wales.

Most disappointing was the loss to Avon Park in the annual feature with these arch-rivals, 18 to 0.

Statistics for the 1938 season are available only from the memories of the players of that year because, aside from the preseason article in the newspaper, announcing the year's schedule and the roster of prospective players, not a single word appeared giving results or accounts of the games.

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Main Street of Moore Haven after the flood had receded following the September 1926 Hurricane



Railroad tracks to Moore Haven after the September 1926 Hurricane

Chapter Fourteen

SEPTEMBER 18th 1926

Hurricane season and September in particular, always calls up recollections of the greatest disaster of nature in the history of Florida. Even now, almost a half-century later, newspapers continue to carry feature articles on the subject. It was on the 18th of September 1926 that a killer hurricane struck Moore Haven.

It might occur to some to wonder why Sebring should make the story of a Moore Haven disaster a part of Sebring historical records. The answer is very simple. Sebring sent in the first relief crew. The surviving victims of the storm were evacuated to Sebring and the bodies of some who lost their lives there were sent to Sebring for burial. And the headquarters for national relief and assistance for Moore Haven citizens was set up in Sebring. For many years, Sebring was the haven to which residents of the Okeechobee and Everglades areas hurried for refuge every time a hurricane was imminent.

In September 1928, an equally ferocious hurricane struck the Okeechobee area but that year, it unleashed its fury on the east and south shores of the lake, killing many and causing great property damage. But 1928 is another story and is adequately documented by the great Florida historian, Lawrence E. Will, in his book "Okeechobee Hurricane and the Hoover Dike." Here, again, Sebring sent in relief crews and provided space in its municipal cemetery for victims.

The last great exodus to Sebring in the expectation of a hurricane was in 1949 when fifteen boxcar loads of people were brought out of the Glades area. Most of them were housed in buildings on the airport for several days and were catered by volunteers from Sebring.

The government has built great protective earth dikes around Lake Okeechobee and these have practically eliminated all hazards of wind tides and drowning in the area but a few people still spend a few days in Sebring motels when hurricanes are forecast and almost every square foot of hangar space on the Sebring airport is reserved in advance for shelter of planes from the south end of the state in event of hurricane prediction.

The hurricanes which have struck Florida have a very definite place in the history of Sebring!

There are many accounts of the tragic events at Moore Haven during the hurricane of 18 September 1926, one of most accurate of which is found in the excellent book by the Drs. Alfred and Kathryn Hanna, "Lake Okeechobee." This, very graphically, outlines the story in a few paragraphs - "In September, a man-sized hurricane struck the lower east coast of Florida. After it had knocked Miami aside, it streaked across the Everglades in a northwesterly direction, 'Whipped up the waters of Okeechobee over the mud dikes, which

crumbled easily and, on September 18th, deposited its swirling tide in the lap of Moore Haven. Between three and four hundred people were killed or injured; the town was completely ruined. The entire country was shocked and stunned - - -.

“Quarreling broke out also over the relief program. The Red Cross immediately moved into action in the whole storm-swept region - - -.

“Meanwhile the people of Moore Haven suffered. Some 1,200 refugees were moved away from the floods. Fully 800 were sent to Sebring, 200 to Lakeport, and 200 to Okeechobee City. When Howard Sharp, who knew nearly everyone in Moore Haven, inspected it on October 2, he called it a “town without a soul”; he was speaking literally. The militia and relief workers were in possession. Those permitted to enter waited outside the flood areas to be carried in military trucks which stood high enough off the ground to pass through the water without drowning their engines. Three weeks after the hurricane, water stood two to three feet deep in Moore Haven streets, cluttered with such debris as a baby’s chair partly broken, a patchwork quilt, a kitchen stove, a trunk and a piece of roof. As soon as possible, fifty citizens a day were brought into town to find their belongings. After the railroad track was repaired more were admitted, but even yet everyone was taken out at night. The hotel righted itself in a short time - about four weeks; after that those who could get accommodations in it were allowed to remain overnight. Relief was handicapped by the slowness with which water receded from the lowlands around Moore Haven and also by another storm on October 30 which disrupted relief work even if it cost no loss of life.”

This description is so accurate that it could be imagined that the Drs. Hanna had been on the scene at the time. There are some details of those days of horror that still remain fresh in the memories of those who lived through them.

Two men in a battered car brought the first news of the hurricane to Sebring just after dark on Saturday night. Mr. George E. Sebring immediately took charge of the situation in Sebring and called a conference with the chiefs of police and fire departments. The refugees told of their difficulties in negotiating the tree-clogged, washed-out roads so it was evident that a relief team could not get through by the highway. Mr. Sebring arranged with the Atlantic Coast Line for a two-car train while Police chief Tom Worley and a contingent of volunteer firemen rounded up every row boat and outboard motor that could be located.

Other groups of firemen collected relief supplies, first aid equipment and personnel. All these were loaded aboard the train which started south shortly before midnight. Progress was slow as it was often necessary to stop to remove debris from the right-of-way and to inspect bridges for safety. By daybreak, the party had reached Palmdale and an impassable washout. Here, the supplies and boats were transferred to small flat cars and “power tops” which were propelled by gasoline engines.

The railroad right-of-way, being the highest terrain, was well populated by all kinds of wildlife from snakes to deer, none of which made too much effort to leave it to make way for the cars. As the relief crew neared Moore Haven the results of the storm were more evident. At one point, the roadbed was washed away for more than 50 yards but the track held together by cross-ties, was like a suspension bridge which swayed recklessly under the cars. Great islands of hyacinths were banked against road fills and bridge abutments and they provided a place for small animals to keep their heads above the water that covered all the land for a dozen miles north of Moore Haven.

Within six miles before reaching the town, it was necessary to abandon the cars and take to the boats. A couple of miles further, the cars of a freight train were passed. They had been blown and washed a hundred yards from where the tracks had been. It was a grotesque sight to see the big steel gondolas and boxcars that far from the place where they should have been.

The members of the expedition had been selected with the idea of having a head for each of the functions that might be encountered, with the thought that more personnel would be following as quickly as transportation could be arranged. None of the party had had any previous experience in this type of emergency so there could not be any preconceived plan of action but at a hasty council it was determined that every human must be evacuated as quickly as possible. Few objections were encountered on the part of the Moore Haven citizens. The streets were the highest spots in town and these were knee deep in water. Only the two-story buildings afforded any place to cook or sleep. The homes of most of the residents had been destroyed and many of them had seen their relatives swept away and drowned.

A concentration point was established from which boats were loaded and to which all residents were directed so that they could rejoin friends and relatives. Sebring policeman, "Red" Cleaver, and several others started the roundup of all people in town and around the outlying areas. Dr. J. W. Mitchell set up operations and ministered to those who needed his services. He was kept busy as there were many injured. Although he was present at only two cases, seven children were born during the emergency, one of which was reported to have arrived on the roof of a house that had been swept off its foundations.

Mike Kahn, one of Sebring's leading merchants, was designated as supply officer. He contacted such Moore Haven merchants as remained and arranged for material and noted the party's needs that could not be supplied locally. Then, he arranged to have them sent from Sebring. He was one of the most valuable men in the party as most of the merchandise in town was rendered unfit for use, by the storm. Strangely enough, shoes were an item in very short supply but the most needed item was water. An effort was made to boil enough but the demand was too great and the only water available was that which covered the entire countryside. Mike unearthed a five gallon jug of moonshine whiskey which was so foul tasting that there was no danger of anyone using it for a purpose other

than to kill what germs may have been in the drinking water.

It was nothing short of miraculous how smoothly the operation got underway and how the populace was moved out. They were loaded into boats and moved on a canal on the west side of the railroad fill for a couple of miles but there it was necessary for them to disembark and cross the fill to other boats that took them north for another couple miles to a point where the work cars took them to the waiting trains. Some of the more hardy walked the last remaining miles to relieve the burden on the small cars.

The first train to go south on Saturday night consisted of a locomotive, two boxcars and a caboose. It carried such supplies as could be assembled quickly and a cadre composed of J. W. Mitchell, M.D., Mike Kahn, H. G. Eastwood, Glen Skipper, Ernest Roberts, Jack Cleaver, N. N. Vann, O. C. White, George Wyandt and Allen Altvater. But more equipment and personnel, were vitally needed and, at the Sebring end, these supplies were gathered and forwarded.

E. J. Durkin tells of this operation which he organized very efficiently on Sunday - "At about four o'clock on Sunday morning I was awakened by a pounding on my door. It proved to be news that a courier had gotten through from Moore Haven with the news that the little city had been wiped out.

"I was president of the Chamber of Commerce at the time, so they looked to me to do something about sending relief. With the help of everyone - including men, women and kids; we gathered all available outboard motors and the few rowboats then in existence. The ladies came with blankets, clothing and food. Gallons of hot coffee were prepared; there were lanterns, axes and coils of rope.

"Authority arrived to take over the Atlantic Coast Line's train (a combination freight and passenger) that was lying in Sebring and along toward evening we took off. There was quite a gang and the excitement ran high and now I can recall only Dan Andrews, Payne Sebring, Rhesa Norris, Sid Jaeger, Red Cook and a few others. We reached a spot; it was either Newhall or Muckway, beyond which the train could not go. From there, we used the work cars provided the track repair crews, but were not permitted to start before daybreak. It was here that we picked up some of the refugees that worked their way up the railroad right-of-way - - ."

It is unfortunate that no writers or photographers were on the scene to record the many acts of heroism and mercy that took place during these first few days. Many of the relief workers continued their duties for 48 and even 72 hours without sleep as they realized the necessity of searching every conceivable place where a person might be marooned or suffering. Those who had lived through the storm were almost crazed by their experiences and, to add to the confusion, word got around that another storm was on its way. On Monday, rain started again and made life miserable for everyone, but in the first 48 hours,

922 persons had been moved out by boat and another 500 or more walked the railroad fill to the trains.

The command post was the nerve center of the operation. It was from here that boats were dispatched to points where rumor had it that a family was stranded. It was from here that tabs were kept on boats that went out and were overdue in returning. Here, people came to get shoes and clothing; to inquire about relatives or to report accidents. Here, the bodies of the dead were brought in and identified. And here, the campaign decisions (and mistakes) were made. After the first two or three days and nights under pressure, without rest, minds did not function too clearly.

Tuesday was clear and warm, and, as a result, the submerged bodies of hundreds of drowned animals came to the surface and created such a stench that many of the workers had to be relieved and sent back to Sebring. Many of the human bodies also came to the surface but they were in such a condition that made them difficult to handle and this phase of the work created a new problem. Fortunately, by that time, most of the residents had been evacuated and, as all approach roads to the area were cut off by water, sightseers were not a problem as they could not get in.

Even though the demand for drinking water was greatly curtailed by the exodus of the residents, the need became very acute. Those who remained would rather be almost perishing from thirst than drink the water that smelled so bad and which they knew must be contaminated. And the moonshine was long since exhausted. They were told that Mr. Sebring had started two cases of bonded liquor by special messengers but it never arrived. Some water did arrive in five gallon cans and, even though some of it tasted of gasoline, it was most welcome.

A relief crew had been assembled in the northern part of the state and it was staffed with doctors and nurses. They were supposed to take over from the original party but on the train trip down, most of them had sampled the medicinal supplies too frequently so that, instead of being a help, they were a problem and this may have been a part of the quarrels to which the Drs. Hanna referred. By the time they arrived, there was small need for doctors and nurses in Moore Haven and they were relieved quickly by the militia but the Sebring party was glad to turn over the entire operation to them when they were able to assume responsibility. All of the rescue work had been accomplished and most of the bodies had been recovered. On Thursday, the Sebring party returned to Sebring where they found a situation that was much more confusing than that at Moore Haven.

But, at least, it was a comfortable confusion. Even the refugees had dry places in which to sleep; there was plenty of good, palatable drinking water and cooked food; and there weren't hundreds of animal bodies floating around everywhere.

Again quoting Mr. Durkin, "As for the services of the local merchants who, can ever

forget the terrific job turned in by Mike Kahn? Chuck Albright and Jack Lindsey practically bankrupted themselves in their efforts to clothe those who could not be fitted from contributed clothing. McRae, Cobb, Hinckley, Durrance, Paul Cater - all stand high on the list of those who served.

The American Red Cross sent a trained team of relief workers from Washington to Sebring and set up an office where the refugees made application for grants to replace clothing and other necessities of life; to repair or replace their homes and restock their small farms. Here again, was another source of quarreling as requests for assistance were, in many cases, far in excess of available supplies of money and materials or were for items not furnished in normal Red Cross procedure.

Special mention should be made the hospitality that Sebring extended to the refugees. Hotels and homes were opened to these unfortunates who were complete strangers and they were made welcome even though it was for some weeks until they could return to the Moore Haven area.

About a month after the disaster, some who had participated in the rescue work held a session at which each of the members recalled the incidents of the emergency that impressed him most. Some of these memories are most interesting.

On Monday evening, A. L. Butler arrived in Moore Haven and reported to the command post for assignment of duties. A cold, nasty rain was falling and Al noticed that one of the workers who had been on duty continuously since Sunday morning was drenched and shivering so, although Al knew that he too would soon be just as miserable, he insisted that his friend take his warm raincoat.

An old man, carrying a suitcase, was being transferred from one boat to another. A relief worker offered a helping hand with the suitcase and was astonished at its weight. He asked what it contained and the old man said, "Everything I own in this world." When it was examined, it was found to contain a change of overalls, some kitchen cutlery and two steel plow points.

Outboard boat motors in 1926 were not the powerful engines of today. The largest was not more than five horsepower and they were far from being dependable or even predictable. In rescue operations, time was an important element so, when a motor failed, it was replaced by one that would function. At one time, before arrangements could be made to bring in mechanics to repair them, a pile of about fifty nonoperating motors had accumulated and were stacked like cordwood. When the Red Cross and militia took over the work, they would not permit any of the motors or boats to leave the area as they had not brought this type of equipment with them. They promised to take good care of these and to see that they were returned, but when Sebring owners later wanted their boats and motors returned, they could not be found.

Men who walked the railroad fill to the trains, told that small animals and snakes were either so frightened or so exhausted by the storm that they made little or no effort to avoid people. One man related that he sat down on the rails to rest a few minutes and when he got up to resume his trek he noticed that he had been sitting within a couple feet of a large rattler which made no belligerent move and did not even go into a coil as he passed on. However, he was responsible for an order that there would be no pedestrian movement after dark.

One indelible impression that remained in the minds of all relief workers was the distorted, discolored and bloated bodies of the unfortunates who lost their lives in the flood. After several days in the water, the only way they could be brought in was to tow them behind the boat and then they were rolled in blankets to be brought ashore. Very resolute and strong men were required for this job and even with them, the nightmarish image remained for months.

Among the evacuees was a very young baby girl; all of her relatives had been lost in the storm. It was only a short time until she was adopted by Mr. & Mrs. Fax Haskins, and since reaching adulthood she has spent much of her spare time in volunteer work with the Red Cross. Her finest work has been on the Water Safety Committee in which she has accomplished notable results.

Possibly the most dramatic incident of the entire five hectic days, was enacted on the evening of Monday at the point where the evacuees were transferred from boats on one side of the railroad fill to boats on the other side. At this point, the depth of the water was well over a man's head. The night was dark and the rain fell in a steady, drenching downpour. On the fill were seven men, seven small children and three women. Four of the men were put into the smaller forward boat which was to tow the larger second boat which held the women and children. The remaining three men were to wait for the return of the boat to pick them up.

The two boats had barely gotten under way when the sides of the towed boat separated from the transom and it immediately started to sink and, with it, the forward boat was swamped. The screams of the women and children brought instant response and as the boat sank very slowly, the entire group was brought ashore. The hand of the Lord was certainly with that party that night because the rescue was made entirely by instinct as it was impossible to see clearly for a distance of more than a few feet.

Fortunately, the outboard motor would still operate and after the lead boat was bailed out, the women and children continued the trip. They were almost subjected to additional hardships for they were just arriving at the train when it started to pull out; those in charge believing that the last boat was already in. The shouts of the pilot from the boat attracted attention just in time to prevent a miserable night out on a rain-soaked railroad track.

One of the men who helped save the lives of the women and children said he didn't mind jumping into the canal because it helped him get rid of some of the rainwater that his clothes had absorbed.

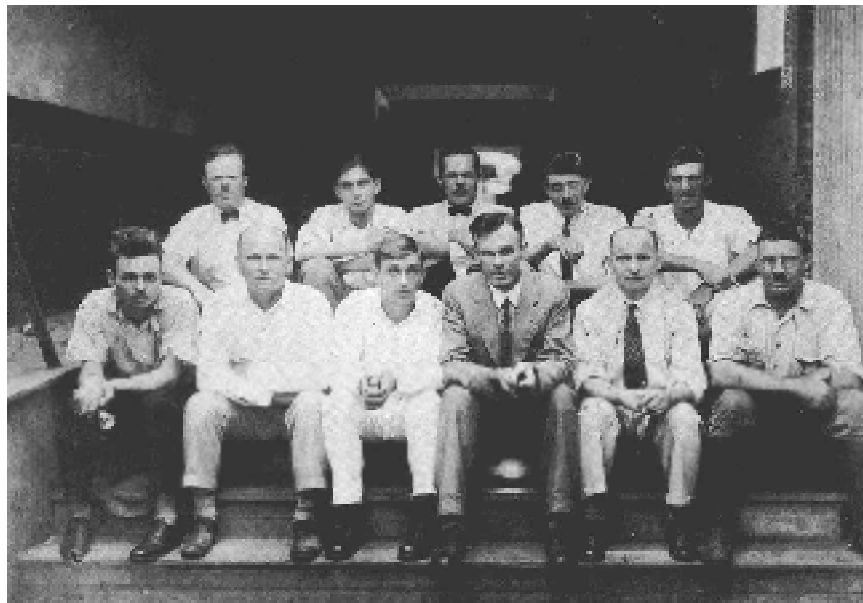
Mr. Lewis Thomas, of Okeechobee City, tells of Natt Bass who was swept overboard from a boat at the height of the storm. His companions were powerless to give him any help and were certain that he had drowned. However, he was washed against a tree which he succeeded in climbing and to which he clung tenaciously for the balance of the day and all of the night even though he learned soon after arriving, that he was sharing his precarious shelter with a full-grown Florida wildcat. Both were so intent on his own safety that neither bothered the other.

The tremendous loss of life in the Moore Haven area was caused by two principal conditions:-

1) The people had no previous experience with this type of storm, so when the "eye" arrived, they felt that the hurricane was over so they were caught away from their shelter when the full blast of the second part hit in all its fury.

2) They were totally unprepared for the enormous "wind tide" that was built up and rolled over the entire countryside, crumbling their flimsy frame buildings like matchboxes. In 1926 there were no protecting dikes to hold back the waters of Lake Okeechobee.

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Sebring Historical Society, October 1972. Pages 361-378.)



The Sebring Relief Crew - The Moore Haven Hurricane, 19 September, 1926
Left to right, Upper row: "Red" Cleaver, N. N. Vann, Ed Spear, George Wyandt, O. C. White
Lower Row: Ernest Roberts, Glen Skipper, Allen Altwater, Dr. J. W. Mitchell, Mke Kahn, H. G. Eastwood

Chapter Fifteen

The following feature item appeared in the "ACCENT" section of the Tampa Tribune. It very accurately describes the activities in Sebring as it was written immediately following the tragic events.

The Tribune editor, Terry Plumb, graciously gave his permission for reprinting in the Bulletin.

The Day Moore Haven Disappeared

On September 19, 1926, one of the most devastating hurricanes ever to hit the United States swept through south Florida, causing the rupture of dikes along Lake Okeechobee. More than 150 were killed in the town of Moore Haven alone. A Sebring woman, Mrs. Lena Marchand, remembers the disaster well; she was a relief volunteer assisting the hundreds of refugees. Following is a remarkable letter, written to her parents describing the sights she witnessed. It appeared in The Kenesaw (Nebraska) Press less than a month after the hurricane.

BY LENA MARCHAND

Sebring, Fla., Oct. 13.-

Dear mother and father: At last I have come to a place where possibly I can collect my thoughts enough to tell you something of the storm and the relief work in Sebring. During our busy time, there was no time for me to read the papers, and I do not know about any of the flooded area except Moore Haven, but it would seem almost impossible to exaggerate the description, the disaster was so great. One of our state doctors who has been at work in that field says it was the most horrible catastrophe he had ever witnessed.

To go back to the storm now - on Saturday, September 19th, the wind blew hard all day. Sometimes it looked like the pine trees near us would go down, it rained continuously all day, and by spells the rain came in torrents. It blew into the houses, and many which had never leaked had wet plaster.

Few people ventured out on Saturday but we were in need of groceries and went to town about noon to get them. The storm increased by the middle of the afternoon and continued until about midnight. Sunday morning was quiet, the sky had a peculiar cast, and broken shrubbery and limbs of trees scattered around were about all the evidence we saw of the storm, as the water had soaked away.

In our Sebring paper, though, were accounts of the storm and one article headed "Inestimable damage done to property here, plate glass windows broken, houses unroofed."

Because of high winds being unusual in this section, many people were wrought up and frightened, but the real damage done here was small. Repairs were soon made and the damage forgotten.

In the same issue, an account was given of the storm at Moore Haven, which lies south of us about 60 miles, on Lake Okeechobee. It seems that three men had managed to get out of there ahead of the water on Saturday. They reported that water was several feet deep in the largest hotel and that the hotel was the highest point in town. An appeal for help was made and also a statement that the Sebring fire department had a special train made up here, and had taken motorboats by which they hoped to reach Moore Haven.

Part of the railroad was washed away, as they had anticipated, and even though ties were washed from under the rails in places, they managed to get over them with hand cars for some distance, which brought them to a point about six miles from Moore Haven. Here the boats were shoved into the water, and the trip was begun. The waters were still rough. It was the tidal wave, which caused the lake to back up on the land, that made the havoc.

When our men reached Moore Haven, they found several other boats there engaged in rescue work. Trees are not plentiful there, and in almost every tree were perched men, women and children. On house tops, floating on the lake on boards, on pieces of furniture and on all sorts of floating articles were people almost exhausted from fatigue, hunger and exposure but still clinging and hoping to be rescued.

It was after noon sometime when the first company of refugees were loaded into boats and as fast as boats arrived (several trains were sent that day) the people were transported to this little station where they were served with hot coffee and sandwiches, then taken on hand cars or flat cars which were pushed by men, to the place where they could be put on a train. The first company reached Sebring about 9:30 Sunday night.

The ladies had gathered up all the clothing and blankets that could be procured and we had made hundreds of sandwiches which we had ready to serve with coffee. Mr. Sebring opened the doors of the Nancesowee Hotel and back to the long tables in the dining room the people were taken providing they did not need to stop at the first aid station in the lobby first. It was so terrible. I see it all again and the things we witnessed almost ate our hearts out those - first few days.

Some had been picked up in nightclothes; others had clothing torn, and these were supplied with overalls when they reached land. Now, if you can picture a row of automobiles lining up in front of the Nancesowee, and from them emerging women and children, wet through due to the motor trip in the rain, in addition to their former soaking, clothing smudged with crude oil which came from huge tanks which burst and spewed out their contents on the water, skin grimed with oil and burned by the morning sun as it beat upon them in the trees and worse than all that, the ghostly look upon their faces; if you can picture this, you can have but a faint idea of what we women of Sebring experienced.

At the first table was one woman who seemed to be looking off into space. One of our ladies insisted that she eat something so that she could get dry clothing. She could not eat, but in a faraway voice replied, "If I knew that the bodies of my children could be found, I could eat."

She told of how she and her husband happened to be in one room in the house and the five children in another when the house divided and the children were swept away and drowned. (The father stayed in Moore Haven one week longer searching for the children, but only two were recovered.)

Another grief-stricken mother told of how she had managed to get her four children out on top of the roof and kept them there all night, but she became so exhausted in the morning that when she relaxed her grip, one rolled off and drowned.

Another told of how she was marooned on a huge rock, a part of a wall. She had four little ones with her. There was just room for them standing, and several times during the night when sleep overcame a little fellow, she had to stoop over and pull one or the other out of the water.

An old lady 66-years-old, who lived on an island, was forced to climb a tree for safety. She told me she was there five days and nights without food. The water even reached to her knees in the trees, and, she said, at one time she was almost knocked down by the force with which a corpse hit her. A rabbit took refuge on her shoulder for hours.

I could write page after page of these dreadful experiences, but it would only cause you to suffer and it brings back those things which were almost too much for some of us.

Going back to the rescue work, I want to tell you that for seven or eight days, people were being brought in. Some had been picked up on little islands; others had drifted out on the prairie. Some parties were brought here who were found twenty miles from home.

It was necessary for each hotel to open its doors, and many were sheltered in private homes. The meals were all served at the Nancesowee, and they were good, nourishing foods, well prepared. The Sebring women had charge of the dining room for about 10 days, and then the Moore Haven women organized to take over the work. A chef was employed, and some colored helpers in the kitchen, after the first day or two. Supplies of food and clothing were sent in from different towns. The Sebring Chamber of Commerce had everything well organized when the Red Cross came in. The Red Cross took over the responsibility officially October 5.

Doctors and nurses came to our aid, and everything possible was done to alleviate the suffering of the unfortunate people. The sympathy given them helped them in a measure to forget their grief for the time being. A remarkable thing about it was that no

epidemic and very few cases of serious illness resulted from the exposure, etc. So far, there has been but one death among those brought here. This lady had been an invalid for some time, and due to exhaustion and exposure, complications set in and death was the result.

By Monday, which ended the third week of their stay in the hotels, the remaining people were placed in tents by the Red Cross. A week prior to this time, some had already been established in apartments and tents, the Red Cross paying the rent for one month.

It is estimated that for several days Sebring cared for about 1,500 white and colored. Free transportation was furnished by the railroads and many left to be with relatives elsewhere, and many others went where they found employment.

At present, there are about 300 whites left in Sebring - the Red Cross distributes to those in outlying districts the same as to those in Sebring.

Some will never go back to Moore Haven, but some are anxious to go back. A day or two ago, the water was still knee-deep in Moore Haven streets. The people of Moore Haven declare that had the dikes been opened so that the water could have gone out gradually when the lake began to rise, the disaster would have been averted; it would have flowed over a larger territory, and never have reached the depth it did.

The state has promised to rebuild roads but cannot do so until water recedes. The ACL is running trains into Moore Haven now, and for several days flat cars loaded with automobiles, or remains of automobiles, have been coming into Sebring. No one is permitted to go into Moore Haven to salvage his goods unless he has had typhoid inoculations.

Many bodies were never found, and many could not be identified. The dead were thought to number about 300.

I began helping at the hotel Saturday evening, September 19, and for three days helped any place I was needed. Then they gave me the information desk, which I kept until the night of October 7. These have been busy times, and there were but a few people in Sebring who didn't help some way or another.

Love to all,
Lena Marchand.

Editor's note; Besides being the author of this gripping description of the 1926 disaster, Mrs. Marchand's personal history could serve as the outline for an American history text. She was born to Lewis and Mary Liveringhouse in Goshen, Ind., October 24, 1889. Two weeks later, her mother and she joined her father in Portland, Ore., where he was a troubleshooter and assembly man for the McCormick Implement Company, supplier of machinery to the wheat farms in the north central states.

On a visit to relatives, the Liveringhouses were isolated in Nebraska by the Panic of 1893 which wiped out their savings. Lena attended high school, earned a teacher's certificate, and married a young Frenchman named Alfred Marchand.

Two successive droughts discouraged the young farm family, and Alfred Marchand jumped at a chance to visit Florida when the Bowles Jennings Land Company of Jacksonville sent agents through the Midwest, describing holdings in Clay, Putnam and St. Johns counties.

Alfred and a brother-in-law took an excursion train from Kansas City to Jacksonville. They were taken to Hastings and Palatka to visit Irish potato farms. They later purchased land in Middleburg, between the forks of Black Creek, where they and several other families hoped to raise potatoes.

Within two years, all but one other family gave up the venture. The Marchand's moved to Sebring in 1921 because of health reasons. Mrs. Marchand attended the University of Florida and Lakeland Southern College, but was out of school during the 1926 hurricane. Mr. Marchand died in 1949 of a heart attack.

The following article by Gene Plowden appeared in the Tallahassee Democrat on Sunday, September 18th, 1966

Moore Haven Still Remembers The Awful Hurricane Of '26

Forty years ago today, one of the most devastating hurricanes ever to hit Florida smashed this community, drowning nearly half its 900 inhabitants. The 1926 storm piled ocean-going vessels in the streets of Miami, caused \$ 111,775,000 damage and killed more than 100. After battering Miami, the hurricane, with winds up to perhaps 150 miles an hour, barreled across the sawgrass to Moore Haven, 85 air miles to the northwest, where it took a frightful toll.

"We had about 900 people in the town then, and lost half of them,," said "Uncle Joe" Peoples, who represented Glades County in the State Legislature for many years.

The land had flooded for several summers before the state built a levee along the southern end of Lake Okeechobee, 47 miles from west of Moore Haven to Bacom Point on the east. It was 20 to 40 feet wide at the base and five to nine feet high, of muck and sand. In the dull gray dawn, storm winds built up to a mighty crescendo and pounding waves melted the dike like chocolate, Water gushed through the town in a wall 10 to 15 feet high.

Mrs. Elsie Nall had finished school the previous spring and was a teacher in Moore Haven High. "We had a teacher's reception at the school Friday night and got word that the storm was expected to hit us with winds up to 100 miles an hour," she recalls. "They blew the siren at the light plant all night to warn the people. The lake had been high for two or

three years and the water came in like a tidal wave when the dike broke about 7 or 8 o'clock Saturday morning.

"I took my sister's two children up to the attic and we saw the Methodist Church float by. We could hear the bedroom furniture banging against the ceiling."

Mrs. Rinda Daniel, postmistress at Moore Haven for many years, was at home with her two children, Mae, 16, and Broward, 9, when the dike broke 100 yards from the house. Her husband, W. E. Daniel, now 86, had gone across the road early that morning to look after his milk cow and heifer. When the dike broke, Daniel saved himself by clinging all day to the roots of a giant cypress tree that had been uprooted.

"The children and I got up on the colonnade between the living and dining rooms," Mrs. Daniel recalled. "The piano was bouncing around in the living room like a rubber ball, but all the other furniture was washed away, even the wallpaper. Everything went out of my kitchen except the sink and a small safe we'd brought from the post office. A mattress floated in the kitchen, and a cottonmouth moccasin was lying on it.

"When my husband got home from across the road about dark, we were still on the colonnade and the four of us stayed there all night. The boys slept some but the others stayed awake so we wouldn't fall off and drown."

Mrs. Horace Howell, wife of the city marshal, tied herself and her five children to a mattress and tried to keep them afloat. As the children slipped off and drowned, she cut them loose one by one, to lighten the burden.

Wallace Stevens, a successful Okeechobee cattleman, was 100 miles away at Bartow at the time. "I think we got the word Sunday," he recalls. "I went right in, and had to wade the last couple of miles. I asked what I could do to help. They gave me a boat and told me to look for bodies. The first I found were those of a mother clasping a year old boy in her arms."

The home of Miss Bertha Gram, one of those that stood, was used as a temporary morgue while she made coffee for rescue workers. She remembers that James Couse swam across the street with a rope, anchored it to the top of the theater and rescued people who had squeezed into the projection booth.

The nearest cemetery was at Ortona, a crossroads 18 miles to the west. In some instances, relatives came in to claim bodies and took them out for burial. Some bodies were found three and four years later and some were never found.

Stevens said towns to the north were quick to offer aid, and many bodies were sent to Arcadia, Bartow, Sebring, Haines City, Lakeland, St. Cloud and Kissimmee for burial.

(This article is reprinted from *Bulletin Number Eleven*
Sebring Historical Society, October 1972. Pages 370-378.)

Chapter Sixteen

Hot Water Well

The year 1921 was one of the conspicuous periods in the history of Sebring. Epic events became common place that year. The high spot that everyone felt would be the one great and momentous incident of the year was the division of Old DeSoto County and the creation of Highlands County on July 4th.

The Board of Trade was reorganized and Frank Sebring, as its new president and a new Board of Governors breathed new life into the organization. Things began to happen. Tuscawilla Park was established and the pavilion in it was built with funds raised by contributions. The Board of Trade issued the most comprehensive advertising brochure ever circulated by Sebring either before or since that date. Mr. H. O. Sebring completed the first paved road around Lake Jackson. This opened a new area of lake-front lots which were soon all sold.

For a period of two or three months, one event caused more excitement and raised greater expectations of progress than any other activity of the year. A bubbling spring of hot water was discovered near Park Street between Lime and Maple Streets. Just off the pavement, opposite the ice manufacturing plant, when a shallow well was being put down, the hot water was discovered.

The effect of the discovery was electrifying!

From the Sebring White Way, September 23, 1923

PREPARING PUBLICITY FOR HOT WATER WELL

Reliability of "Old Faithful" Has Been Established. Literature will Be Sent Out and the World Made Familiar With the Fact That Sebring Is the Only Town in Florida Having a Genuine Hot Water Well. Plans for Sanitarium Being Formulated.

Well the time is at hand for making known to the world that Sebring is the only town in Florida that has a genuine hot water well. The wells at the ice plant, which have been named "Old Faithful" have been proven beyond a doubt that we have a treasure. The owners are getting ready to put on a publicity campaign, and the plans for a sanitarium are being worked out and there is nothing now to do but boost the proposition to a finish, and that is getting into shape.

It will be remembered that a well was bored in the Circle last week in the hope that the hot water might be found, but the stream that was obtained turned out to be a cold stream, but the geologist claims that there is a bubbling spring that supplies the water for the two wells at the ice plant, and that while the stream found

on the Circle evidently flows from the spring the water is cooled off soon after leaving the flow that supplies the wells. The boring of the well on the Circle has demonstrated that hot water wells are not common even around Sebring, for be it remembered that another well has been sunk at the plant and that well is also cold water, so that goes to prove that Sebring really has "Old Faithful" the genuine article, and that hot water wells cannot be found everywhere.

The men who are going to promote the scheme of publicity are preparing to start a "Tent City" in close proximity to the well, where a "Cash and Carry Cafe" will be located. A building for the sanitarium will be erected and you can put it down that the coming winter is going to see thousands coming to Sebring for baths, and they will get them right off the reel.

An analysis of the water will be made, and the medicinal qualities thoroughly exploited. As soon as that is accomplished there will be a move made to give the publicity that such a thing deserves given to a great find. We are making no boasts nor prophecy, but we are of the opinion that there is going to be something great come out of the discovery of this hot water, and there is no reason why another Hot Springs or a Baden should not be established right here in Sebring, and it is a safe bet that in Winter, people would much rather come to the greatest climate on earth to get their hot baths than to go into a country where frost and snow and cold are almost unbearable.

Forgotten Failures

Not all of the plans and projects pursued by groups and individuals in Sebring, over the years, have been successful. While the plans that bore fruit are easily remembered, those which did not reach maturity pass quickly from memory. Although there are more of these failures than we may like to recall, some of them are worthy of mention. Every one of them had merit and the city would have been vastly improved, had they succeeded.

The story of the "hot water well" has been told and retold. The concise version as narrated by Mrs. Alberta Jones in "the Fifty Years of Sebring," is well told and historically correct so it merits repeating -

"In the late summer (1921) a new well was driven near the ice plant. To the amazement and delight of the workers the new well had hot water!

The town that had so long boasted about its remarkable health water was thrilled with the thought that natural hot water was available. Overnight the whole town was bustling with plans to build a health resort to rival the famed hot springs in the Ozarks.

“In early September a geologist reported to the town council that he had traced the hot water stream from the well at the ice plant to the Circle. A committee was appointed to investigate the cost of sinking a well to tap this remarkable stream.

“A few days later the council ‘authorized the Sebring Real Estate Company to drive a well on or near the Circle tapping the hot water stream’.

“Older residents remember that this was a time of great excitement. Other business was virtually at a standstill while the drilling operations were underway. Finally the new well yielded water, but it was cold water! Then the embarrassing facts came to light! The hot water at the original site was not coming from a well, but rather was the surface waste draining from the ice plant where great quantities of water were used to cool the big machinery.”

After weeks of ambitious and big plans, the discovery of the source of the hot water was infinitely more disappointing. It was found that the waste water which drew its temperature from the ice-making process, was being discharged at a point where it ran under the street paving and bubbled to the surface on the opposite side. The dreams of hot water medicinal baths died a sudden death.

The “hot water well” was but an incident in the much larger dream which covered a span of more than a decade. Their pride in the qualities of their water and the congenial climate encouraged the feeling that Sebring was a logical and ideal location for a “health center” and a big sanitarium.

At that period of the city’s growth, the vast majority of the residents were newly arrived from the north with fresh memories of the rigorous winters, so the climate had a great influence on their dream. And the natural purity and good taste flavor of the water was in sharp contrast to the sulphurous flavor of the inland towns’ water supplies and the brackish qualities of the waters of coastal towns. Since that time, of course, other communities have improved their water systems and the Board of Health has made chlorination of Sebring’s supply mandatory so present-day comparisons are not so sharply defined.

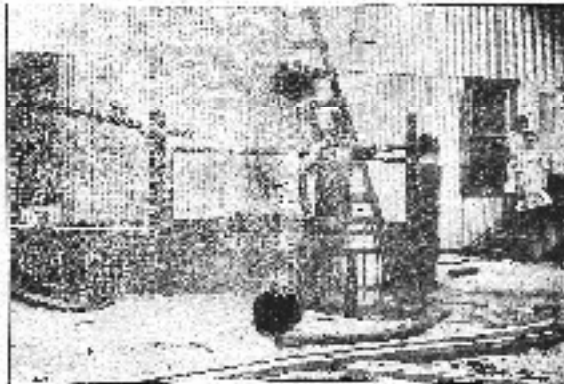
Many roseate plans for the “health center” were discussed which climaxed in negotiations with a Dr. Kellogg who had developed a similar center and sanitarium in another state. The dream did not end in a rude awakening but rather faded so gradually that nobody knew it had ended.

(This article is reprinted from *Bulletin Number Two*.
Sebring Historical Society, July 1969. Pages 45-47. And
Bulletin Number Thirty Four, October 1981. Pages 989-990.
Variations are printed in other society publications)

"OLD FAITHFUL"

Sebring's Famous Hot Water Well

This picture gives you a sight of the Famous Well that is now giving fourth water that



is 118 degrees in heat-almost boiling and there seems to be an inexhaustible supply of this water.

"Old Faithful Hot Water Well"

NOTHING OF THE KIND IN ANY OTHER TOWN
IN FLORIDA

BORING FOR HOT WATER ON THE CIRCLE

This picture shows men at work boring on the Circle at Sebring for Hot Water. The result was that this well produced cold water which goes to produce Hot Water



Wells are not common in Sebring, but "Old Faithful" is the original and only Hot Water Well in Florida. The water is fine for bathing and drinking.

SANITARIUM IN CONTEMPLATION

Already plans are being drawn for a building to be used as a Sanitarium and also it is being planned to build bath houses, and literature will be prepared dealing with the benefits of the well. The nation is now looking toward Sebring, and people are coming here from all parts of the State to see this wonderful, health-giving well.

Watch this page next week for more detailed descriptions of

"OLD FAITHFUL" Sebring's Hot Water Well

Chapter Seventeen

Sebring Utilities

The current controversies centered around the Sebring utilities and the costs of services may focus some interest in the origin and development of the facilities. It will be noted that some of the experiences and problems parallel those of today.

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The original power and water Plant was built by George E. Sebring in 1912. It was a 50 KVA generator powered by a steam boiler and engine. The fuel consisted of slabs and other waste wood from the sawmill on Dinner Lake.

Even though the buildings in the new town were scattered, service was made available to most of them. That is, such as the service was. There was, at the time, little or no demand for power in the daytime so the plant was activated a six o'clock in the evening and shut down at eleven. At 15 minutes before the hour, the lights would blink as a signal to light the kerosene lamps. It was in 1915 when the time was extended to midnight for closing down.

Use of electric power consisted almost entirely in home lighting and a few street lights on the Circle. A room was considered well lighted by a single lamp suspended from the ceiling. Most of these lamps were 16 or 32 candle power with "carbon filaments." Later improvements included lamps with "tungsten filaments" and were designated as 40 or 60 watts instead of so many candle power.

The first appliances for the home made their appearance in the form of electric irons and washing machines. (Water heaters and refrigerators did not emerge until the mid-twenties.) It was not until 1915 that a special arrangement was made to operate the plant one morning a week to accommodate the washing and ironing needs. The owners of the utilities resisted all efforts of the city administration to persuade them to furnish power all night.

While the Sebring interests owned the utilities, Aaron Withers managed the operations and Ed Harshman was the principal plant engineer.

In 1913, G F. Bobb (an electrical contractor from New Cumberland Penna.) was coming to Florida on a train for a winter vacation in St. Petersburg. On the train, he met George E. Sebring who persuaded him to investigate an offer to buy the Sebring utilities. Mr. Bobb envisioned some problems in a one-man ownership but agreed to a half interest so he took over the plant in July 1914. (Many years later, He recalled that the Sebring's never took any part in the operations or problems nor even looked at the books.)

GF. Bobb was a good businessman who paid his bills promptly and expected other people to pay their electric and water bills promptly. His firmness in enforcing this policy did not endear him in the public opinion nor did one of his first revisions of policy. Until he bought into the company, all electric service was billed at \$ 1.50 per month, flat rate. Water

service was furnished for \$ 1.00 a month also flat rate. Mr. Bobb began to install meters on electric services - a most unpopular move.

The growth of Sebring was dynamic and, by the end of 1914, the estimated population was in the neighborhood of 400. This necessitated some expansion of the plant capacity so a used generator was purchased in Winter Garden and moved to Sebring. This was also steam-powered and had a capacity of 100 KVA. (This was about enough to light a present-day high school football field.)

No figures are available that will reflect the cost of the new installation but it is known that one third came from the capital funds of the company and the firm borrowed the remaining two thirds.

The water system was quite adequate for the small town. Two deep wells (one between 800 and 900 feet and the other something over 1,300 feet) were seated in the Ocala stratum limestone, hence the water had a very faint odor of sulphur as it came from the wells but which became imperceptible in the aeration process when discharged into the 90 foot high elevated storage tank. The pumps also aided in the aeration. They were set in pits about 15 feet below ground level and were activated by steam pressure. They pumped air into the wells and the air pressure raised the water.

The two wells must have been in the same underground stratum because although either well would deliver 90 gallons per minute, only 90 gallons were recovered when the two pumps were operated at the same time.

The principal main lines were 4 inch diameter cast iron pipe in three areas. One line ran along Lakeview Drive from Eucalyptus on the north to Kenilworth on the south. The second went east on Pine Street to Lemon Street. The third ran south on Commerce to the alley around the Circle (Wall Street) thence around this alley. Some two inch and some smaller lines branched off these mains. Pressure at the Circle was a maximum of 40 pounds.

Before Mr. Bobb acquired an interest in the utilities, Mr. Sebring offered to sell the facilities to the City of Sebring for \$ 10,000 (August 1913). Even had the City wished to buy, it had no money and less incentive although during the first few years of operation as an incorporated city, almost half of the annual budget was earmarked for municipal water, fire hydrant standby and electricity for street lighting.

It was necessary to negotiate a franchise agreement and one of the clauses specified that the City had the option to buy the facilities at the end of any five year period, at a price equal to the physical inventory. By the end of the first five years, the City was still not in position to finance the purchase but the Council demanded that the company furnish service all night and expand daytime service with the hope that business activities (such as ice manufacturing and fruit packing) would be attracted. As this would not be financially profitable, the Company refused even though the City threatened court action.

A groundswell of public opinion took form in 1919, that the City should exercise its option at the end of the second five years (1923) so a referendum was held in March 1921

at which time the voters approved the purchase by a 51 to 30 ballot. Negotiations followed and in January 1923, the City paid the company \$ 83,966.88 and took over the operation of the water and light plants.

To finance the purchase, a bond issue was necessary. Another issue was needed to put the plant in condition to meet immediate needs and, as the Florida boom developed in the next two years, one bond issue after another was floated to meet the dreams of real estate developers. Before the boom bubble busted, and the nation was plunged into the Big Depression, bonds had been sold to be charged against the plant as follows;

June 1921	\$ 100,000	7% (to purchase)
October 1924	135,000	5 1/2%
July 1925	300,000	6%

In addition to the bond issues, certificates of indebtedness guaranteed payment for diesel powered generators and other equipment. The City had discarded the steam plants immediately after purchase. The funds from the sale of bonds were devoted to improving the system of water mains and power lines. Sales revenues paid for drilling wells and, in 1927, an inventory showed a value of the water and electric systems to be \$ 750,000.

The business of the utilities was administered by a committee of the City Council. Employees included a manager who had charge of the plant and all outside operations. Bookkeeping and accounts were maintained and bills were collected by the office of the city clerk.

The 90 gallon per minute water supply proved to be totally inadequate in the early era of municipal ownership so new sources were essential. After investigation, the Council decided to install "gravel wall wells." These were relatively shallow and, instead of drawing from deep underground streams in limestone strata, water was drawn from sandy strata 200 to 300 feet down.

Screens in the intake pipe were surrounded by layers of gravel which were intended to prevent the sand from entering the screens but, in the late 1920's and early 1930's, one well after another failed and the City Council was plagued with the problem of obtaining a satisfactory water supply. At one time, the fire truck was set at the lake and it pumped directly into the distribution system for more than a month.

Repeated tests indicated that the lake water was fit for domestic use even though no chlorination or other purification steps were taken. That was in the 1920's.

The City of Sebring, like many other Florida communities, had been the victim of "boom fever" and had anticipated a continuing growth. To meet the current and expected demands, it had contracted debts which, by 1930, it found impossible to meet. Many of the boom-time residents had gone back north and many who remained did so because they had no funds on which to travel. Neither did they have money to pay taxes or utility bills. **THE CITY WAS IN A STATE OF BANKRUPTCY!**

A copy of a report for three years ending June 30, 1932, to the City Council will best reflect the position as related to the water and power department: -

CASH LEDGER	Receipts	Disbursements	Balance
July 1, 1929, Balance forward	1,267.12		
1929-1930 Totals	67,600.99	68,619.36	
1930-1931	83,555.81	76,428.87	
1931-1932	81,789.77	46,078.04	23,037.42
RECEIVABLE LEDGER	Charges	Collections	
July 1, 1929, Balance forward	32,264.94		
1929-1930 Totals	95,732.22	68,115.40	
1930-1931	90,452.21	136,553.67	
1931-1932	85,284.45	59,716.47	40,348.28

Explanations

Disbursements include expense and payables of all kinds.
 Balance was consumed and is due from other departments.
 Charges are consumers accounts shown in revenue ledger.
 Collections include adjustments and over fifty thousand dollars charged off by auditors for bad accounts and light and water furnished the City and not paid for since 1928.

Balance -	Light & Power accounts due	31,036.55
	Water accounts due	9,236.73
	Miscellaneous accounts due	75.00

and this balance includes charges to the City for street lights, fire hydrants and other services for past year.

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A quick reading of the above report and the explanations (together with other sections of the report which was too lengthy and detailed to reproduce here in full) give a clear picture of the business operations of the Light & Water Department and also the mood of the consumers. Some people just simply did not pay their bills and the City Administration took only feeble steps to enforce collections. These figures show that, over a three year period, consumers owed the city more than \$ 40,000 even after more than \$ 50,000 had been written off.

The report also sets forth the fact that, in spite of the great loss in accounts receivable, receipts exceeded operational expenses but these receipts (not only net profits) were used to pay expenses of other departments of the city. Unfortunately, there was not enough income to operate the utilities and all other municipal functions so, at the end of 1932, all employees were behind in their wages and most suppliers had put the City on a basis of "collect before delivery." Even for shipments of fuel for energizing the generators, payment was demanded before the oil was off-loaded.

Conditions became so involved that something HAD to be done.

The City was faced with many court actions by vendors trying to recover payment for materials - and from bondholders who were victims of the City's default in payment of interest. At one point, it appeared that bondholders might force the City to assess a 2,000 mill tax levy and another suit would force the City to sell the utilities to satisfy claims. By good fortune, the courts favored the City in these actions.

A courageous City Council attacked the problems in a forthright manner in 1933 with the complete cooperation of the employees of the city.

The Council set up some rigid policies and hired Allen Altvater as manager to enforce them. At the same time, employees cooperated by serving far beyond their normal job activities. (As an instance of this, firemen read meters when off-shift, without additional pay)

As a result of this combined effort, it was possible for the manager to submit the following report to the Council at the end of the first seven months of 1933:

	As of Jan. 18th	As of July 18th
1- Number of light & water accounts delinquent for previous month but still receiving service	32	12
2- Amount due City on these delinquent accounts (Previous month only)	\$ 2,201.00	\$ 26.40
3- Current bills that were due, OK'd but unpaid for lack of funds	1,628.35	All paid
4- Amount due city employees for back wages	1,457.38	All paid
5- Amount of money in bank credited to meter deposit fund	None	4,155.00
6- Amount in bank deposited to General operating fund	487.98	1,767.04

With smoothly operating procedures and collections of revenues due the Light & Water Department, the City was able to reestablish its credit and operate in the black. Some beneficial changes were made in the rate structures that year.

In instituting and enforcing strict policies the Administration incurred the displeasure of many who had previously benefited by lax procedures of former regimes, so it was no surprise that there were changes in some Council seats at the next election and that the manager system was abolished. But good practices had been established and, in general, they have been followed since then.

(This article is reprinted from *Bulletin Number Twenty One*)

Sebring Historical Society, January 1976. Pages 649-655.)

Reprint from the Highlands County News of August 3, 1939

**REFUND OF CITY DEBT SAVED TAXPAYERS OF SEBRING
\$ 7,640,000.00**

The refunding of the bond debt of the City of Sebring saved the taxpayers exactly \$ 7,640,000. Yes, gentle reader those figures are correct, exactly seven million six hundred and forty thousand dollars, and this is not a reporter's dream, but a statement of a certified public accountant, A. Gilbert Lester, city auditor, in a talk at the Lions Club luncheon Tuesday, stated that was the figure the audit shows.

Mr. Lester, who has been auditing the city books for several years was called on for an impromptu talk Tuesday at Lions Club and shocked the credulity of his listeners until he showed them how such a huge savings was made in the settlement of a \$ 4,800,000.

He pointed out that the fifty percent cut in the principal saved the tax payers \$ 1,404,00. The cut in interest coupons saved \$ 700,000. The saving on certificates of indebtedness if paid up at 20 cents on the dollar is \$ 560,000. The savings on difference of interest on the new bonds in comparison with the old bonds over a period of 30 years, \$ 3,776,000. Lastly, the potential saving of 90 percent on taxes and assessments due the city as of 1936, \$ 1,200,000.

It will be noted that in all the figures mentioned, Mr. Lester qualified only the last one by the word approximately or in any other way.

A local businessman after looking over the figures remarked that a BRONZE PLAQUE OF THE FIGURES SHOULD BE PUT ON A MONUMENT ON THE CIRCLE AND ANYONE WHO PROPOSED A BOND ISSUE IN THE FUTURE SHOULD BE MADE TO STUDY THE FIGURES EVERY DAY FOR A YEAR BEFORE THE ISSUE BE PUT TO A VOTE.

Mr. Lester, in continuing his talk, mentioned that building permits for the past month are more than at any time in the history of the town for the same period. He also mentioned that other towns had refunded at 100 cents on the dollar and some of them have already defaulted on interest payments on the refunding bonds.

Winter Haven is now staging a drive to collect taxes because of such a default in order to get in position to refund again at a lower interest rate, the speaker said. He concluded his talk with the statement that "Sebring has completed the best refund I have heard of."

From the Highlands County News, September 9, 1949

UTILITIES PAY LARGE SUM TO RUN CITY

The Sebring Utilities Commission paid the City of Sebring \$ 86,676.73 out of income derived from the operation of city-owned power, gas and water plants, for the fiscal year ended May 31, according to a report just issued. This money was used for operating expenses of the city including such items as garbage collection, fire and police protection, care of streets, parks and pier, and other expenses. Total income for the year was \$ 290,843.45.

In addition to the money turned over to the city, the Commission put \$ 43,140.17 in the sinking fund for replacements and expansion of city utilities. Of this amount, \$ 25,110.25 was spent for capital improvement, the report shows. Largest item of expense for operating was \$ 60,481.89 for diesel fuel and lubricating oil. Wages for operating the electric, water and gas plants, maintenance, meter reading and office were \$ 55,148.38.

Other items of expense were shown to be power plant repair parts \$ 7,993.64; other electric expense \$ 6,976.29; state utility tax \$ 3,396.79; butane \$ 13,475.98; other gas expense \$ 1,188.96; water expense \$ 1,460.31; office and meter reading expense \$ 3,941.12; and interest and insurance \$ 6,696.89.

The income dollar was divided as follows: City of Sebring 29.8 cents; diesel and fuel oil 20.8 cents; power plant repairs 2.7 cents; electric expenses 2.4 cents; state utility tax 1.2 cents; butane 4.6 cents; gas expense .4 cent; water expense .6 cent; office and meter reading 1.4 cents; interest and insurance 2.3 cents; sinking fund 14.8 cents; wages 19.0 cents.

(This article is reprinted from *Bulletin Number Thirty Six* Sebring Historical Society, April 1982. Pages 1030 & 1036.)



First Sebring Power Plant



Highlands Hammock State Park, Sebring, Florida



Chapter Eighteen

Highlands Hammock

As the Sebring Chamber of Commerce is planning an event to observe the 50th anniversary of the dedication of Highlands Hammock to public use as a park it might be appropriate to review the beginnings of the efforts to preserve the area. There can be no more authentic or accurate account than the one by Alexander Blair presented "at a meeting of representatives of Emergency Conservation Work and National Park Service," March 30, 1936. It should refresh the memories of those who were in Highlands County at the time and inform those who came later.

In this brief resume of the Hammock History no attempt is made to do justice to all that has transpired or to mention by name those who have done so much, in various ways, for the Hammock before it reached the present stage of its development.

About six years ago a small group from Avon Park and Sebring organized the Tropical Florida Parks Association with the purpose of acquiring "Hooker Hammock" (as it was then called) which was privately owned, and of preserving it as a natural forest for the benefit of the public. By a curious coincidence Mrs. Margaret Shippen Roebeling (Mrs. John A. Roebeling) was taking the only airplane trip she had ever made, with her son, Mr. Donald Roebeling, and saw the luxurious vegetation of the Hammock, while flying above it, en route to Sebring and at that time conceived the idea that the Hammock should be conserved, without knowledge of what had already been started. When invited by the Tropical Florida Parks Association, which was then soliciting funds to become one of the subscribers she was, therefore, quite ready to cooperate and offered a donation which was adequate to purchase the greater part of the land (some of the lands being offered as a gift by their owners). This enabled the other subscriptions raised, amounting to nearly \$ 10,000.00, to be used during the first two years for the expenses of a curator and a small maintenance force.

Owing to the financial stress existing it was soon obvious that the Trustees of the Tropical Florida Parks Association could not raise sufficient funds to carry out the necessary work in opening up the Hammock, nor to maintain it. At this point Mr. and Mrs. John A. Roebeling volunteered their assistance. They made funds available as required for opening up and making accessible the important points of interest in the Hammock proper, by the construction of roads and trails. (By the Hammock proper, wherever the term is used in this report, is meant the 500 acres lying within the heart of the Hammock property, comprising typical hammock growth). They made available funds which, in cooperation with those furnished by the County Commissioners, resulted in a paved road being constructed by the Commissioners from Lake Jackson up to the Hammock property, on the right-of-way existing (which at that time was laid out through the center of the Hammock). Recognizing that

such a road, if carried straight through, could be a violation of the spirit of the Hammock it was necessary to build this on a new right-of-way around the north edge of the Hammock proper to the northwest corner of the property at the Hardee County line.

Since Mr. and Mrs. Roebing had been so greatly impressed during their trip through Florida by the havoc and destruction to vegetation wrought by forest fires they provided funds for the protection of the Hammock from outside woods fires by means of fire breaks around an area of approximately 1300 acres (that is 4 half-sections) which was then enclosed by a wire and concrete post fence built to prevent damage due to cattle, hogs, etc. They made possible the further protection against fire and the safeguarding of the plant life by means of a water control system, which was designed to prevent damage due to erosion during storm periods, and in times of drought was to furnish a supply of water to the interior pond areas that would otherwise have been dry during the winter season, infinite care being taken to avoid disturbing ground water conditions so that no plant life would be injuriously affected thereby.

This water control system included the building of a main dam in Charlie Bowlegs Creek at the north line of the Hammock and also a number of smaller secondary dams in the tributary drainage ditch to break the continuity of flow in order to prevent erosion of the bottom and banks of the ditches. It also necessitated piping a stream of water into the Hammock proper from a constantly flowing stream in the higher lands to the east, (now the Botanical Garden and Arboretum property) sufficient to allow for normal evaporation loss from the ponds in the dry season. In all of this water control work there has been a limited amount of money available, necessitating great economy and even severity in design of such features as secondary dams and pipe lines. Limited funds also governed the work which was done on the County Road which it is now recognized should, in certain areas, ultimately be vacated and rerouted completely around the property so as to cut off through-traffic, which may be detrimental to the best interests of such a natural forest park. All work in the Hammock was done with a limited number of men over a period of about five years, serving as a project that would assist the County and the State in dealing with the unemployment problems, but without financial aid from any governmental sources.

All construction work in the Hammock was done with a view to disturbing as little as possible the natural wild beauty of the plant life; man-made improvements were introduced only where essential and with a view to harmonizing with their natural surroundings. The principle was established by the Roebing family that nothing exotic should be introduced into the Hammock proper (which was complete in itself), also that no structure be erected within it which would conflict with its natural beauty, and that the Hammock remain always a preserve for wild animal life.

Believing that "Hooker Hammock" did not carry a true significance, the Trustees, after the death of Mrs. Margaret Shippen Roebing and desiring to comply with her wishes that the Hammock be renamed "Highlands," reorganized in February 1932 under the name

of Highlands Hammock, Inc. Some months after Mrs. Roebing died the Trustees on March 13, 1931, held a service dedicating Highlands Hammock to the public. A bronze tablet was placed by the Trustees on a rock which now stands under one of the finest oak trees, as a fitting tribute to her memory. This tree was one of the three restored by tree surgery by Mr. Donald Roebing in memory of his mother.

During the carrying out of this program of gradual development the State Forester, after several visits, became keenly interested and conceived the idea that Highlands Hammock could fittingly be made the nucleus of a State Park. Believing that a State Park might properly incorporate other features than those found in the Hammock, the State Forester, with others, created enthusiasm in the formation of a Botanical Garden and Arboretum Association, and around the interest of the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs to sponsor such a project in property adjacent to and closely tying in to Highlands Hammock. This Botanical Garden and Arboretum Association was organized in April 1934, chiefly under the direction of certain members of the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs and by certain members of the Trustees of Highlands Hammock, Inc., with technical cooperation from noted botanists, landscape architects and others interested.

Consultation with Mr. Frederick Law Olmsted resulted in evolution of the idea for its development by the technical staff of the Florida Botanical Garden and Arboretum Association, and all these individuals and the groups named succeeded in securing Federal cooperation in this scheme through Emergency Conservation Work under the National Park Service.

The property selected as the nucleus of the Botanical Garden and Arboretum was then owned by Highlands Hammock, Inc., and was a section of land lying to the east of and adjacent to the Hammock. This was immediately deeded to the State of Florida in the name of the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund. By the suggestion of Mr. Olmsted and at the request of the Florida Botanical Garden and Arboretum Association, Highlands Hammock, Inc., deeded a further piece of property to the State for Botanical Garden and Arboretum purposes, consisting of a tongue-shaped strip of land which at that time lay inside the fenced area of Highlands Hammock, Inc., bounded on the west by Charlie Bowlegs Creek, on the south by the new road which was known as the County Road and on the north by the Highlands Hammock fence. A C.C.C. camp began work on this Botanical Garden and Arboretum project under the direction of ECW and the State Forester in June 1934.

During these negotiations and while work was being carried on in the Botanical Garden and Arboretum the final construction work in Highlands Hammock was completed, a total of about \$400,000 in all having been made available for purchase, construction and maintenance by members of the Roebing family. At the annual meeting of Highlands Hammock, Inc., on February 18, 1935, Mr. Roebing's responsibility for the upkeep of Highlands Hammock was formally relinquished by him and a sum of money was given to Highlands Hammock, Inc., to be used toward the maintenance costs during the next few

years, with the understanding that the Hammock would, at an early date, be taken over by the State of Florida as a State Park and that these funds would be made available to the State, to be used solely for maintenance purposes, in conjunction with monies to be appropriated by the State Legislature also for that purpose. These Trust funds were placed in the hands of a group of Trustees of Highlands Hammock with the State represented by certain members of the Florida Board of Forestry. The Florida Board of Forestry, an agency of the State, accepted the deed from Highlands Hammock, Inc., in July 1935, in accordance with the Act which, owing to the efforts of many interested, was unanimously passed by the State Legislature and approved June 4, 1935.

At the request of the Florida Board of Forestry the Board of Trustees of Highlands Hammock, Inc., has continued in existence, and in order that this Board might be more truly representative of all parts of the state, the number of Trustees was increased from 25 Trustees, as originally constituted to a total of 45, thus affording reasonable geographical representation to different parts of the state, with the purpose of widening the interest and use of the Park and securing greater support in legislative matters concerning it.

Highlands Hammock State Park is under the administration of the Florida Board of Forestry and operates under the direction of its park representative of the Board, the State Forester and the Director of the Florida Park Service. The Trustees of Highlands Hammock, Inc., have been requested by the Florida Board of Forestry to function in an advisory capacity so as to ensure wise and proper use of the Hammock and to retain responsibility for some of its useful activities, such as the conducting of Sunday Vesper Services throughout the winter season. These Vesper Services have become widely known largely because of the high quality of speakers who have participated in them during the past four seasons and the number of people attending these services has gradually increased.

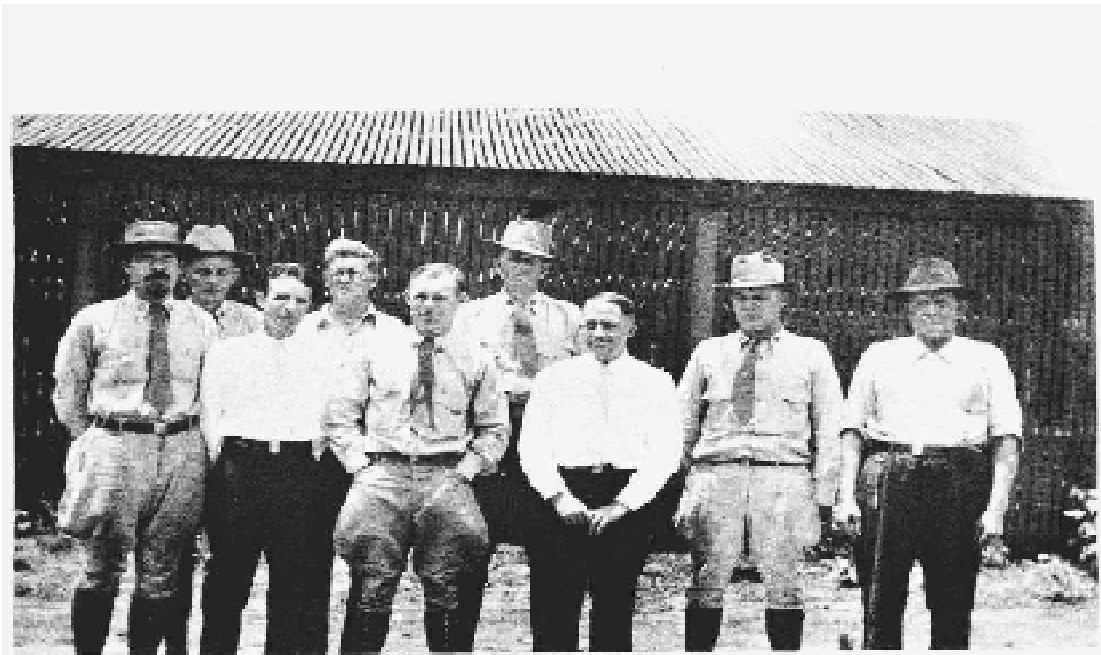
In carrying out the original idea of the State Forester, to which reference has already been made, of creating a State Forest Park considerably greater in magnitude than either of the two projects referred to in the foregoing, it was proposed that an encircling tract of about 50,000 acres (made available chiefly by delinquency of taxes) would serve to protect both these valuable properties. The idea of this park was acceptable to the Florida Forest Service and it was understood that it should be known as DeSoto State Forest Park, the property serving the public in a recreational manner. The acquisition of some of the lands in question has been completed by the consent of the owners, and with their cooperation.

It was recognized that there are problems common to all these three projects and because of their intimate relations, one to another, that the creation of an organization which would have power to consider and administer the related interests of all three projects in cooperation with and under the direction of the Florida Board of Forestry. In the meantime steps have been taken leading to the creation of a committee that shall be representative in its character of all three, being composed of Trustees selected by each respective body, given power to deal with the problems of each. It is suggested that the control of the ECW

funds and manpower might now be placed in the hands of the joint committee and that ultimately the whole park, composed of these three units, should function under one general directing organization and accept policies which would be for the best interests of the State and of all concerned.

ALEXANDER BLAIR
Civil and Construction Engineer.

(This article is reprinted from *Bulletin Number Twenty Seven*.
Sebring Historical Society, October 1979. Pages 827-831.)



CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL.

Left to right: James McFarlin, Botanist; Robert Mann, Engineer; Fred Ley, Clerk; J.P. Lightiser, Mechanic; Allen Altvater, Superintendent; Wm. Norris, Foreman; Wilbur Cornell, Architect; Lamont Wolff, Foreman; Tom Bass, Blacksmith.

(Not shown: George Hicks, Foreman and Clara I. Thomas, Landscape designer.)

Chapter Nineteen

“HOTSHOT”

Among the disappointments one suffers in advancing age, is the abandoning of dreams of adventures that are planned but never quite brought to fruition. One such dream that I pondered for a long time, was to enter a campaign for a political office with the hope that I would not be elected.

I had always felt that a candidate who called attention to his opponents' incompetencies and weaknesses should be soundly defeated so I wondered what public reaction would be if I would carefully evaluate an opponent and, from the stump, tell the electorate about the fact that he was better equipped and better qualified than I and that he would make a better official.

Where these thoughts originated, I will never know but I DO remember a remarkable campaign in which a young man ran for a seat on the county commission. He was not exactly what you would call shy but he was nervous so, before he mounted the stump, he bolstered his nerves with encouragement from a bottle (which his opponent's campaign manager thoughtfully provided). In fact he over-bolstered it but he had in mind the points he wanted to make.

Grasping the podium firmly, as a steady influence, he dove into his arguments. “One of the duties of a county commissioner is to oversee the building and maintenance of roads in his district. Now, I don't know anything about building roads but my opponent doesn't either. The commission hires professionals to build roads.

“Another duty is to set budgets and spend money. This is another subject that I could never understand but my opponent is no better at managing money than I am, Besides the commission has paid employees to manage this work.

“Setting building codes and restrictions is another phase that is supervised by the commission and about which I know very little but my opponent has had even less experience than I in this line but the commission appoints and hires an inspector to manage this.”

One by one, he ticked off the duties of a county commissioner, each time ending with the phrase, “I don't know *anything* about this but my opponent doesn't either. The County hires--”

He wound up his presentation by stating, “I am an old cracker boy, born and raised out there on the Kissimmee prairie. I need a job and I hope you folks will hire me.

They ALMOST did. It was a close race.

(This article is reprinted from *Bulletin Number Fifty Five*.
Sebring Historical Society, January 1975. Page 1377.)



1955 Sebring Grand Prix races



Aerial view of the 1966 races

Chapter Twenty

The Race

There is that delightful story of the description of an elephant by the three blind men who had approached the animal from different angles. The man who felt the trunk said it was a tree; the one confronted by the side was certain it was a rough wall, while the third man grasping the tail was just as sure it was a rope. This tale illustrates the reasonableness of differences in points of view in the “recollections of events.”

Mr. Alec Ulmann has published a very informative book which he titled “**The Sebring Story**” (1) which, from his angle of approach, is no doubt, entirely accurate but there are other angles which would have to be considered in order to give a more complete Sebring story. One of these angles dealt with the initial efforts to establish the race and the furnishing and conditioning of the physical property on which the race was run. There were times when, from this angle, prospects of running the race appeared like a rough blank wall.

Mr. Ulmann opens his narrative with events which took place in 1950 which was the date of the first running. He tells of the groundwork and the infighting that occurred in the various racing circles but he only touched lightly on the situation in Sebring in preparation for all the early events, and his text indicates that, at that time, he had as little interest or knowledge of local conditions as the local people had of the racing setup.

Approximately two years before the first race, two men who introduced themselves as Sam Collier and Phil Stiles, set their airplane down on the Air Terminal runway and asked for the manager. To their abrupt question as to whether the airport streets and runways could be made available for sports car racing, the manager (Allen Altvater) replied that a decision on this subject would have to be made by the City Council but, if they would outline their plans, he would gladly present them to the Council.

During a trip by auto over all the paved surfaces of streets, ramps and runways, they outlined their thinking which apparently had not reached any planning phase but was more in the nature of something they would like to get organized but, for the

(1) “**The Sebring Story**” by Alec Ulmann; Chilton Book Company, 1969.

purposes of getting permission to use the field, they proposed the following general ideas: a group of sports car owners (construed to include men of substantial means) wanted to promote races among themselves, by invitation only, not for money or prizes but merely for friendly competition. (In a jocular manner, one man mentioned the name of a wealthy person who is internationally known and who was known to boast about his cars. When the other man stated that this personage would accept an invitation but not show on race day, the opinion was voiced that if the famous person could be persuaded to post a \$10 entry fee, he would race just to protect his investment.

The original proposal would exclude any spectators but it was suggested that some steps would have to be taken to prevent people or animals from inadvertently straying onto the course because even if the affair was strictly private, there would be sufficient numbers of curious people to create a hazardous condition. To offset the costs of protection, the agreement was reached that, if a group could be found that would be responsible for policing the course, a gate fee could be charged but it was stipulated that those interested in the race wanted no part in the gate arrangements or protection measures but the local group would have no voice in the rules or the running of the race.

The format of this proposition was given to the Sebring City Council and its members indicated their approval. No immediate or definite action was taken to firm up the plans or to set up an organization but apparently Mr. Collier and Mr. Stiles talked to others including Mr. Ulmann and promoted quite a little interest.

In the meantime, the prospects were discussed around Sebring and it was agreed that the only organization with enough suitable personnel to handle a project of this nature would be the Sebring Firemen. They evidenced a strong interest and a willingness to sponsor the undertaking and the Chamber of Commerce offered its cooperation. In the fall of 1950, Mr. Stiles and Mr. George Huntoon returned to Sebring with some firm plans and the following memorandum from the airport management was sent to the City Council:

To the members of the City Council:

No doubt you will be asked in the near future for approval of an agreement to operate a road race on the Air Terminal on 31 December of this year, to be sponsored by Sebring Firemen, Inc. This is the same activity to which you gave your consent approximately two years ago and is under the

same management as that which has been operated for the past three years at Watkins Glen, New York, in the summertime.

It is our understanding that through the cooperation of Mr. C. D. Richardson of the American Industrial Sales Corporation, the sponsors will have adequate financing and man power to do all the work needed to actually run the race and I presume that some arrangements will be made to provide physical improvements that are needed to prepare for such an event. As you know, the finances of the Terminal will not permit any extensive expenditures at this particular time although we are prepared to do a certain amount of work which would be normally done at some time or other such as clearing the runways of weeds and the minor amount of repairs to streets. However, should work be necessary beyond which we would normally expect to do, we would not have the money for that purpose in our funds and arrangements would have to be made in some other manner. For the work which we would expect to do we would also have to ask for the use of our road repair equipment.

We would like to cooperate heartily with the Sebring Firemen in this venture as we have always believed that it would be of incalculable value to the town as a whole, not only from the point of view of furnishing much needed tourist entertainment but it would bring a great deal of money into the town to the hotels, restaurants, filling stations and garages at a time when they are not overcrowded.

It is also our understanding that such a race would give wide spread national publicity to the community from several different angles and it was planned for a date when many would be enroute to Miami for the New Year's game and would probably stop overnight here for this event. We see only a few disadvantages.

No doubt the general chairman of the event, Mr. Forest Howard, will approach the Council at an early date seeking permission to enter into a contract with the management and we would strongly recommend that such a contract be authorized subject to a provision to be made to hold the city harmless in the event of loss or accident.

For several reasons, the City Administration wanted to eschew any involvement in the race but did give the Firemen permission to use the property. And the Firemen, to a man, threw their energy into the project. They learned many valuable lessons. The first year's event was comparatively simple to handle as spectators were relatively few in number but even so, every member of the Firemen was needed to sell tickets, patrol the sidelines of the course and flag the corners. The patrolling was done by dozens of men in Jeeps and on horseback. For flagmen at each of the turns, the older and less active members were supplemented by personnel from the Chamber of Commerce.

Even though all operations were handled by strictly volunteer, non-paid people, the expenses exceeded the income by more than \$2,000 and the differential in the second race was even greater. As promised, Mr. Richardson absorbed a large part of these losses for which the Firemen voted him an honorary membership and he had his name on the program as an official.

Anyone making an estimate of the attendance at the first events would have been justified in thinking that the Firemen were making huge profits instead of sustaining a substantial loss. In making his report of receipts, Floyd Schumacher, the treasurer, stated that there were 2,800 paid admissions and an equal number of passes. The contestants and officials were the only ones authorized to issue passes for their pit crews and functionaries. How the racing fraternity fared financially is not known.

As Claude Richardson could not be expected to continue indefinitely as an “angel” for expenses, and as the funds of the Firemen were limited, a day of decision was reached. The work involved was arduous for at least a week before each event and race day was thoroughly exhausting - all in a losing financial battle so, a vote was taken by the Firemen to continue or discontinue sponsoring the race. A negative vote would have meant the end of the program because it was generally conceded around town that if the Firemen couldn’t make it go, no group could and, as the airport had sustained substantial losses and damage, there was slight chance that the government would look with favor on a similar operation in which the Firemen were not involved.

The motion to “try it one more year” carried by the slenderest margin.

One of the factors that influenced the negative votes of the dissidents was the perfectly miserable weather that followed the downpour described by Mr. Ulmann as the cause of delay of the start of the second race. A typical “cold front” moved in after the rain.

It was a balmy morning when the Firemen met at the airport before dawn to “sweep the field” of spectators who had come out earlier or the night before and who were hiding under warehouses or in the tall grass to avoid payment of the \$1.00 admission. So they were totally unprepared with warm clothes when the cold moved

in. As there were not enough Firemen to relieve those on patrol and flagmen on the curves, these men could not leave their posts so, by the midnight end of the race, they had nothing but unpleasant impressions.

At that hour, it would have been impossible to find a single vote in favor of a third race!

(This article appeared in the Sebring Historical Society,
Bulletin Number Eighteen, January 1975. Pages 589-592.
Also published in *Olio*, January 1979.)

From Trivia, October 1985, pg. 18

**From the minutes of the Sebring Firemen, Inc.,
meeting of November 3, 1950**

Chief Howard reported on Auto Races we hope will be held at Hendricks Field under the sponsorship of the Department. After a lot of discussion a motion was made by Fred Baguley and seconded by Ray Graddy that a committee be appointed to work out the necessary details pertaining to putting on the races. Motion carried.

F. Howard, Ford Heacock, Bill Mackey, Bob Butts, C. E. Weaver, A. C. Altvater and Jim Fulton were appointed by the president to do all the work in connection with putting on the race. The committee was given a unanimous vote of confidence.

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