

Kissimmee Steamboating

By EDWARD A. MUELLER

The drainage and cultivation of the Everglades is now a well known and respected accomplishment but over eight and a half decades ago it was decidedly a different proposition. This narrative purports to hark back to those frontier days when the first successful drainage projects for the Everglades (overflowed lands of South Florida as they were once known) were conceived and to relate the early dredge and steamboating days that evolved.

In the late 1870's and early 1880's, Hamilton Disston, a Philadelphia blue-blood and scion of a hard-working tool-making family, Henry Disston and Sons, was seeking a way to diversify his investments and increase his fortunes in doing so. In finding what he thought was a suitable investment, he rescued the State of Florida from a precarious pecuniary pickle and helped to foster settlement in south-central Florida. Some 27 years old at the time and not satisfied to confine his activities to the making of the excellent tools that the family turned out (Disston saws felled the forests of the Northwest), Disston became the largest private land owner in the United States by buying four million acres of land in South Florida!

In the early 1880's the State of Florida owned some 14 to 20 million acres of submerged lands (depending on how it was measured) which were managed by the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund; however, several millions of worthless bonds were held and the Fund was in virtual receivership. At the time of Disston's advent upon the scene, in sheer desperation, the Fund had commissioned agents out scouring the highways and by-ways trying to sell land at some 25 cents the acre. Even Europe was canvassed by these desperate men. The chief obstacle to sales was that court cases had stipulated that such land sales were to be strictly for cash, and most buyers could offer only a modicum of currency and wanted to use credit to finance the balance.

A court order in 1880 finally forced the Internal Improvement Fund to either get some cash to get itself in a state of solvency or to lose its control of

the millions of acres of land. A buyer of a large tract (and with cash) had to be found in a hurry.

On February 26, 1881, Disston made his first deal which ultimately led to the opening of the overflowed lands and also the start of steamboating in the area. The State contracted with Disston to drain the overflowed lands in return for which *half* of the reclaimed land would be his. However, due to the court rules and a cloud of impending litigation, a clear title could not be given on the land. The newly elected Governor of Florida, William D. Bloxham, in a widely disputed decision, having surveyed both the Fund's and Disston's position, took matters under his wing and persuaded Disston to purchase some four million acres of land at the going rate of 25 cents an acre. This sale was consummated in May 1881 and the Internal Improvement Fund, by thus netting a million dollars, was able to pay off its debts, assume a solvent position and deal in lands forever after.

Disston made an arrangement with an Englishman, Sir Edward Reed to sell two million acres to him and Sir Edward paid some \$500,00 to the Internal Improvement Fund direct. Disston, with the help of some Philadelphia financiers, kept the remaining two million acres and started to develop his holdings. At the time of the sale, Disston was the largest private land owner in the United States and also had the dubious distinction of being the world's largest land holder of worthless (supposedly) submerged land. To move the task along, Disston set up several corporations with himself on the list of officers of each in a different capacity and started to work over his acquisitions. Some of these Disston dominated companies were the Florida Land and Improvement Company (Disston was President), the Kissimmee Land Company (Disston as Vice-President), and the Atlantic and Gulf Coast Canal and Okeechobee Land Company (Disston was Treasurer).¹

Disston was by no means the first person to propose draining the Everglades but he was somewhat successful at it whereas predecessors were unable to get the project off the ground (perhaps more appropriately, out of the swamps.) One of the first proposals to drain the Everglades was made in 1847 by the Honorable James D. Wescott. His proposal was based on reports emanating from the Second Seminole Indian War, a sort of a by-product by

¹ Advertisement in 1882 pamphlet, "Florida, A Brief Description and How to Reach There" by South Georgia, Florida, Savannah and Western RR.

General W. S. Harney and General Thomas S. Jesup.² Harney had explored a portion of the Everglades in vengeful quest of the warlike Seminoles, narrowly escaping with his life on one occasion and Jesup had scouted the Kissimmee River Valley and also that of the Peace Creek to the west. Ironically, two lakes on the St. John's River are named after these generals but little if anything in the Kissimmee area is.

Walcott's proposal was recommended by Buckingham Smith to the Secretary of the Treasury as being practical and upon the strength of this backing and some confirmatory accounts by Army and Navy officers, Congress by an Act on August 12, 1848, granted the overflowed lands of the State of Florida for reclamation.

However, the Seminole Indians again took to the warpath and enlivened affairs in South Florida so it was not for another 10 years that active operations could get underway, this time to be stymied by the wartime conditions imposed by the Civil War. After hostilities ceased, population slowly entered the area and transportation and drainage activities came to the fore.

The great river transportation system afforded by the St. Johns brought settlers to the fringes of interior Florida but a railroad was needed to carry them to the Kissimmee area from whence the river and lake system to the south could be utilized especially in conjunction with the drainage schemes.

In 1878 and 1879, the South Florida Railroad was being formed to run between Sanford on the St. John's River to the Gulf Coast. Starting in December 1879 and finishing in December 1880, the railroad reached Orlando. After that it was extended to Kissimmee, reaching there on March 21, 1883 (the opening day of business). Although there still was not a rail connection between Jacksonville and Sanford, there were steamboats and the business boomed as never before carrying tourists and settlers southward. In 1886, the missing link was finally completed between Jacksonville and Sanford and the St. John's River steamboat fortunes immediately were at their lowest.³

Henry B. Plant bought into the South Florida Railroad in May 1883 and it ultimately became a part of the Plant system. One of his first projects was

² Harney, Will Wallace, "The Drainage of the Everglades" — Harpers New Monthly Magazine, Vol. LXVIII — Dec. 1883 - May 1884.

³ George W. Pettengill, Jr. — "Bulletin 86 — The Story of the Florida Railroads — 1834-1903" — July 1952 (Railway and Locomotive Historical Society, Inc. Harvard Business School, pages 75-78).

to connect Kissimmee with Tampa. He built a three-foot gauge, 74 mile railroad linking these two key points in six months time, finishing only two days before his charter was to expire.⁴

The drainage possibilities were also being explored during this era of railroad expansion. In 1879, the enterprising James M. Kreamer, prominent civil engineer of the day and later chief engineer of Disston's drainage activities undertook a thorough and practical survey of the Kissimmee and Peace Creek valleys and the Lake Okeechobee watershed. This was in accordance with a state charter and his work was in part based on prior work performed by the U. S. Topographical Corps and interested canal, railway, and steamboat companies. The area that overflowed was estimated by Kreamer to consist of some 10,000 square miles which was larger in size than the combined areas of New Jersey, Delaware, and Connecticut with Rhode Island thrown in for good measure.⁵

The solution to the drainage problem was to relieve these many square miles of the surplus water accumulated during the May to September rainy season or so the primitive knowledge available at the time reasoned. The rainy season produced some 44½ inches of water on the average and the solution was to use the natural waterways that were available by dredging them so they could carry the water adequately to the Gulf and Atlantic Coasts in addition constructing additional canals as would be required to carry the water away. The topography and relative elevations of the chain of lakes and rivers that makes up the Kissimmee valley is such that each area can be done successively using a system of terraces, each semi-independent of the other. The differences in elevation were thought to be slight enough that few if any locks would be needed to control stream depth and regulate drainage.

A first logical step in the drainage projects had to be that of linking up the various waterways in the area. In addition to the drainage benefits, communication by steamboat would then be possible. Getting Lake Okeechobee connected to the Gulf via the Caloosahatchee River would be of primary importance. Although there was a connection (loosely defined) of sorts between Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee, it was of such a nature that only canoes or light craft could make the passage from one to

⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 76-77.

⁵ Harney, *op. cit.* pp. 598, 599.

the other. As early as Seminole War days, white men had effected the passage but only with canoes. No steamboat ever penetrated Lake Okeechobee's vastness until Disston's engineering feats had been performed.⁶

Two other drainage link-ups had to be made. One of these would serve to join Lake Tohopekaliga to the Kissimmee River and thus ultimately to Lake Okeechobee and the other would be to connect Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie River and thence to the Atlantic.

A description of the Okeechobee-Caloosahatchee work was made by Will Wallace Harney, son of General Harney, who was the Kissimmee newspaper editor; (In December of 1882) "The axmen had penetrated the fringe of custard apple and revealed through the opening the welcoming pillar of smoke of the dredge. A canal 22 feet wide having an average fall of one foot per mile connects Okeechobee to Lake Hickpochee and this is connected to Lake Flirt by a second canal through the soft chalk rim of the outer basin. Curiously, Captain Menge, engineer of the dredge found there the remains of an old cut of the Spaniards showing that the project of Gov. Wescott's was not the first."

"South of Ft. Thompson is the beautiful current of the Caloosahatchee River flowing between high banks terraced in the characteristic manner of the topography. This feature peculiar to all river valleys, illustrates the manner the grand trowels of nature have built up the watershed of South Florida. Here in the soft marl and loam are exhibited everywhere the escarpments seen in the harsh features of parallel roads in the geology of more northern latitudes."⁷

As far as is known, four dredges were used by Disston's forces for the drainage work. At least three of these were built at Kissimmee it is believed. Harney has left an account of what the dredges looked like which is presented (slightly paraphrased) as follows:

"(The dredges) were (built from a) patent by (Allan) and were (of) the continuous ladder principle. (They consist of) a chain of buckets, suspended about forty feet in the air from an upright. There is another forty foot arm extended horizontally from the foot of the upright and the chain of

⁶ The Everglades News, Canal Point, Fla. — June 1, 1945.

⁷ Harney, *op. cit.*, pp. 604.

buckets is drawn over an incline to its top. The whole affair has a resemblance to the figure 4, having a short foot resting on the bow or front of the hull. There is a chain of buckets that goes over the A shaped part of the 4. The chain of buckets revolves over the drum and sink their scoops into the soft ooze and muck and ascend over the incline over the top of the 4 where they are met by a washer from a hose or pump, and, as each bucket falls over the incline it gives a jerk and its contents are discharged on a sluice gate at right angles to the keel and extending beyond the edge of the cutting and thus on the edge of the canal, thus forming its own levee as it moves along. The long arm swings on the stem of the 4 as it moves from side to side and is controlled by levers so that each bucket sinks beyond the previous one and it digs or cuts a swath 37 feet similar to the way that a mower swings a scythe.”

“A tow rope over a drum attached to a stake is set for the width and edge of the cutting and of course the progress is controlled by means of levers. You can just picture the thing in motion, the huge crane swinging, the timbers groaning, the clang, whine, and rattle of the iron and steel, the steam engine coughing as it does its job, and the men in the muck and ooze, shouting, laughing, hollering, then the commands ringing forth, the constant stream of black ooze as it pours over the top of the sluices and as the derrick proceeds, on behind it, the clean cut edges of the Canal. And the dredge itself is a scow type hull, sort of a stern wheel steamboat and has a narrow cabin with a smithy and also quarters for the men.”^s

No record of any names for the dredges has come to light. Dredge No. 1 worked the lower drainage project, connecting Lake Okeechobee with the Caloosahatchee River. Completion of this dredging would link up the Florida West Coast with the Lake.

Dredge No. 2 was completed at Kissimmee in early summer of 1882. This dredge made the three mile cut between Lake Tohopekaliga and East Lake Tohopekaliga. An 1885 report of the work states: “The work of constructing this canal was commenced in January of 1883 and on January 1, 1884, No. 2 was distant from Lake Tohopekaliga four thousand, six hundred feet. The Boat, completing the cut as she proceeded, and cutting her own floatage necessitated the constructing of five dams in order to obviate exces-

^s Ibid, p. 601.

sive depth of excavation. The first dam was constructed during the latter part of February; dams were also built in May and July."

"From August 18th to September 2nd, the dredge crew, reinforced by other labor was employed in constructing the last dam near East Tohopekaliga Lake. The canal was completed September 22nd. . . . On November 22nd, the last dams on line of canal were cut, and vent given to the waters of the lake. A number of visitors assembled to witness the interesting event. The first rush of the waters carried away the last vestige of the dams and accumulations in the canal, and the velocity of current established was sufficient to scour out the softer strata composing the bed of the canal, to a depth of several feet below the line of excavation. . . . During the first thirty days, the lake surface fell thirty-six inches. . . . Lake East Tohopekaliga, formerly surrounded by Cypress and marsh margins, has developed a beautiful wide sand beach, the bordering lands are elevated and marshes changed to rich meadow lands."⁹

Dredge No. 3 appears to have been the largest Disston dredge and was of the suction type unlike Nos. 1 and 2 which were of the dipper type. She was the most complete in her appointments and was under the command of Captain Ben Brown. It was she that made the difficult Southport cut due south from Lake Tohopekaliga to Lake Cypress through four tough miles. During steamboating days the cut was one of the worst passages to traverse due to the tendency for solid deposits to form in the shape of bars at either end of the canal near the lakes.

The third major cut was to be a canal, 120 feet wide, ten feet deep, and having a fall of one foot per mile to connect from Cahoney Bay on Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie River, and, of course, thence to the Atlantic. This prodigious undertaking for that day would be capable of lowering the area of water some four feet a season! This ambitious undertaking was not to get completed during Disston's lifetime, however.

Dredge No. 4 appears to have been of the snag boat type and she was fitted out with tackle for hoisting and clearing out trees, snags, and logs. She was under the command of Captain V. P. Keller.

Dredging as done in those bygone days was exhausting demanding work, tough on both men and craft. It is thought that all of the dredges were

⁹ Aultman, "When Kissimmee Was Young."

abandoned somewhere in the area after their working days were over. At least one was left in the Lake Hart canal easterly of St. Cloud many years ago and rotted away. In addition to the principal linkages made to get a waterway established for drainage and steamboating, the dredges linked up all of the auxiliary lakes and secondary streams that they could get to to form semi-integrated drainage systems; the Kissimmee River was also streamlined by cutting off many of the numerous bends.

Certainly the completion of the railroad to Kissimmee, and the Disston activities opened up the area and allowed for a multitude of steamboats to operate, many of which were built at Kissimmee, but before this frenzied activity, there was at least one small steamboat operating on Lake Tohopekaliga.

This first small steamboat was the MARY BELLE, owned by Major J. A. Allen who had earned his majority in the Civil War. A school teacher in Kentucky before coming to the area, Allen was an owner of one of the three sawmills that were in operation in early 1882. He built a house of logs possibly in 1879 on Paradise Island, then known as Jernigan's Island and named after one Aaron Jernigan who also gave his name to the first settlement at what is now Orlando. This home was built by Henry Matthews of logs cut on the mainland, hand-peeled by a draw-knife, hauled out to the lake, and ferried to the island. The MARY BELLE was a small sternwheeler, some 11 and a half tons, 47 feet long, 10 feet wide, and three and one half feet deep. She was operating in 1882 according to advertisements of the day:¹⁰

“Excursions to the great Lake Okeechobee, Fla.—The steamer Mary Bell, plying on the waters of Lake Tohopekaliga, and the Kissimmee River, will be held in readiness during the Fall and Winter of 1882 to accommodate excursion parties to the great *Lake Okeechobee* (sic). For terms address J H Allen, Agent, Kissimmee City, Orange Co. Fla.”

MARY BELLE (BELL) carried more than tourists, however. At a later time, John Pearce (Pearse) was operating her and had tied up at Grape Hammock to deliver goods to one Bill Willingham, an outlaw and desperado at the press of the day put it. Willingham provoked a quarrel with Pearce and drew a knife, upon which Pearce and two members of his crew, Jack

¹⁰ Advertisement in 1882 pamphlet, “Florida, A Brief Description and How to Reach There” — by South Georgia, Florida, Savannah and Western RR.

Rooney and Bill Daughtry, overpowered him and tied him securely. Pearce then carried him via ox team to Orlando and delivered him to the minions of the law. MARY BELLE proceeded southerly to Bassinger where she accidentally or purposely sank (some say by her crew for fear of reprisals by Willingham's gang) and was apparently never raised. By all odds, she could not have been much of a steamboat, having to be built and operated under some rather trying frontier conditions.

Major Allen removed to Orlando some time before 1885 and supposedly went back to Kentucky and thence to the state of Washington where he was said to have been a rich man. His father came back to Kissimmee and took up residence on the orange grove property of his son and ran a ferry boat in the area, drowning in 1892. One of the captains of MARY BELLE was Tom Bass, Sr.

The Disston activities required a small fleet of steamboats to keep the dredging and land-selling operations going. At least four such steamboats are known to have been used in conjunction with Disston's doings. The shipyards at Kissimmee located along the Kissimmee City lake shore built these four vessels. In those days, the shore had the appearance of a beach with perhaps four piers fingering their way into Lake Tohopekaliga. One was Major Allen's dock located near his sawmill, another and longer dock jutted out in front of the famed Tropical Hotel and the third was just south of that, probably being owned by the Bass family. The fourth was the Okeechobee dock, later referred to as Johnson's dock (after Clay Johnson.) The shipyards were located adjacent to this dock, near present Hughey and Vernon streets.

In 1882, Bunk Tyson was the foreman, having employees at one time or another such as Jack Vaughan, Sol Aultman, T. O. Wichard of Dawson, Georgia, and Jud Sharp of the Partin settlement. Bunk Tyson superintended or had a part in the building of almost all steamboats at Kissimmee. A Captain Cochran of the Disston company was the engineer in charge for some time, and Captain Rufus Rose who was Disston's resident engineer had something to say about the shipbuilding business also. The Disston commissary was nearby and many of the key Disston personnel, including Rose, Keller, and Clay Johnson had homes in the vicinity.

The four Disston craft were the OKEECHOBEE, the ARBUCKLE, the GERTRUDE, and the ROSALIE. Government records list the OKEECHOBEE

as being built in 1884 at Kissimmee as a stern wheeler of some 37 tons. Her dimensions were 88 feet, length, 17 feet, width, and 3.4 feet deep (dimensions for steamboats given hereinafter as 88 x 17 x 3.4).¹¹ The ARBUCKLE was a sidewheel vessel of about eight gross tons, some 35 x 10 x ?. She ended up in the Lake Hart Canal with one of the Disston dredges and was left to rot. Nothing seems to be known of the GERTRUDE except that she was a dredge tender.

A fragmentary account written in 1885 of the building of the ROSALIE and the OKEECHOBEE comes to us as follows:¹² "For the purpose of securing a more expeditious service in supplying our (Disston) dredges and forces operating at points remote from Kissimmee and also to provide the officials of the Company prompt and speedy services in reaching our works, and for the purposes of reconnaissance, it was determined to construct a steam launch, capable of carrying needed supplies and affording accommodations for a party of ten, the "Rosalie" was built at Kissimmee, completed in September (1884), at once placed in commission and has been a valuable aid ever since. She is forty feet long; ten feet beam; stern wheel; upright boiler; Westinghouse engine. Speed about seven miles per hour. She handles remarkably well on the tortuous reaches of the river. On several trips south, we never experienced any difficulties in navigating this boat from Kissimmee to the Gulf....

"The steamboat, "Okeechobee", has been constantly employed during the year, . . . in conveying supplies to the dredge boats and in making almost daily trips to the scene of operations with parties desiring to inspect the reclaimed lands, and the sugar plantation established at Southport, on soil, which was until recently, permanently covered with three feet of water."

Government records list the ROSALIE as being of some 15 tons and 41 x 13 x 3.5. Her owners are listed as R. E. Rose until May, 1886 and the Atlantic and Gulf Canal and Okeechobee Construction Company to June 25, 1893, when she sprang a leak and sank. For many years afterward her bones could be seen in a canal near Lake Flirt. Her masters of record during her career were Captain Rose, Michael (Mike) Grogan, and Howell Sasser.

¹¹ Steamboat measurements derived from vessel registration data provided by U. S. Archives, Washington, D. C. — also from unpublished Federal Writers Project, Feb. 1937 "The Kissimmee River" P. K. Yonge Library-University of Florida, Gainesville.

¹² Aultman, *op. cit.*, pp. 25, 26.

Government records list the OKEECHOBEE as having had Rose, Ed Douglas, and Howell Sasser as masters. Her official owners were the Atlantic and Gulf Coast Canal and Okeechobee Land Company from May 1884 to May 1886 and after that, William Cannon of Kissimmee had an interest together with the Company until January 1888 when the vessel was wrecked and became a hulk.

Disston had a foundry and machine shop established in conjunction with the ship yards to form the metal parts needed in steamboats although most of the engines and boiler came from elsewhere. Certainly in the 1880's, the sawmills were whirring away, and pine lumber was being supplied in plenteous quantities for the steamboats, hotels and homes that were the hallmark of the bustling, growing Kissimmee.

A song about the dredge workers written by Captain J. H. "Jake" Ahearn who was associated with the South Florida Railroad as it reached Kissimmee, sung to the tune of "Scotch Lassie Jean" goes as follows:

THE OKEECHOBEE DREDGE BOYS

Down in Orange County, in the town of Kiss-im-mee,
 That's where the Okeechobee Dredge Boys dwell,
 And if you strike the town, when the sun has just gone down,
 You will know them by Jeff Branscom's awful yell.
 They work both day and night, that is, when they're not tight,
 For 'tis Capt. Rose who likes his pork and beans,
 And then their next best man, Billy Buster Dillingham,
 Is the boy who beat Ab Johnson on three queens.
 They have the big sun-flower, the cranky John Huffbaur,
 And Edwards with whom he can't agree,
 Feather-bed Depew, with little Johnnie, too,
 And the kid who likes to row across the sea.

CHORUS

The Dredge will soon be done, the men will then be gone,
 And some to jail will go away;
 But you can bet your life, there will be no care and strife,
 If the Okeechobee Dredge boys get their pay.
 But then, I near forgot, the worst one in the lot;
 The cook and Mr. Wilson, they are two,
 Jack the Irish guide, with Maxwell who's cross-eyed,
 And Johnny Mann who wears a twelve-inch shoe;
 There's Mcintosh and Jack, they both are coffin-black,

And McMillan who tries to beat his board,
The little "midget" Freeman, it was fun to hear him scream
When John Driscoll poked his eye because he snored.

The Dredge will soon be done, the gang will then be gone,
And I don't think I'll stay here very long;
So while you're all away, you won't forget, I pray,
You will remember "Yorky" and his song.¹³

Disston needed a right hand man to assist him in his endeavors and a 34 year old chemist and steamboat captain from New Orleans, Rufus Edward Rose, was summoned. For five years before coming with Disston, Rose had been superintendent of the Louisiana Reclamation Company which was reclaiming peat and muck lands in the Mississippi Delta.¹⁴ For the first five years he was in Florida, a period of 1881 to 1886, Rose was superintendent of the Disston Everglade Drainage Company. About that time some of Disston's sugar crops were coming of age so a sugar mill was started at St. Cloud and Rose was appointed as superintendent of the Disston-St. Cloud Sugar Company.

Rose was born in New Orleans, March 19, 1847, the son of Alfred James and Albina Stanhope Rose. He attended the public schools of the day and went on to higher education but the Civil War interrupted his studies at Dolbear Technical and Commercial College where he was interested in pharmaceutical and chemical studies. Rose served with distinction in supply and naval forces on the Federal side, his father being captain of the gunboat, DIANA, and Rose had acquired knowledge of navigation and engineering from him. After the conflict Rose was a captain of steamboats on the Mississippi and Red Rivers and also assisted in the establishment of the first artificial ice plant in New Orleans. He also designed and erected many sugar mills in Louisiana and just prior to coming with Disston was engaged in land reclamation.

Evidently one of Captain Rose's tasks was concerned with some of the layout and planning of Kissimmee. He did not forget his relatives in doing this for we find the names of streets such as Ruby (his wife), Rose, Mabbett (his brother-in-law), Clay and Amory (the last two after Clay Johnson and his

¹³ Aultman _____, "When Kissimmee Was Young" — pages 26, 27.

¹⁴ Information on Rose largely derived from, "Obituary of Captain Rufus Edward Rose, August 1932 (reprint from "Journal of the Association of Official Agricultural Chemists."

son, Amory, brother-in-law and nephew, respectively). A street was also named after Captain Brack, a steamboat owner and one of the first County Commissioners. Another street was named after Colonel J. A. Aderhold, a prominent Civil War figure and early mayor of Kissimmee.

The little pioneer settlement of Allendale became Kissimmee City on March 24, 1883, as the result of an election held that day. There were only some 36 qualified voters within the then corporate limits and a two-thirds majority was required for incorporation. Tom Bass was the first Mayor and David Bass was the first Marshal. There supposedly had been an earlier election in January in which Captain Rose was elected Mayor but this election was declared invalid because too many people living outside the corporate limits voted and the two-thirds majority had not been met. There is some suspicion that some opposition to the incorporation developed because the mayoral candidate was an outsider and many thought that a native should be selected. However, Captain Rose was elected Chairman of the first Board of County Commissioners when Osceola County was created by an act of the Legislature on May 2, 1887, being formed from part of Orange County.

After 1886, Rose was connected with the Florida East Coast Railroad Company as land agent and agriculturist. He also had a prominent part in developing some of the phosphate deposits in Florida. In 1901 he was appointed State Chemist of Florida in the Agricultural Department and held that post for 30 years until his death in 1931. Rose was most zealous in securing legislation that ensured that Florida citrus when marketed would be properly matured. He also authored all of the agricultural control laws enacted during his tenure, a rather impressive and interesting career to be sure.

Disston's Drainage Company was in existence until 1894 although the first operations in the early 1880's formed the bulk of the work insofar as establishing channels for steamboats were concerned. James M. Kreamer, Chief Engineer and General Superintendent glowingly reported in February of 1885 that due to the construction of 40 miles of canals (at a cost of \$250,000), 360 miles of inland waterway navigable by shallow draft steamboats were a reality. Over one million acres of land had been permanently drained according to Kreamer (disputed by his opponents and political factions in the state) and the next goal was to be the drainage of seven million more acres!

The enticement of settlers, selling of land and all similar types of operations were business operations of Disston and agricultural pursuits such as sugar cane and fruit tree growing were also carried on. The first tract of land was planted in cane in February 1884 and successfully harvested in season. Never successful by present day standards and hardly so by the criteria of the day, the operation did produce enough crops to indicate that sugar cane could be successfully grown and perhaps with a profit in the overflowed lands after they had been drained. A modern sugar mill built in the late 1880's in St. Cloud lasted until 1901 when it was sold to Mexican operators. Lifting of federal subsidies on cane raising and cane borers introduced inadvertently from Cuba contributed to the demise of sugar cane growing and milling in the area.

Disston's last drainage efforts before his untimely death in 1896 at 52 years of age were designed to link up the lakes and streams northeasterly of East Lake Tohopekaliga with that lake, a task not completed in his time.

The national panic of 1893 had already started putting the skids under Disston's Florida empire as the Disston Land Company had been forced at that time to mortgage its holding to a Philadelphia banking concern. Disston's family did not appear to take a financial interest in Hamilton's ventures and did little or nothing to rescue him. The mortgage was for two million dollars and five years afterward the remaining two million acres of Disston land were sold for \$70,000 to satisfy the mortgage holders. Several land companies still operated in the Disston area in the 1920's and a very few scattered descendants of these still remain.

It is interesting to speculate as to just what effect the Disston activities had upon the state. Certainly Disston could not have made much if any money on his efforts. They served to open up the country sooner than would have been the case otherwise. The drainage systems are still in use today although greatly enlarged and modified. After Disston, it was not until the turn of the century and the advent of the Army Engineers and Flood Control Districts upon the scene that further drainage efforts went forward.

Steamboat activities in the mid-eighties increased as the dredging activities linked up the waterways and provided a reasonable good passage to Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee and then to the Gulf Coast. One of these early steamboat arrivals was the largest steamboat ever to touch at Kissimmee

but she didn't stay long. She was the BERTHA LEE and her brief meteoric Florida career is still told some 85 years later.¹⁵

BERTHA LEE had started life as a staid and plain midwesterner, being built in Portsmouth, Ohio in 1879. She was officially registered as a two deck sternwheeled steamboat of 121 tons gross, dimensions, 130 x 21 x 3.8 and official number, 3096. She seems to have plied the Ohio River on local service being owned by a consortium of Kentuckians for most of her midwest career. Just prior to her entry on the Florida scene she was employed by the Louisville and Evansville Mail Company for 15 months, evidently on a mail service run between these two cities.

In the summer of 1883, Ed Douglas of Kissimmee, acting for the Kissimmee, Okeechobee, and Gulf Stream Navigation Company was shopping around for a steamboat in the Ohio Valley. He bought the BERTHA LEE because he needed a boat for the influx of tourists to Kissimmee and she appeared to be "small" when viewed alongside other Ohio River behemoths in addition to being a "bargain."

Douglas had been managing the Tropical Hotel in Kissimmee and business was booming. A steamboat was urgently needed there so Douglas after his purchase was faced with the task of getting her back to Kissimmee. The route was via the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and then the more hazardous run from New Orleans around the Gulf of Mexico, hugging the shore and hoping that strong winds and high seas would not materialize. Among the hands recruited for the trip was John Gottwallis, a carpenter. John had been on steamboats on the Green River in Kentucky previously. At New Orleans, Douglas further recruited one Benjamin Franklin Hall, Jr. for the remainder of the trip to Kissimmee. Since Hall and his son were destined to play prominent roles in Florida steamboating, a few details are perhaps appropriate.

Hall's father, Benjamin Franklin Hall, was of Irish descent, born in the 1820's and died when he was 96. He was a Quaker and lived around Lynn, Massachusetts and later moved to Pittsburgh and Williamstown, West Virginia. The lure of the river caught him and he became a steamboat captain on the Pittsburgh to New Orleans coal trade. During the Civil War he was on a

¹⁵ Information on Benjamin Franklin Hall, Jr. and his steamboats derived from Captain Ed Hall of Houston, Texas — also from newspaper writings of Lawrence Will of Belle Glade.

gunboat during the river campaigns and on one occasion had the wheel house shot up by Confederate forces, one fragment going through his hat. Later on, he suffered a bad foot and ankle injury and retired from the river, settling in Marietta, Ohio.

Prior to coming to Florida, Hall and his father had been on the CHARLES BROWN, a large iron hulled steamboat specializing in hauling barges of coal to New Orleans from the Pittsburgh area. Bored with such a monotonous job, Hall transferred to the BIG SUNFLOWER and was a night pilot on the New Orleans to Port Eads run where the Mississippi meets the sea. Hall was shifted later to the day run and the story is told that he was bewildered by the strange route as he had seen it only at night and accordingly had to learn the river pilotage over for the day voyages. The BIG SUNFLOWER later ran to Pensacola carrying railroad supplies for the Louisville and Nashville Railroad and Hall went with her. When the BERTHA LEE came along and needed another hand, Hall signed up, being footloose and fancy free and wanting to visit Florida. Neither Hall nor anyone on board was familiar with the navigational problems on the Caloosahatchee or Kissimmee Rivers (very few people in the world were at that time) so an attempt was made to enlist the services of Captain Lawrence Jennings of Kissimmee who had journeyed to Ft. Myers by sailboat and was looking for a way home but not as official captain or pilot. Jennings allowed he wouldn't want to be responsible but would help to get her there.

At any rate, Douglas, Hall, Gottwallis, Jennings, and company, took on a cargo of grain from New Orleans and continued their voyage on September 20, 1883. It took a week to get to the entrance of Lake Okeechobee, it being rather difficult to get a 130 foot boat drawing almost four feet of water up the narrow and crooked Caloosahatchee, past Ft. Thompson, shallow and grass-filled Lake Flirt, Bonnet Lake, Reedy Canal and the like. Just as she neared the lake, Three Mile Canal really hung her up and a small earthen dam was constructed, the extra water being impounded and subsequently released, serving to help her on her way. Only three cords of wood were left so everyone turned to and cut fuel as the BERTHA LEE tied up at Observation Island. Then came the easy trip across Lake Okeechobee to the mouth of the Kissimmee River. In those days, the river was a snake's dream of heaven, being a crooked combination of narrow channels, sharp bends, cut-offs, dead rivers, and zig-zags in confounding numbers. Anything larger than a rowboat had pretty tough going.

The BERTHA LEE finally got to Kissimmee City but not without literally cutting her own way at times across some of the sharper bends and using her paddlewheel to generate enough current to cause a scouring action and thus clear a short channel. Usually the steamboat would turn around, reversing direction and use her stern wheel to help clear the way, the process being known as fanning. After 15 heartbreaking toilsome days of beating up the Kissimmee, the BERTHA LEE had to dispatch a rowboat to Kissimmee as supplies were very low, due to the extreme length of the extraordinary voyage. After a week they returned with provisions just as the crew were on their uppers. The BERTHA LEE finally emerged triumphant at Kissimmee after a month and a half of very arduous voyaging from Ft. Myers. This undoubtedly was the most severe trip for any vessel on the Kissimmee River. Hall must have liked the area despite his rough introduction to it for most of the rest of his life was spent there.

After her trials and tribulations, it was extremely galling to find that the BERTHA LEE was not the outstanding success that it was thought she should be and evidently she was used only briefly around Lake Tohopekaliga for moonlight excursions and trips to the islands in the lake.

Some of the idleness of BERTHA LEE coupled with the moonlight excursions evidently produced some results for two of her crew used their spare time wisely to spark a couple of sisters from Kissimmee and it ended up that Ben Hall and John Gottwallis were married to two sisters that they had met on a moonlight excursion. It was a double wedding ceremony with the Reverend T. G. Bell of Kissimmee tying the knot.

While the BERTHA LEE was less than a complete success at Kissimmee, the St. John's River was in need of steamboats and Douglas and his company, needing money, decided to take her there to see if she could earn her keep. So in the fall of 1884, probably in September, the BERTHA LEE was back in Ft. Myers getting ready to go around the Florida Keys to Jacksonville. However, she had a lot of debts, her crew had not been paid for quite a spell so she was auctioned off to settle accounts. Captain Hall had about the most due of anyone and he managed to get control of her using Tom Bass to help finance him in this endeavor.

The BERTHA LEE did not get to the St. John's River, however. A need for a steamboat developed on the Suwanee River and that is where Hall took her. She ran from Cedar Keys to Branford, hauling passengers, supplies,

and naval stores. After this venture she moved on to the Apalachicola and Chattahoochee Rivers. Captain Hall had picked up a cotton charter at a good rate from the Whiteside's cotton brokerage firm of Columbus, Georgia who were in the business of steamboating cotton from Columbus to Apalachicola and a railroad was giving them stiff competition. After several successful runs, the BERTHA LEE was wrecked while under the pilot's guidance (Captain Blanchard) in the notorious Moccasin Bend cut off. The sad part of the story is that Captain Hall had just finished spending some \$10,000 in a needed overhaul and the BERTHA LEE accordingly represented his life's savings. He went back to Kissimmee, clerked in a hotel there at night and eventually got enough of a stake to commence building, buying and running *smaller* steamboats on the Kissimmee River.

"A Capital ship for an ocean trip was the walloping window blind." Kissimmee's versions of Robert Louis Stevenson's rainy weather invention for a child were the SPRAY and the COLONIST, which were unlikely craft for any kind of a trip.¹⁶

SPRAY'S owners evidently were rather ashamed of her because she was never documented. She supposedly was about 40 feet long and perhaps some 10 feet wide. She may have been the second non-Disston craft built at Kissimmee. Arch Bass and Captain W. J. Brack probably were her owners. She was a sidewheeler and while wide at the guards had a rather narrow hull which gave her a bad habit of listing precariously to one side or the other. Clay Johnson and his family supposedly lived on her for a short spell when they first arrived in Kissimmee. She couldn't carry enough cargo to make her profitable. It is thought that perhaps Frank King and Paul Gibson tried her out on the Kissimmee River run, rather unsuccessfully no doubt. Due to her lack of capability and a bad boiler to boot, she was beached at Kissimmee, the COLONIST was beached alongside her and both burned in 1893.

The COLONIST was another Frank King and Paul Gibson craft. Built at Kissimmee in 1885, she was a small 16-2/3 tons (45 x 13.7 x 3.5). She was named for the English colony at Narcoosee and operated between there and Kissimmee until the Sugar Belt Railroad was built between these points. She was also used to tow logs and haul lumber for a sawmill owner at Edgewater. She was a real mixed up affair, having a sawmill boiler, and a one

¹⁶ Information on SPRAY and COLONIST from Capt. Ed Hall.

cylinder engine to run her sternwheel. She was not even equipped with a reverse gear to go with her single shaft so a twist belt was employed for this purpose. Link chains connected her sternwheel to the shaft via sprockets and linkage. She was always breaking down usually snapping her chains which then tumbled overboard. King and Gibson evidently put up with this nonsense for two and a half years from May 1886 to January 1889 when Captain Ben F. Hall, Jr. bought her. He tried her out on the river run but she was quite useless there so he laid her up on the beach at Kissimmee where she burned. Hall must have got her at a pretty low price to even take her and was probably fairly well down on his luck after the loss of the BERTHA LEE.

Another early largely unknown boat was the NARCOOSEE. She was either built at Narcosee in 1884 or 1885 or in Kissimmee. Thomas Bass was her master when she first applied for vessel documentation (as 106 tons in 1885) but for some reason her number was reassigned to another craft in New York and her registration never completely put through.

The NARCOOSEE definitely existed as it is known that Captain Ben Hall's brother-in-law, John Gottwallis, was engineer on her for a spell. She may have been owned by the British colony at Narcosee but apparently these feeble recollections are all that is known.

Not all of the boats that plied the Kissimmee and its adjacent waters were local products. A demure lady from Massachusetts is our next entrant on the scene. The SADIE of Salem, Massachusetts, usually known as SADIE OF SALEM appeared in late 1887. The SADIE had been built in 1886 and was 61.7 x 14.8 x 4.9, 19 net tons. After spending the first 14 months of her existence in Salem, one of her owners, Albert S. Kinsman teamed up with Frank King and she was around Kissimmee until May 1891 or so. Kinsman had a sugar cane farm near Southport and had to haul cane to Disston's mill at St. Cloud so he used the SADIE for this task. Not a fast boat, the voyage to Florida was arduously lengthy for the SADIE as she had to use salt water for her boilers after running out of fresh. She was of little practical use in the area due to her depth and being a propeller tug, could not "fan" her way out of a tight corner as a sternwheeled vessel could. Frank King was her captain during most of her Kissimmee existence, however at the outset she was skippered briefly by Ben Hall.

In May of 1891 Burton E. Coe of Tampa bought the SADIE, renaming her the CLARK in the process and she became a tug in the Tampa area until October 1897 when she was finally officially abandoned. King and Coe

alternated as her captains during most of the Tampa period. When taking her to Tampa, a submerged tree was hit and a propellor blade broke off. Frank King and Paul Gibson made a replacement out of wood and took her under this jury repair to Tampa, there being no reasonable way to get a spare propellor in the interior of Florida on short notice.

As sportsmen and land seekers came to the area, suitable boats were constructed to take them around. One of these was the FLORIDELPHIA, a rather large 85 foot, two decked sternwheeler. She proved to be too large for the area and could not always run in periods of low water. She was built at Kissimmee under the auspices of the Floridelphia Steamship Company and finished in December of 1887 but ran only through two tourist seasons before she was sold to a Latin American concern in May 1889. The FLORIDELPHIA ran most of the time to Kramer Island in Lake Kissimee where the company attempted to build a tourist town but the venture failed. The FLORIDELPHIA later went to Los Angeles after the Panama Canal opened. Mike Grogan was her captain while she was in Kissimmee. Mike had arrived with the Disston people and was on many of the Kissimmee area boats.

Another unusual boat was the TALLULAH later named the REINDEER. She was first owned by the Gilberts although financed by Charley Carson of Kissimmee who probably took a mortgage on her. Charley was a groceryman most of the time but occasionally used some of his capital to take a fling at steamboating, usually ending up owning the boat when payments fell due. The TALLULAH was named after the Gilbert brothers' only sister and built in 1891 and was 33 feet long. J. C. Stratford, an Englishman bought her and ran her until the summer of 1901 when she was abandoned. The story goes that he gave up his English citizenship and a healthy retirement pension to become a pilot on her. She ran locally around Lake Tohopekaliga as a party boat and ferry to Stratford Islands.

Interestingly enough, there were two steamboats named HAMILTON DISSTON. The first of these undoubtedly never saw Lake Tohopekaliga as it drew too much water to ever have penetrated to Kissimmee. Government records also indicate that it was based in East Coast waters throughout its life. However some accounts have placed it in Kissimmee¹⁷ (which indicates that steamboat history is not as easy to verify as might appear.)

¹⁷ Notes on file at Rollins College Library, Winter Park, Fla., also "The Kissimmee River" — steamboat accounts are always subject to mistake and these two err on this craft.

The second HAMILTON DISSTON was a much smaller sternwheel craft of some 11.8 tons. Only 48.6 x 14.2 x 3.2 she was built in 1890. She had an iron or steel hull, the sections of which were cut out at Philadelphia and later assembled at Kissimmee where her wooden upper works were built and attached.

She was built as a party and pleasure boat but was rather a complete flop. She had a wide deck housing compared to her rather narrow hull (four foot overhang) and had an open forward deck. Even in only moderate swells she would take on water over her bow. She had a rather limited freeboard and this in addition to making her relatively unseaworthy allowed for little cargo capacity. She was a cabin boat, however, and once had the distinction of carrying Thomas A. Edison. Edison selected her for a journey to Ft. Myers where he had a winter home but the poor old HAMILTON DISSTON got stuck in the Southport canal and Edison, despairing of getting to Ft. Myers in the craft went aboard the TALLULAH going in the opposite direction back to Kissimmee and continued his journey by railroad. By and large, HAMILTON DISSTON was a case of too much house on too little hull and most of her life was spent at the dock.

Mike Grogan was her master of record from May 1890 to June 1898 when she officially went out of service (she was probably abandoned several years before but the records were not brought up to date). She was sold to Herb Fleming who owned Fleming Island in Lake Tohopekaliga. He towed her over there, jacked her up and used her as a storehouse. One time Mike Grogan was piloting her at night and he came upon a lagoon at a sharp bend of the Kissimmee River. Mike was not too well acquainted with the lower end of the river, and couldn't find the main river channel because trees had hidden the reflection of the water. Mike took off in the lagoon, got nowhere and accordingly dropped anchor to wait for daylight. At daybreak he was anchored at the gap he had entered. It was afterwards known as "Grogan's Lake gap."

The OCTAVIA, a sternwheeler, was built in Kissimmee in 1891. A 15 ton vessel she was 55 feet long and was a freighter for E. J. Brown. He had her for over a year from May 1892 to July 1893. Paul Gibson next took over and evidently moved her to Tampa. After being there for a few years towing and lumber hauling she went to Cedar Keys and perhaps the Suwanee. Lukens Gulf Cypress Company owned her for a spell before selling her to

the Tilghman Cypress Company in 1911. She was probably not around too long after that although she was not officially abandoned until 1931. Paul Gibson was one of the better old time pilots of Kissimmee steamboat days. Other well known captains with the OCTAVIA were Robert Stapleton and Dan McQueen, famed pilots of the Suwanee River and Cedar Keys area.

The CITY OF ATHENS, named for the Georgia homeplace of Herb Fleming and his father who sponsored the craft, was built in Kissimmee in 1890 and 1891. She was 23 tons, 65 x 16 x 3.7 and was a two decked stern-wheeled vessel. Ad Gilbert owned her and ran her until sometime in the 90's when she burned at Ft. Thompson on the Caloosahatchee River probably from a fire caused by hot ashes from her own furnaces. She had originally run to Basinger (also known as Bassenger and Bassinger and not to be confused with Fort Basinger) but Gilbert had transferred her to the Ft. Myers run. According to Ad Gilbert her remains were purchased by Captain Fred Menge and she was resurrected. She ran on the Caloosahatchee for several more years. However this period of Menge ownership is not reflected in government records. Captain Hendry, after her demise, took the stern wheel and used it to pump water to his orange grove. The current of the river would activate the buckets and they would rotate causing water to be lifted from the river to a trough leading to his grove. The wheel was set in the river in the line of the water current and special tin plates fitted to the buckets. (The blades of paddle wheels are termed buckets.)

The Gilberts were an interesting steamboating family and their lives were interwoven one way or another with the water. Seven brothers and one sister, all of the boys had some interest in boats and a boat was named after their little sister, TALLULAH. All were born near Athens, Georgia at Magnolia Farms. James, called J. B. or Jim was the oldest, followed by Sam, (S.A.), Edward A. (Ned), Addison (Ad) William (Bill), Alpheus D. (Al), George, and Mary Tallulah. Sam married a daughter of the Morgans who controlled the Morgan cattle company at Basinger. Jim and Ad had captains' licenses, Ad and Will were engineers and George and Al were deck hands.

The Gilberts' father had a mania for tinkering and inventing and among other things developed an ice cream freezer. He never made much money at this but evidently had a lot of fun. He finally went into the broom business, putting up a factory, using children to pick the long narrow Florida grasses that the brooms were made from.

Jim and Ad started working on the Disston dredges and Ad was the fireman on the CINCINNATI and when Clay Johnson bought her, stayed on and got his engineer's license. Will Gilbert was on Menge's GREY EAGLE for many years but left her and came to Kissimmee on a visit. While there, Captain Ed Hall, son of Benjamin Franklin Hall, Jr., introduced him to *his girl*, Flora Cates. Well, before one could say, "stern wheeled steamboat", Will and Flora were married. Will was also a Morse code telegrapher and stayed on in Kissimmee to work at the railroad depot. George and Al, who were deck hands, drifted out of the boat business, Al going to Jacksonville and entering the florist business. George married Hardy Lanier's daughter from Basinger and eventually moved to Zephyr Hills where he bought the Coca Cola bottling works.

The last and largest of the Gilbert boats (after the TALLULAH and the CITY OF ATHENS) was the BASSINGER. Sam or Jim Gilbert built her probably with the help of Morgan family money in financing her. She was some 87.5 tons gross, 62 net. Her dimensions were 66.7 x 7.3 x 2.8 and she was built in 1899. Her speed was about 12 miles per hour. Her crew consisted of the captain, usually Jim Gilbert, who also acted as pilot, an engineer, fireman, cook, and two deck hands. The BASSINGER usually made one round trip to Basinger a week, leaving on Tuesday and getting back to Kissimmee on Saturday night, spending two nights on the river.

The BASSINGER almost never got into service. She was being fitted out on her launching cradle in Kissimmee. Her stern wheel and engines were in the after end and her boiler was forward to balance the weight. To hold the craft together and equalize the strain it was both customary and necessary to use "hog chains" which served to act as a type of truss and keep the boat together. These are supported and kept in place by vertical or slanting posts. As it happened these hog chain posts were in place but the chains were not aboard her at the time a hurricane struck in the area. This storm with its heavy wind and extra high water floated the BASSINGER off her cradle and into the lake. When they got her back to put on her hog chains and finish her up, her hull had already sagged (termed "hogged") and she could not be completely straightened out in the normal manner. To compensate for the hogging an extra amount of sheer was placed in the hull using the hog chains so she journeyed through life with unusual lines. Gilberts owned her from December 1889 to August 1902 when she went to Punta Gorda for about eight months, probably as a replacement for a burned out tug boat there. She was finally destroyed by fire in Charlotte Harbor in March, 1903.

At any one time during the last decade and a half of the nineteenth century and the first decade and a half of the twentieth, there might be at least three steamboat lines running in competition with one another on the river for the scant carrying and tourist trades. Besides the Gilberts, the two best known of these competitors were Clay Johnson and Benjamin F. Hall, Jr.

Captain Hall after his misfortunes with the BERTHA LEE gradually got back into steamboating. His main successes were scored with three unique craft, all named NAOMA. The first two of these NAOMAS were never documented and consequently details from government archives records are not available. NAOMA No. 3 was documented, however. Hall named his craft after the biblical name of Naomi but thought that people would think that the "i" of Naomi stood for the numeral "1" so he slightly altered the name to Naoma. The period of the NAOMAS probably covered about 15 years starting with the first one built around 1892. She was a sidewheeler and was on the Basinger to Kissimmee run. She had a 4 x 5 upright engine with bevel gears, the shaft was down below, chains were run to the shaft on deck via wheels and chain drive and connected to a pinion that in turn connected to the side wheels. She was about 40 feet long and about 10 feet wide with an open front deck, a pilot house and covered space to the stern of the craft. She was around some five or six years and was run by Captain Hall and his first son, Benjamin F. Hall, III. However, she proved to be too small for her trade.

Captain Benjamin Hall, Jr. had a son by his first marriage (before the Kissimmee one) who was named after him, just as he had been named for his father. He married a second time in Kissimmee and his child by this marriage was named Edward H. Hall after Captain Hall's brother. Ed's story is covered elsewhere in this narrative but both he and his father suffered an irreparable loss when Benjamin Franklin, III ran away at the age of 18. As young Benjamin grew up he had not been made aware that his stepmother was not his real mother and when some schoolmates taunted him with this he took up stakes and left home. He had been heard to say that he wanted to mine gold in Alaska but where he went is largely conjecture as he was not effectively traced. Ed Hall in later voyaging years attempted to run down rumors but the search was in vain.

The NAOMA No. 2 was a rather versatile craft being both a sidewheeler and sternwheeler. Most likely she was built in 1897 in Tampa, starting life as a sidewheeler using the engines of NAOMA No. 1. The Halls had a

remarkable facility for adaptation and resourceful use of steamboat machinery to both build and keep their vessels running. The NAOMA No. 2's job in Tampa was to haul barges of building materials for a generating station being built in the Sulphur Springs area. A very low clearance was needed as a street car bridge lay athwart the river between the source of supplies and the station. Accordingly, the NAOMA No. 2 was equipped with a hinged pilot house and smoke stack which were lowered to go under the bridge. The entire arrangement was practical and ingenious and points out the versatility of steamboat men in general and the Halls in particular. The Halls arranged the stack to lay forward when lowered, the whistle being permanently fastened to the boiler deck. The pilot house floor was fastened to the deck and the four sides of the housing were hinged to the floor and laid out horizontally on all four sides when lowered. The top was canvas on a skeleton frame and was taken off and laid on deck. The pilot wheel was hinged on the bottom and also laid on the deck. Even with all of this ingenuity, the Halls still had to wait for low tide before getting under the steel trolley bridge. This was certainly steamboating under adverse circumstances.

After the generating station was completed, the NAOMA No. 2 came back to Kissimmee taking a 40 x 10 barge with her. When she arrived there she was changed into a sternwheeler and put on the run to Basinger. The side wheel engine equipment was not wasted, however, as Hall sold it to W. A. Roebuck of Kissimmee who had a sailboat of the "sharpie" type named IRENE that he converted to a steamboat and renamed it CITY OF BASINGER.

Ben Hall had a set of engines made in Tampa for the NAOMA No. 2 so she could be converted to a stern wheeler and put on the run to Basinger. She proved too fast as a sternwheeler and being too small for the run had to tow a barge to carry enough cargo. The trade shifted to the bringing back of fish from Lake Okeechobee and the barging proved unhandy. One can imagine going upstream on the narrow crooked Kissimmee loaded with a barge of fish and trying to beat the clock before the fish spoiled! Finally after some four or five years and also due to the competition, the NAOMA No. 2 was given up. In 1900 Clay Johnson had come out with his LILLIE and in order to meet the LILLIE, Captain Hall built the NAOMA No. 3 in 1901 in Kissimmee. Captain Hall's brother, Ed, had come down from Ohio to spend the winter and with the help of Bunk Tyson and Ed Hall's uncle, Jack King, the Halls got the NAOMA No. 3 built.

According to government records, the NAOMA No. 3 was 55.4 x 12.2 x 2.4, and of 49 gross tons, and 31 net (later reduced to 12.43, and 10 tons, respectively in 1905). She was a stern wheeler. The NAOMA No. 3 was somewhat like the LILLIE except that instead of having the wheelhouse on the cabin roof as the LILLIE had, the NAOMA had her wheelhouse on the boiler deck but raised three feet higher than the cabin roof which extended all the way aft. This raising of the wheelhouse enabled the pilot to see the water immediately behind the boat when backing down. And, of course, backing down the channel was a frequent necessity on the Kissimmee River when a vessel was often in reverse gear, trying to fan a channelway during low water periods.

The NAOMA No. 3 was skippered by Captain Ben Hall, Jr. with Captain Ed Hall as engineer until the end of 1907 when she was laid up. She was finally officially abandoned in 1914. Captain Ed Hall took the engine and boilers in that year from her and went to Okeechobee City to try and rework the gasoline engined SERENA VICTORIA into a steam sternwheeler using the NAOMA No. 3 gear. However, before he was finished with this interesting conversion, the railroad came to Okeechobee City and the project was abandoned and the SERENA VICTORIA never finished.

The NAOMA No. 3 carried some notable passengers in her day. Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, a steamboat captain on the St. John's River in his younger days and a famed filibuster using his THREE FRIENDS in helping to supply arms to Cuba rebels, based some of his campaign for governor on the issue of draining the Everglades which, of course, had been neglected since the cessation of the Disston activities. He took an inspection trip before election of the Lake Okeechobee area on the NAOMA No. 3. After his election as governor he returned bringing many state officials with him and made another trip in the NAOMA. On this occasion Key Johnson was engineer and Ed Hall was also along. Needing fuel when they reached Taylor Creek [connecting stream of water between Okeechobee City (Tantie) and Lake Okeechobee], and finding none immediately available, Governor Broward took off his coat and swung an axe with the rest of the crew as they cut wood.

The NAOMA No. 3 also had Thomas Edison and his family for a ten day hunting and fishing trip around Lake Okeechobee and up to Fisheating Creek and on another occasion, the Chrysler automotive family. The NAOMA No. 3 was also the first boat to haul fish from Lake Okeechobee to Kissimmee

for the W. B. Makinson Fish Company and also the only regular freight and passenger boat to Tantie.

Kissimmee steamboat machinery had as many lives as a Tampa alley cat. The NAOMA No. 2's side wheel engine had gone into the IRENE and she was renamed the CITY OF BASSINGER. Cal Buckles ran her after W. A. Roebuck was finished with her. She carried freight and was a generally unsatisfactory craft, being around only a short time. After the CITY OF BASSINGER's demise, the old NAOMA's engines found their way to the RUTHIE which was a small gasoline propellor craft built by Hardy Lanier. He sold the RUTHIE to Roebuck who tried the side wheel installation but she was quite small and not much of a factor.

In 1906 the SUCCESS was built at Kissimmee. She was completed early in the year and was 56 x 14.5 x 2.7. Originally she was of 31 gross tons, 19 net. She burned at the dock in Ft. Myers in October 1907 and was rebuilt in mid-1908 as a larger vessel, 61 x 15.8 x 2.3, 67 gross tons, 43 net, and with two decks.

With the advent of artificial ice plans in Florida and better rail service to the north, a good fishing business developed around Lake Okeechobee, fish usually being caught there and rapidly shipped by boat to Kissimmee and other points that served Lake Okeechobee and thence to other destinations by rail. As time passed, the fish transportation by boat shifted from Kissimmee to the Caloosahatchee River route to Ft. Myers.

Although the SUCCESS was not primarily a Kissimmee River craft she was built at Kissimmee and served on the river for some of her life so her story is included here. She was built by Captain Tom Bass, Jr. and Bronson for the fish business and ran to Kissimmee from the Lake. Later she took fish to Ft. Myers from the Lake. When she burned in 1907 she was loaded with fish (what a smelly fire that must have been!). Bass had her a short time thereafter but in December 1908, he lost her as she was sold at auction to help repay her debts. Kinzie Brothers bought her and put her on a route to Sanibel and Captiva Islands from Punta Gorda.

Captain Hall (Ed) was on her when she burned and recalls a trip she made from the Lake to Ft. Myers after her rebuilding. The water was exceptionally low and Captain Ed Hall had to fan a channel with his stern wheel

to get across Lake Bonnet. This took some three days and meanwhile the ice melted! Buzzards started hovering overhead, the fish, of course, spoiled and things looked pretty tough. Captain Hall had no choice except to dump the eleven tons of fish he had aboard over the side and get on down the river. At the time of her sale, Hall had some \$380 owed to him in back pay (which he received from the auction proceeds) so things were in pretty bad shape.

Kinzie Brothers also rebuilt the SUCCESS in a unique way by splitting her down the middle and widening her. They placed larger engines and a water tube boiler in her. She towed shell barges to Ft. Myers for road work as well as being on the route to Sanibel and Captiva Islands. Kinzies used her until 1921 when she was sold to the Ben Johnson Dredging Company of Jacksonville. They had a dredging contract on Fisheating Creek and the Lake and used the SUCCESS to haul oil for their dredges. After this contract was over, Dave Ireland of Ft. Myers owned her as did the Gulf Transportation Company until the end of 1924 when she was sold to Harmon Raulerson of Okeechobee City who owned her and used her on a drawbridge project across the Kissimmee River and also to run tomatoes to Ft. Myers during the winter truck farming season.

The SUCCESS's last owner was the John Ringling estate and she was used to help haul materials for a causeway being put in from Sarasota to Siesta Key. As she was pretty well past her working days she was supposedly sunk in a cove near the causeway after the project was finished. Government records list her as being finally abandoned in 1933 but there is a possibility that her last Captain, Earl Murray, raised her and used her around Fort Denaud on the Caloosahatchee where he lived. If this was the case, she is supposed to have finally sunk there.

The last vessel that the Halls constructed was the CORONA. At that time (1908) they were living at Alva, Florida and she was accordingly built there. She was a steam stern wheeler, 57 x 10.6 x 3. She was active until at least 1915 and perhaps thereafter. An interesting tale connected with her building stems from the fact that she was built on a river bank very close to the water and after her topsides were placed aboard, the rays of the sun as they were reflected back by the water literally baked the one side of her. The topside planks shrunk accordingly and large cracks developed. The Halls filled these up by driving cedar shingles into them, wedging them in

place and sawing them off flush. She kept them in her all of her life, the Halls employing a salt box inside the hull to try and keep the moisture content uniform and therefore prevent the shingles from excessive expansion and contraction. The other side of the hull away from the water was completely normal.

Halls kept the CORONA until after World War I when they sold her to the Menge interests. She was originally built for a mail run on the Caloosahatchee to LaBelle on the Lake, Ben Hall having got the government contract away from Menges for a period of at least one year. After losing the mail contract, however, Halls ran her to Coffee Mill Hammock to service a turpentine still. CORONA was supplied with engines from the LEONORA (which Hall had bought for \$100) and had a tube type boiler capable of 200 lbs. pressure.

So ends the account of the Hall efforts with steamboats on the Kissimmee. Another craft about which little is known except for the government documents was the J. M. KREAMER, named after Disston's civil engineer. She was a small 33 x 13 x 2 vessel built in 1894. She was abandoned in 1901 and had been owned by Mike Grogan for two years and by J. W. Watson, a Kissimmee lawyer. Jim Gilbert was a captain on her for a short period in 1895 and for most of 1896. The KREAMER was probably a small private boat not on any particular route. Around the turn of the century the waterfront of Kissimmee was lined with abandoned boats and the KREAMER was probably one of these.

The JUANITA made her debut in 1905. She was built by the Mobley Brothers, W. C. and F. M. at Kissimmee. She was a stern wheeled vessel, 46 x 15 x 2.4 and carried goods to Basinger and intermediate landings from Kissimmee, being primarily a freight vessel. One time while she was loaded with a batch of shingles, bolts of calico, and the like she had an unusual misfortune. She was overloaded with her well paying cargo, even to the point of having shingles stacked on the forward deck. She drew down pretty heavy in the water and soon it entered some of her well dried upper seams, and the JUANITA, unbeknownst to the Mobleys, was taking on a great deal of water. At one point in the river, the captain had to put her rudder hard over to effect a sudden change of course and in so doing the water in the hull ran to one side and she listed heavily and dumped part of her cargo of shingles overboard. Of course losing this weight helped tilt the craft the

other way in a counter action and she turned over and sank losing most of the rest of her cargo in so doing. Mobleys finally raised her but eventually lost her in the process due to the heavy financial burdens brought about by the loss. She continued after her raising in the fish carrying business. Government records indicate that her career ended by her being wrecked in December, 1912 while another version is that Clay Johnson bought her, using her hull for a barge. In any event her engine went to the LUCY B, the last Kissimmee steamboat.

And now, the story of Clay Johnson and his steamboats. Captain Rose couldn't do the job by himself for the Disston interests so he invited his brother-in-law, Clay Johnson, to leave his New Orleans home and join him. Johnson later became rather renowned in the Kissimmee area for steamboating and other activities but was just another 32 year old young father at the time he came to Kissimmee.¹⁸

Clay was born on November 5, 1850, in or around Springfield, Illinois. He was the oldest of seven children of Colonel A. K. Johnson who had been a leader of Illinois Volunteers in the Civil War. After the conflict the family moved to Louisiana where Clay, like many others from the north, became more southern than the native southerners. He enjoyed the gay, colorful New Orleans life and especially its dances. Sometime between waltzes he took time off to marry Lillie Augusta Rose whose family was of French descent but southern in manner. In Louisiana he grew sugar cane and was proficient with sugar milling machinery. In 1892 he removed to the Kissimmee area, his family following in 1883 and started working in the shipyards, helping to build the Disston dredges and their supply boats.

Clay Johnson, especially in later life, bore a remarkable resemblance to Samuel Clemens, the Mark Twain of literary fame. Johnson, with his sun tanned face, blue eyes, and white hair and beard, was a great admirer of the ex-Mississippi River pilot and was highly delighted when people remarked on the resemblance.

Clay was one of those perennial people who love life and enjoy it to the fullest. Stories are told that he would delay the return of one of his steam-

¹⁸ Information on Clay Johnson, his steamboats and activities largely provided by Mrs. Mary Steffee Degtoff, granddaughter of Clay Johnson, now in Agana, Guam — also from Captain Hall and many newspaper accounts.

boats just to play a fiddle at a dance or frolic. He acted as an errand runner for the people who lived on the river and in addition to the more prosaic errands, once even got a marriage license for a young lady, perhaps not too unusual except that when he came by again she asked that he take it back and get her another one with a different name; it's a possibility that women change their minds.

Clay was a warm-hearted generous man and if he had collected all the bills owed him, could have retired a wealthy man. He was good at mechanical things and was a tinkerer with machinery. He was one of the first people in Kissimmee to own an automobile, a 1910 Ford. He loved to drive at high speed and bounce over the bumpy roads that were the wont in Kissimmee in those days. His grandchild, Mrs. Mary Steffee Degtoff, recalls riding in a later Model T, hanging on for dear life and bouncing around; being a hero to his grandchildren, Clay acted as a sort of chaperon on social trips of the day. He had several cars and loaned them out so more people could go along and support the basketball team or whatever the function at hand was. On one such trip that Mrs. Degtoff remembers, one of Clay's cars got stuck in the mud and Clay spent all night helping to extricate it, never getting discouraged but exhibiting the patience, cheerfulness and encouragement that when formerly applied to steamboats helped design and build them and successfully operate them without serious accidents.

Clay was not without his faults, being especially noted for his profanity and seeming lack of respect for the Deity. Of course, remarkable ability at the art of profanity was part and parcel of steamboating and Clay was probably no worse than others of his time. The story is told that on one occasion a squall came up as Clay was crossing a lake towing a barge. The barge broke loose from the steamboat and drifted toward a lee shore. On this occasion, Clay shook his fist at the heavens, let loose an especially juicy lot of choice epithets and then perhaps threw a handful of change into the teeth of the gale to pay off the water gods and change his luck. Such blasphemy must have tempted the Almighty but there is no record that a heaven-sent bolt of lightning ever was dispatched to settle the issue.

Captain Johnson built one of the first homes in Kissimmee on the Lake near the ship yards. After his dredge building days, Johnson seemed to be in charge of transportation operations of the Disstons and was not commercially active on the river as early as Captain Hall and the Gilbert and Bass boys were.

The MAMIE LOWN was probably Clay John's first steamboat. She was a small sidewheeler about 28 x 8. She was never officially documented but the story goes that she and her sister, the SHIPMAN, came to the area about the same time from the midwest, perhaps Chicago or Wisconsin. A group of sportsmen decided they would be just the thing for hunting and fishing trips and they were for a spell but eventually Captain Johnson wound up with the MAMIE LOWN and Captain Hall with the SHIPMAN. Hall operated the SHIPMAN for a period but she was not much of a success due to her small size.

Captain Johnson landed a contract to tow barges carrying muck from the dredged canals to the railroad at Kissimmee for further hauling to the site of the famed Tampa Bay Hotel in Tampa, then under construction. The dredged muck had been deposited as spoil on the canal banks and, of course, was a very fertile material so some entrepreneur found a way to get a profit out of it and also enabled Captain Johnson to enter the hauling business using the MAMIE LOWN.

Of course, the MAMIE LOWN was scarcely large enough to be of much effective use so Johnson looked elsewhere, although his next craft was not large by any standards. She was the CINCINNATI, a product of Chicago, built in 1889. She was 34.6 x 9.9 x 3.4 and was a sternwheeled craft. Originally owned by a Cincinnati man (hence her name), James Ritty, from December 1889 to March 1892 she was finally owned in her last days by Clay until December 1893. Clay had been her captain from the beginning and continued of course, after he had purchased her. Ritty owned a lumber mill in the area and used the CINCINNATI for lumber hauling. She may also have been used as a party boat by hunters and fishermen and perhaps some towing. All in all, the CINCINNATI was a pretty neat little boat, had a nicely rounded model hull and a good 5 foot by 20 inch engine. However, her hull got in rather bad condition so Clay built another less aesthetic hull for her engines and she emerged as the ROSE ADA.

The ROSE ADA (two words and not to be confused with the later ROSEADA), had a flat bottomed scow type of hull. She emerged as a 38 ton, 54.3 x 16.3 x 2 stern wheeler, not a gracious looking boat either by any standards but one well suited for her trade. Clay Johnson, her owner and master for all of her life finally completed her and she was documented on December

30, 1893. Interestingly enough, he named her after his two daughters, Rose and Ada (Ada was the middle name of Bertie, the second daughter). She was placed on the Kissimmee to Basinger run and was running almost eight years before the same fate of the CINCINNATI overtook her, her engines were taken out and a new hull built and then the engines were reinstalled.

The latest reincarnation was appellated ROSEADA (one word) and in size and shape she was similar to her predecessor, however, being a little longer and narrower, at 57' x 14.7 x 3.3. The ROSEADA was completed in the very last days of December 1901 and she lasted until the late 1920's although she was not too active the last few years of her life.

Clay Johnson's son, "little Clay", as he was known to distinguish him from his father, was in command of the ROSEADA for a spell but George Steffee [who married Ada, (Bertie)] was captain for most of her career on the Kissimmee River run to Basinger. In her later days she ran on the upper lakes and finally in 1928, a hurricane drove her ashore at Kissimmee and she was abandoned. In between about 1917 to 1920 she operated around Lake Okeechobee and in the 1920's was in the service of the Kissimmee Island Cattle Company, commonly known as "Kicco" and hauled supplies for them.

Just before the ROSEADA was built, (perhaps a better term is reassembled) Clay completed his prettiest vessel, the LILLIE. Named after his wife, the LILLIE was a trim little one decked vessel some 64.67 gross tons, 55 net, 60 x 17.5 x 2.8. Not only was she Clay's favorite but Captain Ed Hall who ran her in the Lake Okeechobee vegetable trade around World War I called her the nicest little stern wheeler, bar none, that he had ever been in and he should know.

The LILLIE was designed for passenger carrying and chartering for hunting and fishing. Business for many years was good, the Johnsons running her on the Kissimmee River to Basinger. She was Clay's pride and joy. Around World War I she had her cabins removed and was used to haul produce barges in the Lake Okeechobee vegetable trade and oranges in season.

The LILLIE ran for many years but in the summer of 1926, Clay Johnson sold her to his son-in-law, Elonzo (Lon) Dann of Miami who had married Rose. He changed her to a house boat and kept her around for many years until she was converted to a barge and used for hauling vegetables around Lake Okeechobee.

Clay's last and biggest steamboat was the OSCEOLA. She was built in Kissimmee in 1910 being first documented in October of that year. She was 87 gross tons, 54 net and was 74.6 x 21.1 x 3.6. Designed as a freight boat primarily, she ran on the river run most of her days. She finally was sunk in the Palm Beach Canal at Fort Worth when Clay ran her into a dock.

Another character of a boat associated with the Johnsons was the ROSEADELE. She was another home built Kissimmee product finished in the summer of 1910. Unlike most of the others she was a propeller driven boat about 50 x 150 x 1.6, 10 net tons. She was built by Lon Dann.

Dann was a blacksmith by trade but ventured into the steamboat business upon occasion. The ROSEADELE had a rather peculiar mission in life. She was used as an aid to promote settlement in Florida. It seems that Dann in conjunction with the Hunter Land Company (Harry A. Hunter), who are listed as her owners after 1913, used her to show land to prospective buyers. Originally the business attempted to get off to a start by Lon Dann hiring Captain Ed Hall to chauffeur prospective buyers to the Hunter property. It seems that Hunter got control of some of the old Disston property (at least 250,000 acres of formerly open cattle range) near Basinger and was trying to sell it largely to Canadians. Hall was driving these potential buyers from Kissimmee to see the property but after going 16 miles in 16 hours once in 1910, Dann decided to go with the ROSEADELE and got Hall to run her as Dann only had a license for boats up to 45 feet. Hall ran her for two years with George Saunders as engineer. The ROSEADELE left Kissimmee every Saturday morning with a load of Canadians and took them to either Alligator Bluff or Micco Bluff depending on which was the best for the particular kind of weather in vogue at the time. Then when the ROSEADELE arrived, a fleet of autos would meet her and take the potential buyers over the land that was for sale.

This operation finally went to the wall and the ROSEADELE was tied up. Her last captain, Marvin Goodman was her cook! He was also the crew, caretaker, and night watchman as he lived on her as she lay at dock in Kissimmee.

About the start of World War I a good market for truck vegetable crops developed and the Lake Okeechobee region not having a railroad used steamboats to get the crops to market. The ROSEADELE was purchased by Clay Johnson and he took out her engine, stripped off her upper works, closed up

her propeller tunnel, and put her on duty as a vegetable barge in Lake Okeechobee working with the LILLIE and the ROSEADA. She is rumored to still be there perhaps as a broken down barge or rotting away at a fish camp.

Another small boat was the TAMPA also called the "LITTLE TAMPA". She had a small propeller, was owned by Sol Aultman (who occasionally worked on building and financing boats) and was a party boat. She was not around Kissimmee very long and ended up doing towing work in the Ft. Myers area.

The last steamboat built at Kissimmee was the LUCY B. Never documented she was a stern wheeler about 50 x 10 x 3 and built about 1912 for Cal Buckles. For a period of about a dozen years she took care of the remaining business of freight and passengers after the Johnsons and Halls had abandoned the northern part of the run. Sometime in the mid-1920's the machinery was removed from the LUCY B and she was converted to a house boat.

This story would not be complete without paying tribute to Captain Edward H. Hall, now a frail gentleman of 82 but blessed with a fine memory of old Kissimmee's steamboating days in which he played such a prominent part. Born in Kissimmee City in 1884, he grew up on steamboats. When he was 21, he stood and passed the examinations for pilot and engineer (steam, gasoline, and diesel.) Being able to hold any position kept Captain Hall in constant employment on the Kissimmee boats until they played out before World War I. Captain Hall went to sea with the War Shipping Board then and later on in the Jacksonville and St. John's River area with many different steamboats. He also ran for one of the Atlantic coasting services to Florida.

In World War II, Captain Hall served with the Merchant Marine as a Commander and was in Normandy on D-Day. Later he served on army transports to Japan and in the Korean War. Finally, in his seventies, he "swallowed the anchor" and moved to Houston, Texas where he now lives. He is the last living person connected with Kissimmee steamboats as they were when steamboating was a way of life in south central Florida. As he tells of his experiences, his eyes light up and the 82 years slip away. It took men like Benjamin Franklin and Ed Hall to make steamboats go; when they went, so did steamboating.