

First in Palm Beach

By LOUIS CAPRON

You remember, of course, the story of Lang, the Confederate deserter, and the beginnings of Palm Beach. J. Wadsworth Travers opened with it in his "History of Beautiful Palm Beach", and it has always been the traditional genesis.¹ This is Mr. Traver's version:

"It was in 1867 that Palm Beach had its beginning. . . . In October of 1867, George W. Sears of Miami made a trip to Indian River in a 'sharpie' and returning, managed to enter a small opening between the ocean and the lake, near where the inlet now is. He sailed past a point where the Cluett home now stands, and seeing a man standing by a palmetto tree, went ashore to investigate. He learned that the fellow was a deserter from the Confederate army and that he had a pal named Matthews, though the latter was away at the time. He was surprised to hear that the war had ended two years before. Upon Captain Sears return home, he told Charlie Moore of the beautiful lake he had discovered and Moore and a companion immediately secured a dory and provisions and set sail for the lake. Arriving at their destination, they looked everywhere for Lang, the deserter, but he had vanished.

"Moore liked the place and decided to make it his home, but his companion concluded that there were too many snakes and wild animals, so he returned to Biscayne Bay. Moore later took up a homestead and it is upon this land that the first church in Palm Beach — the Episcopal — was erected."

Moore is supposed to have appropriated the dwelling deserted by Lang, the Confederate deserter. And it has always been supposed that, learning the war was over and that it was safe for him to return, Lang had headed back to his former home. But it wasn't so and Lang wasn't very far away — that is, as distances are today.

¹ J. Wadsworth Travers, *History of Beautiful Palm Beach*, (Palm Beach 1928).

In 1871, "The Florida Gazetteer", compiled and published by J. M. Hawkes, M. D., New Orleans, 1871, 214p, contained the itinerary of a party that had travelled down the East Coast of Florida in 1870. This was republished in the *Florida Historical Quarterly* in October, 1939 and January, 1940, and shows the lack of communication in those days and explains why Moore lost track of Lang.

"JUPITER LIGHTHOUSE — Here is the end of your boat travel inside . . . The family of the lighthouse-keeper, although quite social at their own house, very rarely make afternoon calls, after the manner of townspeople. They had not even called on Mrs. Gleason, their next door neighbor, to the south, although they had lived so near for three years — only a hundred miles, and four creeks and rivers to ford.

"From the top of the lighthouse may be seen Lake Worth, seven miles south. . . . Lang, who until 1868 lived alone on an island in that lake, knows of a short haulover where boats can be taken from a branch of Jupiter across into the lake."

And further on:

"LAKE WORTH, on our right, was formerly a fresh lake, but Lang wanted a private inlet of his own, so he cut a canal a hundred paces, through the beach, and let in the salt water. Then he had a 'pretty kettle of fish', for the water became salt and the fish all died, and floating ashore died by cartloads, making such a stench that Lang had to clear out to find clearer air. And so this inlet for awhile made a salt water bay, the favorite resort of myriads of fish from the sea. But on a certain unlucky day a few months before our visit there, a relentless northeaster had closed up Lang's cut with quicksand, and lo! the incoming creeks are changing the waters of the lake to fresh again; which process in its turn kills the salt water fish, and thousands of them were floating, or lodged along the shore, in every stay of decay, and scenting the air for miles. . . .

"Our first night on the beach was near Lang's Island, and our larder was replenished from his four acre potato patch, which was running wild."

So *that's* why Lang left! But where was Charlie Moore? And now hang on to your hats, the most fantastic part of the story is still to come!

In 1873, the publishers of *Forest and Stream*, a sportsman's magazine, sent an expedition to Florida to explore the region around Lake Okeechobee and report on the routes thither and the hunting and fishing. It started about December 1, 1873 and was headed by Mr. F. A. Ober, a young naturalist of Massachusetts. They were gone about four months, and Ober wrote several papers about it under the pseudonym of "Fred Beverly." These were published, with other similar articles, in *Camp Life in Florida, A Handbook for Sportsmen and Settlers*, compiled by Charles Hallock, in 1876.

In these articles, Ober confined himself strictly to matters of interest to "sportsmen and settlers," but in 1887 he wrote a book for boys entitled *The Knockabout Club in the Everglades*. In it he incorporated a grim and grisly who-done-it which may explain the final disappearance of Lang. It is the story of two boys who are on an exploring expedition to Lake Okeechobee. They reach Fort Pierce, and the story continues:²

"The trading post at Fort Pierce was to have been placed at our disposition; but the man in charge wanted a day to move out, and so we waited, not removing anything from our boats. About midnight a small boat came off to us stealthily, and the boatman in it awoke us with the startling intelligence that a murder had been committed ashore, and we were needed to join the force of residents who were going out to hunt up the murderers.

* * *

"The circumstances attending the murder were these: Two young men ('crackers') named Drawdy and Padgett came up to the cabin of a Mr. Lang, a German, who had started a nursery some miles from the lagoon, in the pine woods. After taking dinner with him, they requested him to set them across the creek in his boat. He complied, taking them over the creek, about an eighth of a mile from his house; and at about the same time he should have landed them, his wife (at the house) heard the report of fire-arms, since which he hadn't been seen. That was two days before our arrival, but his distracted wife had just got to the lagoon with the news as we reached Fort Pierce. There were very few people in this section, the sheriff was nearly one hundred miles away, and it really looked — as one of the men who brought the news declared — as if there were no law in this country at all.

² F. A. Ober, *The Knockabout Club in the Everglades: The Adventures of the Club in Exploring Lake Okeechobee* (Boston 1887). citing pp. 90, 93, 94, 96, 100, 126.

“We were all much excited. Everybody said it was outrageous, and that something should be done; but nobody was ready to take the lead, and so the murderers went at liberty, defying the law.”

* * *

“We — that is, Sally Osceola, Billy, Jimmy, and Jarneky — then said good-by to my partner, the Antiquarian, and trudged over the sand hills into the pine forest. Late in the afternoon we reached the only cabin on the trail, the house said to contain the men who had shot Mr. Lang. There was nothing to do but to stop there a while, as the trail led right by their garden, though our camping-place for the night was four miles beyond.

“The owner of the cabin, Jernigan, I had known two years before, when he had led me off into the forests with the intention (as I afterwards believed) of losing me there and appropriating my ‘plunder.’ He was an evil-appearing man, with a black-looking face half hidden by a rusty beard, and always carried a gun over his arm. He hailed me with apparent joy, and introduced me to young Drawdy, one of the suspected murderers, — a simple-looking, not ill-favored young man.

“While I was drying my clothing — for I had forded a creek a mile above — this young man came into the house and got his gun, drawing out the buckshot, seventeen in number, from the barrel, and then firing off the powder. *The other barrel was empty!* The significance of this lies in the fact that with this gun he had shot the German, and had not reloaded it since, as was later proved when he was captured.

“Jernigan tried to make himself agreeable, and was eager for news from the lagoon, saying he had heard that Mrs. Lang was at Fort Pierce trying to get a posse out to search for the slayers of her husband. He was anxious to know if anything would be done, and particularly inquired if Mr. Stewart, the sheriff, had arrived. He said he didn’t know much about Mr. Lang, but had heard that he was a mighty bad man. ‘They do ’low round here,’ he explained, ‘thet he hed been taken with *heart disease*, and crawled off and died. It’s a right smart sudding disease, and persons has ofting been tuk with it, specially sich as Lang, which shoots our cattle when they feel like it.’

“It was apparent that he knew something of the murder, if he had not been concerned in it; and I thought that my best policy (at least for the

time being) was a non-committal one. I realized that I had unsuspectingly stepped into a nest of serpents, and heartily wished myself back at Indian River. But it would not do to recede, and so I went on with my Indian friends.

“At Ten-mile Creek, four miles beyond, the sun went down as Billy was making our camp-fire.”

* * *

“. . . let us retrace my trail now, in order to finish my account of the doings of Jernigan and his crew.

“It was nearly a week later when, having finished my exploration of the country to be traversed with the boat, I returned to Indian River. I had a guide to a point within twenty miles of the lagoon, and thence went on alone, as the trail was well marked, though nearly ten miles of the distance was under water, through which I waded half knee-deep. At about mid-afternoon I reached Alpattiokee Creek, where we had first camped, and arrived at Jernigan’s cabin ‘an hour by sun,’ or just before sunset.

“Jernigan and all the men were out hunting, his wife said; but she gave me a good supper, and then, in spite of her earnest appeals to stay till after her husband’s return, I went on towards the coast. It was then seven miles to the lagoon. Two miles beyond was Five-mile Creek, which was a very bad piece of water to cross, and I wished to get to the other side of it before dark. So I was walking swiftly on, at the very top of my speed, and had almost reached it, when I heard a whistle near me. Looking around, I saw Jernigan and Drawdy approaching, on horseback; while two other men could be seen slinking off into the distant woods. They said they had been out hunting; but they were heavily armed and came from the direction of St. Lucie Prong, where stood the dwelling of Mr. Lang! They rode close up to me, and urged me to go back with them to the cabin. I held my rifle carelessly in the hollow of my arm, but it was quite ready for action in case of any suspicious movement on their part; and so I stood, half at bay, while they seemed to be making up their minds what course to pursue.

“Jernigan was the man I wished to engage to take my boat across country to Lake Okeechobee, as he had the only oxen and cart-wheels in this section of the country. He was very willing to do it, as I made him a

liberal offer, but was afraid to go into Fort Pierce to get the boat. If I would meet him at the creek, he would engage to carry my party the whole distance. This I could not do, and he finally agreed to go in for the boat in ten days' time, as he first had 'right smart of planting to do;' but I was to treat him squarely, and not say anything to his hurt, for he had heard 'how them Indian River fellers spicioned' him and his partners of the Lang affair.

"Then I said good-by, and pushed on again, as they turned about and made towards their cabin. It was then quite late, and night was already spreading its gloom over the swamps as I reached the hammock bordering the creek, and walked over the slender poles across it in fear and trembling. Ah! but it was gloomy above that deep alligator hole, into which a single misstep would have plunged me!

"It was fairly dark as I waded the 'branch' struck off across the marshy plain, and pushed on into the woods. Just before darkness obstructed the view, I glanced back, and saw something that made my blood tingle with anticipatory danger. I saw the four men I had left behind me circling to right and left — two on each side, as if to flank my course and head me off before I could reach the lagoon.

"Nothing has since occurred to justify me in the surmise that they intended to cut off my retreat and put me out of the way, as one possessing dangerous information against them, except some dark hints from Jernigan, two weeks later, that I nearly lost the 'number of my mess' that night.

"The people at the Fort (Fort Pierce) had collected quite a number of facts regarding the murder, forming indeed a perfect chain of circumstantial evidence against the two Drawdys and Padgett, with Old Jernigan as accomplice. The sheriff had been here, but was afraid to act, as Jernigan and his friends were reported strongly intrenched in their cabin and had threatened to shoot every man coming out to arrest them.

"To complete the episode (which occurred several years ago), let me insert an extract from a Florida newspaper of two years later, which was sent me while absent from home in the West Indies. Jernigan had often said to me that he would never be taken alive, and it seems by this account that it was no idle boast. The following is the extract:

A Murderer Killed. — Information has been received from Fort Thompson, Manatee County, saying that Elias Jernigan, one of the murderers of O. A. Lang, was killed near that place on the 18th of January, by a posse who were attempting to arrest him. The facts in relation to the murder of Mr. Lang are written by Mr. C. S. Williams, and published in the 'Union.' Mr. Williams, in the course of a long sojourn in the Indian River country, became acquainted, we believe, with Mr. Lang, who, in some respects, was an odd genius. He says: 'Mr. O. A. Lang was a shrewd German gardener, educated and accomplished in his business, and well versed in botany and other scientific studies. He came to this country about ten years since, and some eight years ago settled with his family on Lake Worth, Dade County, Florida. Here he lived a solitary life, having no neighbors nor associates, except a few "beach-combers," or "wreckers," and some straggling Seminoles; introducing foreign plants and cultivating vegetables and fruits about six years. He it was who opened the communication between the Atlantic Ocean and Lake Worth, since become noted as the subject of a claim by W. H. Gleason under his contract with the state for ditching, — Gleason claiming that Lang did it in his employ. While living here, Lang made careful and thoroughly scientific examinations of the fauna and flora of that section, and prepared several books of preserved foliage as specimens, with botanical descriptions attached. Wearied of his monotonous life, he removed to a location on the St. Lucie River, some twenty miles or more from its mouth, where he established a home, and finally secured a title to a tract of land, part of which was on an island in the river, and there he made a clearing, and planted various tropical fruits, etc., but for some reason he acquired the enmity of his neighbors — if families living several miles distant can be called neighbors, and it was reported that he was in the habit of shooting their hogs and cattle. Whether this was true or not, or whether it was but a pretext for getting rid of him, is uncertain, but one morning, about two years since, two men came to his house, pretending to be hunting horses. They were known to him, living not far away, and he took them in to breakfast, gave them such information as he could, and finally put them across the river in his boat, when they shot and killed him — his wife distinctly hearing the shots. His body was sunk in the river, but it rose after a few days, and was cut in pieces by the murderers, and the parts stuffed into alligator holes. Subsequent developments revealed the fact that four men were connected with the murder, of whom the Jernigan above-mentioned was one. Some were arrested, and one is now in prison for the crime; the others left the country. Mrs. Lang, with her two or three children, abandoned their plantation, and is said to be living with relatives near New Smyrna. The improvements have gone to ruin, although sugar-cane, bananas, and other fruits are growing there, to be

gathered only by wandering Indians and stray hunters. For several years Lang kept a diary, which is said to be in the possession of a resident of Indian River, and contains much that would be of value to citizens and fruit-growers if it were published.’”

Finally, a quote from the *Tallahassee Sentinel* of Feb. 28, 1874, appears to confirm this version of the Lang story.

“*Murder in Brevard County.* About the first of this month A. Long (sic) living on Five-mile creek, near the St. Lucie River, was decoyed from his house and killed by Thomas Daughtrey and Allen Padgett. It is supposed he was murdered for his money. Our correspondent says the country is infested with lawless characters. The notorious Green, who murdered Griffin on the Halifax about two years ago, is living in the neighborhood where Long was killed.”

But Ober did not have the whole of the fantastic story. An earlier trip to Florida in 1872 had convinced him that the only way to reach Lake Okeechobee and explore it, was by boat. So he had a light boat of shallow draught built and brought it with him in 1874. He collected his party at Fort Capron “Though I had undertaken the exploration alone and unaided, when the final start was made my party included five persons besides myself and the two drivers. . . . The Professor had come to me recommended by the leading naturalist of America. He was a valuable acquisition, erudite and companionable, The Doctor, his friend, was an indefatigable collector and naturalist, who had visited nearly every Indian tribe in North and South America, and had much experience in tropical countries. Two students accompanied them, fresh from college and enthusiastic. But the mighty man of valor was a Dutchman, whom we will call Van Buster, whose only aim in life seemed to be to see strange sights and lands, and report thereon.”

The “Professor” was John Whipple Potter Jenks of Brown University in Providence. He was collecting material for the University museum. His notes of the expedition were not published until 1887, when they provided a series of six articles in the November and December issues of *Forest and Stream*, under the title, “Hunting in Florida in 1874.”³ The following year he had a booklet printed under that title for complimentary distribution. It

³ J. W. P. Jenks, *Hunting in Florida in 1874*, A collection of Articles from *Forest and Stream*, Vol. 29: 323-325, 344-345, 362, 384-385, 402-403, 424-425 November and December 1872) citing pp. 12 & 23ff.

corroborates Ober's story and adds the fascinating detail that Mr. J. "promised his daughter in marriage to "a young man of nineteen, whom we will call Tom," if the deed should be carried out successfully. The "Professor" was present at the wedding.

His meeting with Ober is described by Jenks as follows —

"At 4 P.M. we landed at Fort Capron, the projected base of our swamp operations. Stepping from the boat, a Yankee explorer [Ober] bound also to Lake Okeechobee, grasped my hand, and in a trice told me that he had brought out a sail-boat all the way from New York City, with the intention of having it carried across the country, sixty miles, by an ox-team, to Fort Bassinger, on Kissimie River, down which he proposed to navigate it till it should usher him into the lake, and, moreover, he was only waiting to make up a party of four, having already secured one. Here was a dilemma. The addition of my party would make the number six, while the utmost capacity of the boat would accommodate but four. It was, however, quickly decided that we should all go to the river together, and then mature our plans according to circumstances. To secure the services of an ox-team and driver, the "Explorer" and Erwin volunteered a tramp of ten miles to the cabin of a "cracker" who was understood to be able to furnish the team. On their return the following day they reported themselves successful, and Saturday fixed upon as the date of departure, the "cracker" engaging to take the boat and all luggage to the river at the point designated for forty dollars.

"As the day of our departure drew near, I was informed that we should pass through a settlement of outlaws, ten miles distant, every man of whom had left his native region for that region's good, and located himself outside of "law and gospel" just over the frontier line of civilization. The owner of our team was accounted a leader among them, and by way of cautioning me, my informant related, under the promise of secrecy, the particulars of a murder, within three weeks, by two of the gang, of an honest, industrious German, who had made for himself a home just outside of their settlement. He being a man of education and some degree of refinement, not affiliating with them, and, withal being envied the possession of a better orange plantation than they had, though wholly the result of his own industry, it was decided to get rid of him on the damning charge of being a stealer and killer of cattle. Among Floridian "crackers" this is a far more heinous crime than that of taking human life, and once fastened upon a man, if only on suspi-

cion, immediately puts him out of the protection of such law as may exist. Finding their victim could not be driven away, their usual resort to treachery was adopted, and the deed committed to two desperate ruffians, one a young man of nineteen, whom we will call Tom, and who will figure largely in the sequel of this narrative. To him, as the story was told me, our team owner promised his daughter in marriage, if successful. At first, every effort was made to provoke a quarrel that would give some shadow of excuse for the execution of their plot; but the imperturbably good nature of the honest German would not beguile him into a dispute. At length under the pretext of desiring some orange-slips from his excellent grove, they called at his cabin and asked for dinner. Both dinner and slips were cheerfully given them, and then requesting their host to set them across the deep creek about a quarter of a mile from his house, he went with them for the purpose, but did not return. Soon after leaving, his wife heard four gun and three pistol shots in quick succession; but surmising they were fired at game, waited till near dark for her husband's return, and then repaired to the creek, only to be horrified by the sight of blood in the boat still securely fastened on the other side. It was subsequently proven that the assassins sought to cover up the evidence of their guilt by dragging the body a half mile below, and thrusting its desmembered fragments into alligator holes. The wife, snatching up her young child, traversed the gloomy wilderness for ten miles, at the dead of night, to Fort Capron and reported the deed. The following week the sheriff of the county with a posse of ten men, started for the settlement with the intention of arresting the guilty parties. When within five miles of it he was met by a delegation informing him that his design was known, and the whole neighborhood was assembled in one cabin with plenty of arms and provisions, and ready to endure a siege, but no one could be arrested while a man or woman remained alive. Under these circumstances and considering "discretion the better part of valor," the sheriff beat a hasty retreat. Thus the matter stood two weeks subsequent, as I was about to enter the community, my informant closing up his narration with the remark that he felt it his duty to let me know the character of those to whom I was about to trust myself and my party, but cautioned me on no account to breath a suspicion of any one or reveal the secret to either of my companions, lest it might be suspected by the outlaws that we had some knowledge available to the government, and, on the principle that "dead men tell no tales" find our last resting place in concealed alligator holes, even if their cupidity should permit us to return from the swamp after they had fleeced us to the

extent we might permit. Forewarned, forearmed, I the more persistently determined to penetrate the mystery and walk the strand of Lake Okeechobee."

In crossing Five Mile Creek, a wheel broke, and after considerable delay the party reached the teamster's cabin with their belongings. There they were told that the load must be lightened. "Fred and myself volunteered to remain, while Doctor P. and Erwin insisted upon advancing." However, "Just before they were ready to start, the Teamster came to me and said he had in the woods another pair of steers that six months before had been yoked. These Tom would catch and with a light cart take the luggage of Fred and myself on the morrow . . . a neighbor had left a boat at the fort, in which he would take Fred and myself to the lake and back to the fort in one day, while the oxen were resting. Then we would return to his cabin together." However, after various delays they met the Teamster returning with the ox-cart, who reported there was no boat at the fort and it was sixty miles from there to the lake, so they returned to the cabin together.

"As suggested by Tom, towards sundown of the day following our return I observed men, women and children gathering at the cabin, mostly on foot, but some on horseback and others in ox-carts. At length a man rode up of graver mien and with horse more richly caparisoned than any other I had seen. Soon Mr. J. brought him to my tent, and taking me aside said, "This man is a justice of the peace, and has come sixty miles to marry Tom to my daughter to-night, but there is a hitch in the arrangement, as last week's mail has failed to bring the license sent for. . . . Now what do you advise, as the justice cannot wait two weeks for another mail, and my neighbors for ten miles around are all gathered to witness the ceremony? As the malfeasance would be wholly on the part of the justice, inasmuch as should he perform his part with their consent, they would be legally married to all intent and purpose, it was finally decided that Mr. J. and Tom should give the justice a written obligation, with myself as witness, to send him the certificate as soon as possible, which document they both signed by making their mark, after I had assured them it was written correctly. Nothing further hindering, Tom and his bride took position on the platform connecting the two rooms of the log cabin, while the justice pronounced them, without any questioning or pledging, husband and wife. Tom had exchanged his teaming suit for a similar one, only more cleanly, and his bride contented herself with plain calico without ornaments of any kind, but with shoes and stockings — the

first time I had seen her wear any. After the ceremony, the bride's mother and grandmother stepped up and shook hands without kissing, and were followed by her father without coat or vest, shoes or stockings, but with shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows, and his pants to his knees. After a long pause, I considered it my turn to shake hands with them, though, with all my knowledge of their antecedents, and at how fearful a price Tom had gained his bride, I could hardly bring my mind to congratulate them upon their union. The ice broken, there was a rush for handshaking, after which Mr. J. brought out a fiddle with two strings and called for dancing. Unable to aid in this part of the festivity, I soon retired to my tent, though disturbed till daylight with the music and toe-tripping."

"I have learned from newspapers," the Professor says in his concluding pages, "that soon after I left the region a determined sheriff went into the settlement with a posse, and shot Mr. J. dead in his tracks while resisting arrest, but brought Tom to trial, who was, for the want of positive evidence, convicted only of manslaughter, and died within a year in the State prison."

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"Less than a year after," the professor adds in concluding this account, "I found the following in the *Boston Transcript*, but by whom written I know not, nor, through correspondence with true men in the vicinity of Fort Capron, have I been able to obtain other than conflicting accounts of the arrests and trials.

Now that spiritualism is being brought so prominently forward, it is interesting to learn, from the Chicago Tribune, that an ingenious attorney in Florida was the first person to discover a practical value in it. His client, Tom Drawdy, was accused of murdering one Lang, and the jury was composed of eight colored and four ignorant white men. There was no doubt of the murder; there was no flaw in the evidence. But the counsel found one. He maintained that no proof of Lang's death had been given and, in all probability, he was still hiding to obtain revenge. This made a commotion, but the main argument was yet to come. The gentlemen of the jury had heard that spirits were very common all over the North; that some had even been heard of in St. Augustine. Supposing the jury brought in a verdict of guilty and hanged an innocent man, what could they expect but that his spirit would haunt them through life, appearing with staring eyes and clammy tongue, the death damp on his hands and the horrors of the tomb round about him? Of course they must take the responsibility, and they did, by acquitting Tom Drawdy forthwith.

There is another version of this fantastic trial in *Historical, Industrial and Commercial Data of Miami and Fort Lauderdale, Dade County, Florida,* by F. W. DeCroix, published about 1911.

“August Lang was an old German, and rumor has it that at one time he was gardener of the German Emperor. . . . A sad ending came to this honorable old man. (He) moved his family from the Lake Worth district, and settled up on the ‘Ten Mile Creek’, just above White City, in St. Lucie County. One day the old man was missing. Search was made, but to no avail, he could not be found. One day a man named Hendry told a story that paralyzed the country. In a quarrel amongst Lang, Drawdy, and a man named Padgett, Drawdy and Padgett killed Old Man Lang, and cut up his body and placed it in some alligator holes, the ’gators destroying the corpse. Young Hendry had witnessed the killing, and the two murderers so frightened him that he became insane over the tragedy, but before losing his mind, he revealed the facts and the two were brought to trial. In those days there were no white men available for jury duty, and the two were tried by negroes.

“They were brought to Ocala, and received a sentence of eight years. Now comes the part where the attorney for the murderers had his share in the history of this case. The negroes who were jurors in the trial of Drawdy and Padgett, naturally superstitious, were affected to a considerable degree by stories of ghosts, hobgoblins and such. The least mention of the dead was sufficient to cause a stampede of all the negro race in the country, whether they were in court or in church. The wiley attorney for the defense, in a moment when the jurors were about to announce sentence, sprang up with a shout and with fear upon his features, with a long bony forefinger pointing to the trembling blacks, shouted, ‘You want to hang these men? Why, their ghosts will come back and haunt you for the rest of your days!’ That settled it, with the sentence and frightened screams mingled together, they rushed from the building, and scattered broadcast. One authority states that some of the blacks are running yet.”

The reason, of course, that white jurors were scarce, was that most of the white residents of suitable age, had fought in the Confederate army and were still un-reconstructed — and, therefore, not citizens.

It would be a shame not to include in this collection, a letter in the Tri-Weekly Florida Union of Saturday, Sept. 12, 1874, not only because it sheds new light on law-enforcement of the day, but even more because of its transcendent prose.

A Dastardly Murder

Titusville, Fla., Sept. 5th, 1874

To the Editor of the Union:

Sir: Some time since this section of the State was thrown into intense excitement over the report of the most dastardly and brutal murder ever committed and under the most atrocious circumstances. The facts were immediately communicated to Governor Stearns, who has taken every step in his power, as the Executive of the State to bring the chief actor of this horrible crime to condign and speedy punishment. In order that the readers of this article may not be confounded in the locality of this outrage, I will simply state, that this murder was committed on four mile creek, near the extreme southern end of Brevard county, a stream running into the St. Lucie river, which empties into the St. Lucie sound, one hundred and twenty-five miles south of this place. The victim of this complicated and revolting murder was a German, by the name of A. Lang, who, with his young wife, had sought out this remote locality for the purpose of horticultural pursuits, it being below the frost line. A man of science and education. As a botanist he had no equal, having at one time been the chief gardener to the King of Saxony. It was here, whilst surrounded only by his wife, engaged in the introduction of rare flowers, as well of the different varieties of choice tropical fruits, foregoing all the luxuries and comforts of life — he was struck down without a moments warning by the hand of the assassin, under circumstances so revolting, and so cowardly that it created terror and awe in the heart

of every good and law abiding citizen. One Allen Pagett, and one Thomas Drawdy, with others unknown, concocted a plan for his destruction. Under the garb of friendship they went to Lang's house, and after receiving his kind and generous hospitality, they requested him to set them across the river, which he cheerfully complied with — having no idea or conception of foul play — he went into the boat unarmed, whilst Pagett and Drawdy carried each a double-barrel shot gun, but a few moments had elapsed, when the sharp crack of several guns was heard at the landing, and A. Lang passed from this life to eternity. Not satisfied with their foul and hellish murder, in order to hide their crime from the face of man, they placed weights to his mangled corpse and sank it into the St. Lucie river, in a secluded spot, under the mangroves. "But murder will out." The spirit of A. Lang, with the shattered trunk once more came to the surface — it would not stay down; and then in the clear light of Heaven, without a witness, save that all-seeing eye, in order to blot the record out, of their cold and unrelenting act, they drag his body ashore, and then commenced one of the most horrible debaucheries of barbarism ever known in any civilized country. With their knives and axes they chopped the body into pieces, and with long sticks put the remains into the alligator holes under the banks of the St. Lucie river. Their bloody and most damnable work did not awe them, After a lapse of time, Mr. Lang not returning, his wife almost frantic with grief, knowing but too well the meaning of the firing of those guns, left her home with an old woman by the name of Betsey, and went into Fort Pearce, a distance of ten miles. Gathering some friends, they returned, and instead of finding her beautiful rural home, it was a sad waste. Those lawless men had destroyed it all — plants, flowers, and thousands of fancy trees, were either pulled up or cut down, and the work of years destroyed in a single hour. You may ask why is this?

Why are not the laws put into execution? I will tell you. The Governor of Florida has found it impossible to find persons to accept his appointments, and the county being sparsely settled, the settlers being more or less in constant dread of these lawless men, not knowing at what moment they might share the same fate of A. Lang. But thanks to Governor Stearns and his prompt action in this matter, and through Hon. John Price, Judge of this district, in the absence of county offices in Brevard County, the High Sheriff, Arthur Speer, and the High Sheriff, Kit Hart, of Orange and Volusia counties, with a strong posse of men with Bench warrants, proceeded to arrest this gang. They returned with Thomas Drawdy, have placed him in strong irons and ere this reaches you the ringleaders will be in the Orange county jail, and it is to be hoped for the sake of this progressive and civilized age in which we live these men may be hanged, and the law vindicated. Now let J. B. C. Drew, U. S. District Attorney do his duty, under complaint in regard to robbing stranded vessels &c, on this coast, and this beautiful country will soon be the pride of every Floridian.

Yours, ARIZONA.

Tri-Weekly Florida Union.

Saturday, Sept. 12, 1874

But if we are going back into the origins in the Palm Beaches, Lang is recent. This garden spot has probably always been a chosen living place of man except during its periodic subsidences under the sea. Several thousand years ago, no doubt, it was the home of some relative of the "Vero Man," that prehistoric gentleman whose bones were uncovered under the marl in excavating a canal spillway near Vero Beach half a century ago, and whose pre-glacial status is still under discussion.⁴ Various other skeletons brought up from varying depths indicate a continuity of life in this region but no

⁴ George Grant McCurdy, "Archaeological Evidences of Man's Antiquity in Florida", *The Journal of Geology* XXV (February 1917).

personalities. It was not until the Seminole War and the year 1841, that an individual stands out, and his name was given to the place now known as West Palm Beach.

On November 5, 1841, Captain R. D. A. Wade of the Third Artillery, accompanied by Lieutenant Thomas of the Third Artillery, who, in a fateful September twenty-two years later was the General George Thomas who won the title, "The Rock of Chickamauga," Assistant Surgeon Emerson, and 60 N. C. officers and men, embarked at Fort Lauderdale in twelve canoes and with provisions for fifteen days. In the bay at the Hillsboro Inlet, they captured an Indian who led them to a village, fifteen miles to the west, where they surprised and captured twenty Indians and killed eight. A little later, finding the going difficult, they left the prisoners, the boats and a guard in charge of Surgeon Emerson and proceeded on foot.⁵

"Under the guidance of an old Indian, found among our prisoners, who is called Chia-chee," Wade reported, "I took up a line of march through nearly a mile of deep bog and saw-grass, then through the pine-barren and some hammock, to a cypress swamp, a distance of some thirty miles northward. Here (on the 8th instant) we were conducted to another village, which we also surrounded and surprised, and captured twenty-seven Indians, took six rifles and one shot gun, and destroyed a large quantity of provisions and four canoes. The next morning we set out on our return to the boats.

... Having seen much in the old man, Chia-chee, to inspire my confidence, I permitted him to go from our camp . . . to bring in other Indians, which he promised to do in three or four days. This promise he subsequently redeemed, having . . . brought in six . . . at Fort Lauderdale." On November 6, both Captain Wade and Lieutenant Thomas were advanced a grade in rank.

Captain Wade was laconic. His report was to the military point and said little about the country. A rough map of the area accompanied the report and was incorporated in future maps, but the details had to wait for fifteen years, when the Second Seminole War was long over and the Third, or Billy Bowlegs War, was building up. Jefferson Davis, then Secretary of War, faced with military operations in the unsettled, uncharted and practically unknown Everglades, turned over to Lieutenant J. C. Ives,⁶ of the Topo-

⁵ John T. Sprague, *The Florida War* (New York 1847 p. 392.

⁶ J. C. Ives, *Memoir to Accompany a Military Map of the Peninsula of Florida South of Tampa Bay*, April 1856.

graphical Engineers, the job of compiling a military map of the country south of Tampa Bay, and a memoir descriptive of the area based on expedition reports from the recent war. Ives turned the "general Direction" of this over to Captain A. A. Humphreys, of the Topographical Engineers. This was very fortunate for us, because Humphreys, then a lieutenant, although unmentioned in dispatches, probably because he was a surveyer and not a West Pointer, accompanied the Wade expedition and kept a copious journal. We know this because a foot note to the section, "Inland Routes from Fort Jupiter to Fort Lauderdale", reads, The information here given is taken from a journal kept by Lieut. Humphreys, Topographical Engineers, while passing over the line in company with Captain Wade's command, in 1841."

There were probably no longer any Indians in the Palm Beach area. Wade had carried them off as prisoners. When General Harney had a "Military Map" drawn up in April, 1857, after numerous scouts had been ordered by the General, there was nothing to show Chai's Village or Chai's landing either on the area map of Major C. S. Pemberton, who had charge of the scouting parties in this section, or on the master map drawn by Captain J. W. Albert under orders of General Harney. But, thanks to Humphreys, there is on the Ives map, and a detailed description is in the Memoirs. "Chachee's Village" appears on the map, and "Cha-chi's Landing" in the Memoir, although Chai was now living in the Manatee region with his wife, Polly. "Cha-chi's Village" appears also on the "Jeff Davis Map" of 1856.

Wade's party was in the vicinity of the Palm Beaches twice, once on his way north along Lake Worth, and again on the trip south from Fort Jupiter along the higher, dryer route further inland. Thus we have two descriptions of Cha-chi's enterprise. Let us take up the south bound first.

"Lake Worth, is a pretty sheet of water, about twenty miles long and three quarters of a mile in width; bounded on the west by pine barren, and on the east by the sand hills of the beach, which are sometimes twelve or fifteen feet in height, and covered with cabbage trees, wild figs, mangroves, saw palmettos, &c., with here and there a variety of the cactus. In the center of the lake, a mile and a half from the head, is an island [Munyon's Island], bearing a tree resembling the wild fig in appearance, with a fruit like the olive in shape and size, of a yellow color when ripe, and used by the Indians as food. A delicate running vine is also here found, yielding a vegetable about three quarters of an inch long, with a flavor similar to that of the cucumber. Opposite to the middle of the haul-over, only eighty yards across, descending twelve feet to the sea, at

an angle of forty-five degrees. Two and a half miles further on is another haulover, one hundred yards in width. Below, along the eastern border of the lake, are long strips of cultivable ground about two hundred yards wide, separated from the beach by ponds and wet prairie. These were formerly tilled by the Indians who had large villages in the neighborhood. The soil is light but very rich, being almost entirely vegetable mould. Rock occasionally makes its appearance on the surface, and heaps of sea shells are strewn here and there. The country on the west side would afford fine grazing.

“Six miles from the last haulover, on the west side of the lake, is Chachi’s landing. A broad trail, half a mile in length, formerly led from this place over a spruce scrub towards the villages of the Indians whose gardens were on the opposite side of Lake Worth, which they reached by hauling their canoes over the trail. The last fields were five miles from the foot of the lake.”

“The second inland water route from Fort Jupiter to Fort Lauderdale . . . diverges from the one just described, at the point where the water leaves Lake Worth Creek. An extensive sawgrass pond or marsh extends from this place, twelve and a-half miles south, to Chachi’s Village, which is a mile and a half west of Lake Worth. Lagoons of deep water, covered with spatterdocks, are here and there to be met with. In many places canoes have to be pushed and hauled, but at others the water expands into grassy lakes, a quarter of a mile in extent, and generally from one to two miles apart. To the east can be seen a growth of spruce with some pines, and to the west a line of cypress bordering the pine barren back of it. Capt. Wade’s command were two days in going from Fort Jupiter to Chachi’s Village. The site of this is on a pretty island, bounded on the northband east by a deep clear pond half a mile wide, and between a mile and a-half and two miles long. On the west and south it is surrounded by the grassy lake. The trail to Lake Worth leads, a third of a mile, to a small pond a quarter of mile across, on the opposite side of which is the haulover. Westward, a small trail runs from the village to the swamp bordering the Everglades, the eastern boundary of the former being about seven miles distant. Capt. Wade’s command examined this trail at a time when the water was rather low and did not attempt to take the canoes over, as it would have been necessary to haul them a mile and a-half over perfectly dry and rather rough ground. There were indications that it had been frequently traversed in boats during high water. The grassy lake was followed by the exploring party two miles and a half to the north-west. For the last quarter of a mile the water was but a few inches deep. A dry pine barren, more than a mile across, through which runs the wagon-road from Fort Jupiter to

Fort Lauderdale, forms the boundary of the Lake. Beyond this is a small pond, and an eighth of a mile further a string of them, deep enough to paddle in, and generally not more than forty feet apart. At the end of half a mile the water again overspreads the surface of the ground to the depth of two feet; dotted with small islands of cypress and pine.

“Leaving Chachi’s Village, and travelling six miles a little east of south through the grassy lake, where the water continues about two feet in depth, the pine barren is again encountered at a point where the lake makes into it for a short distance. Turning to the west, at the end of a mile of alternate water and dry land, a series of ponds is arrived at. When the water is high, canoes can cross to the Everglades at this place without difficulty.”

Chachi, or Chai Chi, or Chai, or Chi, under an assortment of names, became a scout for the army. Lieut. Com. John T. McLaughlin of the navy commanding an expedition in the Everglades, says, in a report Dated December 26, —

“I . . . shall send a party into the Mangrove lake, near Key Biscayne, with which Chai professes to be acquainted. . . . Chai is now my only guide. His brother, taken by Captain Wade, is an excellent one, and could be induced to volunteer with Chai.”

It could have been on one or another of these more or less aquatic expeditions that Chi’s name was given to “Chi’s Cut” that runs into the lower end of “Key Biscayne Bay.”

When the war ended, Chai-chee did not return to his old haunts on Lake Worth, but settled across the state in the Manatee region, where we find reference to him in Lillie B. McDuffee’s fascinating story of early days in that region, “The Lures of Manatee”, a new edition of which is now available.

“Among the Indians mentioned by the Rev. E. F. Gates, as showing a marked friendliness towards the settlers, were old Chi-ee and his squaw, Polly. Chi-ee had been a famous chieftain but at this time was in exile from the Seminoles because of the help he rendered the white soldiers in capturing his brother tribesmen. . . .

Contrary to the usual laconic mood of the Indian, Chi-ee as he grew better acquainted, became loquacious and through the Span-

iard Manuel, who understood the Indian language, he related many legends of his people which had been handed down from one generation to another."

But Chai-chee's aid to the enemy was not to be forgiven, and a proclamation was published in 1852 by Governor Thomas Brown as follows:

"State of Florida:

"To all to whom these presents shall come, Greetings —

"Whereas it has been presented to me by a petition of a number of the citizens of the county of Hillsborough that a certain Indian of the tribe of the Seminoles now in Florida by the name of Chi and his wife have been outlawed by their tribe for the offense of acting as a guide to the United States troops during the period of Indian hostilities in Florida and that the faith of the general government has been pledged for the protection of the said Chi and his wife. Now know Ye that the faith of the state of Florida is hereby extended for the protection of the said Chi and his wife granting to them the privilege of remaining in the state and it is hereby required of all good citizens to protect the same Chi and his wife and to see that they are not delivered to their tribe or sent beyond the limits of the state except by and with their own free will and consent. Witness my hand and the great seal of the state of Florida which I have caused to be affixed hereto. Done at the Capitol in Tallahassee this twelfth day of October A. D. 1852.

(signed) Thomas Brown Governor."

December 19, 1955, a party of surveyers commanded by Lieutenant George L. Hartsuff of the army, wantonly destroyed the prized garden of Billy Bowlegs, the acting chief of all the Seminoles remaining in Florida, and met his angry protests with horseplay. He called the Seminoles again on the war path and the next day wiped out the camp of the surveyers, killing two and wounding Hartsuff.⁷ The army was again activated, troops poured into Florida, and expeditions of the regular army and Florida volunteers penetrated Indian country with Indian guides — including Chai. But Chai did not survive this war. He met a tragic end, but it was fifty years before his epitaph was written.

⁷ Ray B. Seley, Jr. "Lieutenant Hartsuff and the Banana Plants", *Tequesta* XXIII (1963) 3-14.

A young lieutenant, Alex S. Webb, graduated from West Point in June, 1855, and was immediately assigned to the Second Artillery and to duty in Florida. Fifty years later, as a Brevet Major General, retired, he dug up his journal of those days and wrote an article, "Campaigning in Florida in 1855." It was published in the Journal of Military Service Institute. On June 6, 1856, he found the following entry —

"I forgot to mention the death of Corporal Manning of my company, of Chi, the Indian,. . . Chi committed suicide. He evidently felt that he was neither Indian or white, and got himself out of the world to avoid meeting parties of Indian scouts."

Thus Chia-chee, Cha-chi, or Chi, the first resident of the Palm Beaches we know by name, came to a violent end by his own hand. But Old Polly, his wife, remained to be immortalized by Canova.* The famous Captain Jacob Mickler came in with a bunch of Indians he had captured and, "after securing a receipt for the Indians, . . . was furnished with a guide, an old Spaniard, named Phillipi, and an Indian squaw, called Polly, a former wife of Chi-ee, a famous Seminole chief." Canova was of the party, which was to cross the watery waste of the Everglades.

"Polly, who was to act as our guide, gave her directions to Phillippi, who interpreted them to us in English. She had crossed the Everglades eighteen years before, and yet she knew the way as if she had made the trip a hundred times. No mariner's compass could have guided us across this trackless waste with more precision than this hideous old hag."

"The weary, toiling soldiers became discouraged. . . . They at last openly declared that Polly was misleading them. . . . The next day Miami was in sight."

* * *

"After travelling two miles we came to a spot where Polly commenced an excited discussion in Seminole, with Phillippi. That old worthy said that Polly pronounced the little rivulet at our feet to be the head of the Miami river. Polly piped out in her shrill, panther-like voice:

* Andrew P. Canova, *Life and Adventure in South Florida* (Tampa, 1906).

‘Sookus-hecheck-opko! lokasee; ojus!’

We all understood the word ‘lokasee,’ and permission was speedily obtained to follow a bear which was running across from one island to another. The chase was a short one; the bear took refuge on an island and was soon surrounded and killed.”

“That night we camped at the lower end of Biscayne Bay, and the next day we passed through Upper and Lower Cards Sound, into Barnes’ Sound, and through Chi-ee’s Cut-Off, into Saddler’s Bay. Chi-ee’s Cut-off is where the waters of Barnes’ Sound connect with Saddler bay. The water was twenty-five feet deep, and clear as it could be.”

‘We built a fire and soon had a mammoth chowder ready, together with some cooter steak. Polly’s eyes scintillated with suppressed joy, but when she tasted the delicious mixture, her bosom heaved, her lips parted, and lifting her withered hand toward heaven, she ejaculated;

‘Good — too much!’”

Old soldiers never die — they just misremember! F. M. C. Boggess was one of these “old soldiers.” In 1900 he published his memoirs under the title, “A Veteran of Four Wars, A Record of Pioneer Life and Adventures and Heretofore Unwritten History of the Florida Indian Wars.” It was published by the Champion Job Rooms, Arcadia, Fla., in 1900. This excerpt marks his earlier years and has a half-familiar ring —

“The Indians knew how to travel through them (the Everglades). In 1850 there was a boat company that went in the mouth of New River. They had an old Spaniard and his Indian wife. His name was Chico; his wife Polly Murphy. They got out of provisions and were lost. They told Polly if she did not pilot them out they intended to kill her. She became much frightened and began crying. She took some dry leaves and crumbling them she laid them on the water shielding them from the wind. All at once she cried out, clapping her hands, telling them she knew where she was. They went in the direction indicated by the leaves and entered Shark River.”

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