

*Marjory Stoneman Douglas talks about Governor Bloxham's attempt to clear out peaty muck in Everglades*

Marjory Stoneman Douglas: You can see from this map, as Dr. DeGrove said, the attempts to drain the Everglades began, actually, about 1881, when Governor Bloxham, the first Republican...oh well, let's not go into that. Maybe he was Democrat. Can't remember. Was he a Republican or a Democrat? First Democratic governor since the Reconstruction, I guess that was it. Called in Disston and asked him to do something about the flooding, with the way the waters flooded down the Kissimmee, into Lake Okeechobee, the headwaters of the Caloosahatchee. And Disston put in a couple of little canals, I'm a little vague, some canals that destroyed a little lake Flirt that disappeared as a result of that, and some kind of canal work on the mouth of the Kissimmee that I've been vague about, but anyway, he was given half of all the lands he was supposed to drain, and he couldn't even sell it in those days, so he went bankrupt. He couldn't do anymore. So it wasn't until 1906 under Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, who'd run for governor, under the slogan of "Draining the Everglades." It wasn't until 1906 that the first drainage canal was run up from Ft. Lauderdale to Lake Okeechobee. The North New River Canal and the South New River Canal and after that you can see all the canals. It's like a plumbing chart. The whole idea was to get rid of the water; from the overflow water, from the Okeechobee and particularly from the agricultural area. Now the south of Okeechobee, I hope I am pointing to the lake, but you can see it anyway. All the way to the southern part of the lake...in the early days before man, there was a band of tropical jungle trees; bald cypress and willow and pond apple and all that, and in the course of 7,000 years, they had laid down the spilt of their leaves and the rotting of their roots and bark, so that there was a mound of thirty feet of peaty muck immediately around the Lake extending a mile or so south. That was rich-looking black soil, that's what Governor Broward said was the richest land in the country, all you had to do was put a bushel of it in your garden and that would act as fertilizer. Well, the Governor was nuts: there's no fertilizer in it, there's no nourishment in it. It's like this stuff peat moss that you use for planting things in pots. It holds water and nothing else. So the minute they put the first canals up around the Lake, they chopped down all those jungle trees and began to put agriculture and then sugar on that mound of peaty muck around the Lake. The result of that has been that in the years of cutting the trees and sawgrass off, and letting the sun get on the peaty muck. And the fires, of which particularly have to get the sugar fields ready for harvesting so that the fires that burn into the

peaty muck, that thirty feet of peaty muck has disintegrated until now it's only about five feet and the question is; 'What are they going to do, after that is gone?' They're not going to be able to raise sugar around the lower part of the Lake. I'll talk about more of that in a minute. The whole idea was to develop it for agriculture, without any idea at all if any development, agricultural or urban, that would interfere with the sheet flow, was interfering with the water supply of all South Florida.