Sailing In South Florida Waters In The Early 1880s

PART II

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The usual route to . . . [Cape Sable] from Key West is to take the East Channel and proceed to Bahia Honda, and thence across to Cape Sable; but not wishing to retrace that portion of our route to Bahia Honda, I resolved to add variety to our voyage by going to the westward and northward of the keys, or on the Gulf side, then sailing eastward to Key Vaccas, thence due north, thirty miles to East Cape Sable. Accordingly, we left Key West by the Northwest Channel, leaving all the keys to starboard, and anchored before sundown at N.W. Boca Chica, a small key with a beautiful sandy beach, some ten miles northwest from Key West.

The Florida Keys, like the southern portion of the peninsula, are of recent formation, and underlaid by oolitie [*sic*] and coral limestones. These coral lime rocks are formed by the action of the waves and weather upon the calcareous secretions of coral polyps. those beautiful "Flowers of the Sea," which are still building . . . on the outlying submerged reefs. . . . The fishes about the keys are very handsome, both in form and coloration: silvery, rosy, scarlet, brown and golden bodies, with sky-blue, bright yellow, rosy or black stripes and bands, or spotted, stellated and mottled with all the hues of the rainbow, and with jeweled eyes of scarlet, blue, yellow or black; fins of all colors and shapes, and lips of scarlet, yellow, blue or silver. Some of the larger keys, [such] as Sugar-loaf, . . . Pine and Largo, contain a few deer, and some of the oldest settled ones harbor a few bevies of quail, but most of the keys of the Florida Straits are barren of game.

The next morning, with a splendid breeze from the southwest, we left N.W. Boca Chica, and under the lee of the keys we made good time, arriving at Key Vaccas in the afternoon. The spongers and fishing smacks were lying at anchor under the different keys as we bowled merrily along, the wind being too high for them to pursue their vocations. At Key Vaccas we found several brothers, named Watkins, with their families, all "conchs," who had quite a large clearing, or "cultivation," as they called it, and who were raising tomatoes and other vegetables for Key West and the Northern

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markets. The soil is thin and very rocky, but rich, and produces well. There is a fine spring of excellent water pouring out of the sharp and jagged rocks of this key, east of the Watkins settlement, where we filled our water casks. We collected a number of beautiful land shells . . . and a rich variety of botanical specimens, for we stayed here the following day, the wind having backed up to the north, blowing hard. The next day thereafter, however, it hauled to the eastward, when we again set sail, due north, for East Cape Sable. We were out of sight of land for two hours until we sighted Sandy Key, and made the cape in six hours sailing from Key Vaccas. Had we not gone to Key West we should have crossed to the cape from Long Key or Channel Key. Very small boats can cross from these points, and . . . be in sight of . . . keys . . . all the way, but the water is shallow, with numerous banks and shoals of sand.

We sailed eastward of East Cape Sable to the mainland, where there is abundance of deer, turkey and other game. We here saw for the first time that magnificent bird, the flamingo,[1] with great numbers of egrets, rosy spoonbills, and herons. The next day we passed East Cape Sable and proceeded to the Middle Cape, or Palm Point, where there was a house. We landed to call on the occupant, who was very desirous for us to stop a day or two to kill some deer, which were plentiful, but being pressed for time we kept on to the N.W. Cape, and a few miles further on entered Cape Sable Creek, where we anchored. This creek is an admirable harbor for small boats, and the only one near Cape Sable. With a narrow entrance, some twenty feet in width, it soon expands into a roomy basin, quite deep, where a vessel can be safely moored alongside a sand spit running out from the shore; a hurricane blowing outside would not ripple the water of this quiet basin. Sharks and other large fish may be harpooned or grained from the deck of the vessel, or with line and hook the angler can get a surfeit of fishing. The stream heads in a large lagoon back of the cape, the resort of innumerable waterfowl and aquatic birds. The region about Cape Sable is the best south of Charlotte Harbor for camping, hunting and fishing, there being a broad, smooth, sandy beach all around the cape, abounding in beautiful shells and other marine curiosities, with good dry ground for camping, and an abundance of game on the savannas and in the pine woods and hamaks.

From Cape Sable Creek to Pavilion Key there is a succession of mangrove keys and islands, and but very little beach or hard ground. Between these points lie Shark, Lostman's, Harney's and other rivers, and Whitewater and Chatham bays, which are studded with the "Thousand

[1]Though once quite abundant in southern Florida, the flamingo was never known to nest here. Today, the bird appears in the state only as a rare straggler.

Islands"; had they been called "Ten Thousand Islands" it would have been a more appropriate name.[2] This whole region lies in Bahia Ponce de Leon. It is from ten to twenty miles from the Gulf to the mainland, which latter can only be reached by following the intricate channels between these numberless so-called islands, many of which have not a particle of soil, being merely clumps or thickets of mangroves. It would take a month or more to get an idea of Whitewater and Chatham bays by penetrating to the mainland and to the Everglades, and as we were already behind time we did not attempt it, leaving that unexplored region for a more convenient season.

Mangroves here grow to be tall trees, as tall as water oaks or even pines. There are small bunches of them, and great forests of them—nothing but mangroves, mangroves. It is wonderful how these mangroves grow, and, when once started, how rapidly they increase. The seeds are about as long and of the shape and appearance of the old-fashioned "long nine" cigar. These fall into the mud or shallow water and soon take root, the upper end giving off shoots, which, growing upward, send down other shoots or roots parallel with the main stems, and these taking root, again grow upward, and the parent stem as it continues to grow continues to send down other branches or roots to the water. I have seen these pendent branches descending twenty feet to the water, as straight and smooth as an arrow, and an inch thick. I have walked a quarter of a mile through a mangrove thicket on the lower arching roots, two or three feet above the water, where there was not a particle of soil. But in time, drift, sea weeds and shells accumulate about the roots, and floating seeds lodge and germinate, so that at last an island is formed and lifted up above the surface of the water.

Another reason for our not tarrying long in this section was the scarcity of water. Our supply was getting short, and there had been no rain on the southwest coast for four months. We attempted to go up one of the creeks to the mainland or to fresh water, but the ebb tide left us aground and we were forced to return on the next tide. The water in these bays is quite shallow, so with an offing of several miles in the Gulf we sailed for Chuckaluskee[3] . . . where we expected to get a supply of water from cisterns at that settlement, the first north of Cape Sable. Stopping at Pavilion Key we found a boat with two men who told us the cisterns at Chuckaluskee were dry, so we went on to Panther Key and anchored for the night.

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[2]The area just north of Pavilion Key has in fact become known as the "Ten Thousand Islands."

[3]Henshall spells the hamlet's name the way it's pronounced, but the more usual spelling is "Chokoloskee."

We went ashore at Panther Key the next morning, where we found a hut and a bright-eyed old Spaniard and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. John Gomez. Old man Gomez is a noted character on the southwest coast, having lived there for thirty years or more. He is reputed to be a hundred years old.[4] He told me that he went from Spain to St. Augustine when a young man, ten years before Florida was ceded to the United States, which would make him about that age. He is held in wholesome dread by the settlers, who throw out dark hints of his having been a slaver, and even a pirate in his younger days; but "He was the mildest mannered man that ever scuttled ship or cut a throat." He had a plantation up the creek, near Panther Key, but [with] his well going dry, he had come down to his place on the key, where there was a shallow well with about six inches of brackish water. But he informed me that there was a good well on Cape Romano, some five miles to the westward. Gomez was under contract to furnish provisions to a Government surveying party, who were then some six miles up the creek on the mainland. His schooner had gone to Key West for provisions, and he was daily expecting her . . .

We departed for Cape Romano, where, on the southerly shore, a quarter of a mile from the extreme point, we found a well of excellent water, from which we replenished our water casks. We took a ramble on the beach, where we found great quantities of shells, sea-urchins, star-fishes, seafans, sponges, etc. We then sailed for Cocoanut Key, five miles E.N.E. from Cape Romano where there is a pass leading to Marco and Horr's Islands. We anchored off Goodland Point on Marco, near the house of Capt. Roberts,[5] who has a fine plantation of tomatoes, bananas, etc. These islands are high, with good soil, and are very productive; but the long drought had told on the plants. Capt. Roberts owns a fine schooner, in which he carries his fruits and vegetables to Key West in their season, and at other times engages in fishing, turtling and sponging. On Horr's Island I found Capt. Horr,[6] formerly of Ohio, who was well located for raising sub-tropical fruits and early vegetables, for these islands possessed the best soil I saw on the west coast. At the west end of Marco, near Caximbas Pass, a brother of Capt. Roberts has also a large and excellent plantation, and on its northerly side is the location of Capt. Collier,[7] who also owns a good weatherly schooner, transporting his produce to Key

[4] It is unlikely that Gomez was a century old in 1882, for he lived until 1900, which would have him almost 120.

[5] The "Roberts" referred to here is probably one of the brothers who came into the region in 1870, settling first on Fakahatchee Island.

[6] Although he gave his name to the island, John F. Horr used his home there mainly as a vacation retreat; he spent most of his time in Jacksonville and Key West.

[7] W. T. Collier founded the town of Marco, having arrived on the island in 1870. The Collier spoken of here is either W. T. or, more likely, his son: W. D. ("Captain Bill") Collier.

West. This is a fine settlement, very pleasantly situated, the waters teeming with fish and turtles, green and loggerhead, and the flats with clams and oysters. Immense tarpum and jewfish are speared under the mangroves with "grains," a stout, two-pronged fish spear, in the use of which these people are very expert.

The boat being poled quietly along the fringe of mangrove bushes at the edge of the channels, the man standing in the bow with the grains ready at length spies a great tarpum some six feet long, like a giant fish of burnished silver poised motionless in the shade. When within striking distance he hurls the grains by its long handle with a skillful and dexterous thrust and an unerring aim, born of long experience, which strikes home with an ominous thud, when the monster tears away, with a tremendous spurt, leaps clear of the surface, and, falling back, makes the water fairly boil and seethe in his desperate efforts to escape. But the barbed grains hold fast and the long, stout line is as tense as a bowstring. The great fish tows the boat around like a cockle-shell, until his fierce struggles and grand leaps begin to tell on him, and at length he is towed ashore completely exhausted. Sometimes the boat is capsized or swamped by an unusually large and powerful fish, but, as I have mentioned before, these "Conchs" are almost amphibious, and seldom lose their fish, even under the most adverse circumstances. . . .

The mud flats about Caximbas Pass at low tide swarm with . . . snipe and shore birds, and at flood tide the channels under the mangroves teem with redfish, groupers, and snappers, while near the beds of . . . oysters are schools of sheepshead and drum. In fact, all of these passes and inlets of the west coast are fairly alive with fishes, from the mullet to sharks and sawfish. While lying in his bunk, one can hear all night long the voices of the deep, under and around him. The hollow, muffled boom of the drumfish seems to be just under one's pillow; schools of sparoid fishes feeding on shellfish on the bottom sound like the snapping of dry twigs on a hot fire; while a hundred tiny hammers in the hands of ocean sprites are tapping on the keel. Then is heard the powerful rush of the tarpum, the blowing of porpoises, and the snapping jaws of the sea-trout among the swarms of mullet, which, leaping from the surface by thousands, awake the watery echoes like showers of silver fishes falling in fitful gusts and squalls.

On the islands about Caximbas Pass are many shell mounds, bearing witness to the many "oyster suppers" enjoyed by the aboriginal inhabitants. From the proximity of wild lime and lemon trees, it may be presumed that they took them "on the half shell," and also in the form of "box stews,"

if we may judge from the fragments of pottery and fire-coals scattered through the heaps. . . .

We left Caximbas Pass in the middle of the forenoon, with a northwest wind, sailing close-hauled all day until an hour before sundown, when we put into Estro [*sic*] Pass for the night.[8] We had just made everything snug; the kingfish was sputtering in the frying pan, the venison broiling over the coals, and the aroma of old Government Java was ascending toward the mastheads, when a small schooner also put in and dropped anchor on a shoal within fifty yards of us. The sails were lowered away and furled by the crew, which consisted of a solitary one-armed man. In a short time the receding tide left the little schooner aground, when I went over in the Daisy to see if we could be of any service.

"Oh no," said the combined skipper and crew, "she'll lay all the easier aground, and she'll be afloat time enough for me in the mornin'. . . ."

Then making a fire in his little stove he began preparing his supper. He had a cargo of bananas for Cedar Keys. This man, from the habit of hunting alligators in the summer, had obtained the sobriquet of "Alligator Ferguson," and was a character of some note on the west coast. After supper he came over to the Rambler and assisted the boys in shark fishing, regaling them, between bites, with accounts of his prowess in hunting the huge saurians, which with him had become an all-absorbing passion.

"What I don't know 'bout 'gators, gentlemen," said he, "the 'gator don't know himself. If I can ketch his ugly eye, I can tell jist what he's thinkin' 'bout. If he sees me a comin' with old 'Sure Death,' my big Springfield rifle, . . . sez he, 'Thar's Alligator Ferguson; my hide's good as off; my teeth's good as gone; . . . far'well to Flurida!' "

. . . We left Esters [*sic*] Pass[9] with a northwest wind and put out into the Gulf about a mile. Squire and Jack were trolling and caught several kingfish and bonitos, both of the mackerel family. . . . We caught them from ten to fifteen pounds in weight. In trolling for these fishes a stout braided line is best, though the coasters generally use . . . cotton codfish lines. A well-tempered codfish hook, with a long shank and a foot of stout copper or brass wire is necessary to withstand their sharp and numerous teeth. The usual bait is a strip of white bacon rind, six or eight inches long, cut in the semblance of a fish, with a slit cut in the upper end and one in the middle, through which it is impaled or strung on the hook, the upper end being firmly secured by small wire. A block tin squid or a very heavy spinner is, however, a better lure. . . .

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[8]Presumably Henshall is speaking of Estero Bay.
[9]See footnote No. 8.

We saw many of the beautiful little flying fishes, but failed to secure a specimen. When within eight miles of Punta Rassa, and off Sanibel Island, we encountered a school of devil-fishes . . ., twenty or more.[10] These monsters were from six to fifteen feet from tip to tip of their wing-like pectorals. We sailed close enough to have harpooned some of them, but we lacked the harpoon or lily iron; and as Skipper looked at them he said he was glad we forgot to procure one in Key West as intended.

We found the famous Punta Rassa to consist of but three or four buildings and a wharf. It is a low, flat point at the mouth of Caloosahatchee River . . . which, during the periodical overflow of the river, is many feet under water; consequently, the houses are mounted on posts. A large building is occupied as a telegraph office, the shore end of the Havana cable being at this point. The office of the United States Signal Bureau and the post-office is also in this building. Col. Summerlin[11] occupies the building at the wharf. Although a small place, Punta Rassa is important as a shipping point, as the cattle from the ranges of Southern Florida are all driven here and shipped to Key West and Havana. The cattle interest of Florida is quite extensive and yields a large amount of money annually. Key West and Cedar Key steamers touch here twice a week. A small steamer, the Spitfire, runs up the river as far as Fort Thompson,[12] and also makes trips to various places on Charlotte Harbor.

Sanibel Island, . . . opposite Punta Rassa, is renowned for its fine fishing. The angler can here fairly revel in piscatorial abandon and cover himself with piscine glory and fish scales. If ichthic [*sic*] variety is the spice of the angler's life, Sanibel and its sister keys are the Spice Islands. Sharks, rays and devil-fish, tarpum and jewfish, redfish, snappers and groupers, Spanish mackerel and kingfish, sea-trout, bonito and crevalle, lady-fish and sergeant fish,[13] sheepshead and drum, [and] a host of smaller fry—spots, grunts and porgies, and the ever-present . . . catfish can here be jerked, and yanked, . . . and pulled, and hauled until the unfortunate angler will lament that he was ever born. . . .

The entrance to Caloosahatchee River . . . is beset with oyster reefs, but the channel is staked, and by keeping a sharp lookout the cruiser will have no trouble. The river from Punta Rassa to Fort Myers, twenty miles above, is a large one, as broad as the St. Johns below Palatka. Vast pine

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10This area of the Gulf became well-known for its huge "devilfish" or manta rays. Among the fishermen who journeyed here to battle the behemoths was Theodore Roosevelt.
11Jacob Summerlin was Florida's greatest cattleman.
12During the Second Seminole War, Fort Thompson was established at the head of the Caloosahatchee by the forces of General Persifor S. Smith.
13"Sergeant fish" is another name for the cobia.

forests lead up to the banks on either hand, rendering this portion of the stream somewhat monotonous.

Fort Myers is quite a neat and thrifty village, with a church or two, several stores, a telegraph office, and some comfortable dwellings with tastefully arranged grounds. Some of the wealthiest cattlemen of Southern Florida reside here, and their wholesome influence is everywhere apparent. We arrived at Fort Myers on Sunday, and at night all hands and the cook attended divine service. I was surprised to find so much conventional style in a place, seemingly, so distant and so isolated from all the world. I could not realize that I was in the wilds of Florida while gazing upward at the lofty Gothic ceiling, with its chamfered and oiled rafters, or at the new cabinet organ, the font and lecturn [*sic*], or at Jack flirting with a prètty girl in a . . . Gainsborough hat and bangs.

Two or three miles above Fort Myers there is a group of small islands, where the river narrows and becomes . . . the width of the average river of Southern Florida; the banks become diversified with a greater variety of foliage, while guarding them like fabled dragons are numerous and large alligators. We moored the Rambler some ten miles above Fort Myers, near a clump of palmetto trees, where there was a good landing of hard ground, for the shores of this portion of the river are low and wet. The banks of streams generally on the west coast are much lower than those of the Atlantic coast, and this is true also of the shoreline of the Gulf.[14]

We found deer and turkeys quite plentiful, and the hunting [was] excellent on the burns in the open pine woods. We enjoyed our tramps here greatly, for they were the first open woods we had found since leaving Cape Sable. The next day while dressing a deer and some turkeys at the landing, the little Spitfire went puffing by with a party of excursionists from Fort Denaud[15] and Fort Thompson. . . .

One day as I was returning to the schooner I . . . heard . . . a rattlesnake, but as the place was thickly grown with tall grass I could not see it, and did not care to search for it in such a place. The boys [came] . . . along shortly afterward, [and] Cuff pointed two, they having crawled out into a more open space, when they were shot and brought in for Skipper's dinner, but he . . . preferred venison or turkey, or even black bass, to snake diet. These snakes were fully five feet long and three inches in diameter.

14The different appearances of the Gulf and Atlantic coastlines result from the fact that the western shore is sinking into the sea while the eastern shore is rising from it.

15On the south bank of the Caloosahatchee, Fort Denaud was established during the Second Seminole War by the forces of General Persifor S. Smith.

An episode of a serio-comic nature occurred to Jack at this place. He had gone hunting before breakfast, and losing his bearings, when but a quarter of a mile from the Rambler, he became himself a bewildered rambler in the, to him, limitless pine woods of Southern Florida. Being lost under such circumstances is sometimes a serious matter, owing to the unvarying monotony of the surroundings. He did not return until after sundown, though during the afternoon we had searched for him in every direction, shouting and firing guns repeatedly, and had given him up for the night, after setting fire to the scrub to guide his wandering footsteps campward. Just before dark I perceived him, afar off, heading toward the schooner. As the boys fired a volley I sprang into the rigging and waved a white handkerchief, which he observed, and [he] made toward us on the double-quick, swinging his hat all the way. He arrived footsore, weary and hungry, for he had not ceased walking all day, except for a half hour, when he stopped at a deserted cowboy's hut in the afternoon. Here he had made up his mind to stay for the night; and finding a pile of new cypress shingles, he wrote out a full account of the party and its objects, and where his friends might be addressed should he perish in the lonely flat woods. He then placed the "shingular" record in a row in a conspicuous place in the hut, with the first shingle inscribed in large letters: "Read and Act." He took another shingle and made a map of his supposed whereabouts, the course of the river, and the location of the schooner. After studying this for sometime, the idea dawned upon him to strike out in the opposite direction to where he supposed the schooner to lay, and acting upon this impulse he came straight toward us until I observed him, as stated. And strange to say, though he had seen the smoke from the fire, and the head of the mainsail, which we had hoisted as a conspicuous object, he could not believe that it was the Rambler, so confused had his ideas of location become, until he heard the guns and saw me waving the handkerchief . . .

Just above our camp was Twelve Mile Creek, and twenty miles above Fort Myers is a telegraph office where the line crosses the river. Still further up the river are Fort Denaud and Fort Thompson. At the latter place is the falls or rapids. In the neighborhood of Fort Thompson the soil is rich and deep, but subject to annual overflow, as is all the Caloosahatchee country. It is claimed that the canal which was being dredged from the Caloosahatchee to Lake Okechobee, by way of the Flirt and Hickpochee lakes, will prevent this overflow and drain all that flat section of country; but how the overflow of the river during the rainy season is to be prevented by bringing the waters of Lake Okechobee into it by

a canal is hard to imagine, unless Okechobee can be drained to the bottom, which is not probable.[16]

We returned to Fort Myers and Punta Rassa, and with a half gale from the northeast sailed up [to] Charlotte Harbor with the little stern-wheeler Spitfire ahead of us, the latter keeping well under the lee of the islands and making but little headway. On Pine Island, a large one, which we left to starboard, will be found a few deer. On our port was Sanibel, at the northerly end of which is Boca Ceiga Pass,[17] separating it from Captiva Island, and northward of this is Lacosta Island with Captiva Pass between them. On our starboard we passed a number of small keys and islands, Bird, Useppa, Mandingo, etc. On some of these keys were rookeries of egrets, herons, roseate spoonbills, cormorants, frigate birds, etc. We stopped awhile at a Spanish fishing ranche [*sic*] on Lacosta, just below Boca Grande, the pass separating it from Big Gasparilla. We found here a number of Spanish or Cuban families, but the season for fishing was over. There are a number of these fisheries on the west coast engaged in catching and curing mullet, finding a ready market at Key West and Havana.

Big Gasparilla and Little Gasparilla islands are separated by Big Gasparilla Pass. Both of these islands contain deer, and the fishing at the passes is excellent. On Big Gasparilla is another fish ranch, but the fishermen and their families had left for the season. Between two of the huts we killed two large rattlesnakes over five feet long. Squire discovered the first as he was in the act of stepping over it, as it lay stretched at full length; . . . needless to say, the step was a long one. He despatched it, and hunting around, we soon found its mate, which was also killed, and both reptiles skinned. . . .

At Little Gasparilla we took all the usual variety of fishes, many large sharks, and an immense jewfish, nearly as large as the one taken at Jupiter; it weighed fully three hundred pounds, being six and a half feet in length. Jack and I towed it ashore in the dingey, but even with a charge of buckshot through its skull, delivered at a distance of only two feet, we had a difficult job in beaching it, where, after dissecting it, we rolled it in again for the sharks. The mud flats at Little Gasparilla . . . at low tide fairly swarm with bay snipe and shore birds, while brown and

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16 The efforts made in the early 1880s to drain overflowed land from Kissimmee to the Caloosahatchee were not notably successful, for only about 50,000 acres were permanently drained. Nevertheless, steamers could now travel from Kissimmee to the Gulf, by way of Lakes Tohopekaliga, Cypress, Hatchineha, and Kissimmee, the Kissimmee River, Lake Okeechobee, and the Caloosahatchee.

17 Though in many cases, Henshall's spelling is now merely archaic, here it is incorrect. *Boca Ciega* is the correct Spanish spelling and literally means "blind mouth." This explains the origin of the present name for the cut: "Blind Pass."

white pelicans, gulls and gannets are fishing incessantly for mullet and other small fry. They strike down among the schools of small fishes with terrible force and a great splashing, completely demoralizing the little fellows, who are gobbled up before they have discovered the cause of the commotion. The piratical frigate birds, or man-o'-war hawks, sailing gracefully overhead, swoop down and rob the industrious gulls of their prey before they have time to swallow it.

The noble bald-headed eagle and the magnificent frigate-bird are both first-class sentimental frauds. We have watched the great American bird, time and again, perched atop a lofty pine up the inland streams, sitting motionless, in conscious pride as a king among birds and the emblem of a glorious nation, in the interests of which he is supposed to be meditating, with one eye upon the sun . . . and the other upon the maneuvers of an industrious osprey fishing for a breakfast for its nestlings. Having secured a fish, it starts off on joyous wing, when my noble eagle, casting to the winds his solar observations . . . , pursues with relentless fury the poor fish-hawk, compelling it to drop its well-earned prey, which is instantly seized by our noble bird . . . [and] conveyed to his lofty perch, where he ignominiously devours it. . . .

And the frigate bird or man o' war hawk, with its long forked tail, the magnificent sweep of its pointed wings, stretching fully six or eight feet from tip to tip, soaring aloaft [*sic*] with a grace and grandeur approached by no other bird, commands our admiration and wonder until he reveals his true nature by swooping down upon a poor little defenseless gull who has just emerged from the water with a fish in its bill, and ere it can shake the water from its eyes, the morsel intended for its callow little brood is ruthlessly and remorselessly snatched away by this rapacious robber, who thus prostitutes his mighty pinions and powers to such base purposes. . . .[18]

The beaches of the Gasparilla islands are rich in stores of sea-shells, sea-fans, star-fishes, sea-urchins, shark's eggs, etc. While busily engaged in picking up the treasures one day, two deer came out of the scrub about fifty yards from us, and stood for several minutes gazing at the unusual sight. After satisfying their curiosity they scampered off with their white flags flying in the rear. We did not molest them, for we were already supplied with venison.

Charlotte Harbor is one of the best points on the Gulf coast for the sportsman. It is a fine body of water, with numerous keys and islands, and nowhere will game or fish be found more abundant, while there is

[18] Actually, the frigate bird has a preference for fish much larger than the prey of small gulls; the latter, therefore, are rarely molested.

plenty of oysters, clams, crabs and turtles. The mainland can be penetrated by several rivers: Alligator River in the west, Peace Creek in the northeast, and Myakka River in the northwest portion of the bay. By sailing or rowing up any of these streams, deer, turkeys and, if he wants them, alligators, will be found in numbers to satisfy the greediest hunter, while ducks, snipe, quail and shore birds are, to say the least, multitudinous. The passes between the islands abound in fishes of endless variety. . . . And if of an adventurous turn, . . . [a party] can sail up the Caloosahatchee to Fort Thompson, and then proceed in canoes to Lake Okechobee.

We went outside at Little Gasparilla Pass with a south wind, about noon, and at four o'clock entered Casey's Pass. Here I captured a large white shark . . . and removed his formidable jaws as a trophy and memento of the event. From Casey's Pass we sailed next morning with a southwest wind. In passing Little Sarasota Inlet we saw the U.S. Coast Survey schooner moored inside, and the men at work surveying the inlet. We continued northward until we reached Big Sarasota Pass, through which we entered Sarasota Bay. This is a fine body of water, though shallow, and the mainland is dotted with homes of settlers. The drought still continued and water was scarce. At the fisheries on Lacasta and Gasparilla there were good wells where we procured water, but we were now about out of that necessary article. We sailed across the bay to a house, but found no one at home, but as necessity knows no law, we filled our casks at the cistern and proceeded on our way, camping near the head of the bay. There is not much game in this vicinity, for being somewhat thickly settled, the deer keep well back from the bay, nor did we see much smaller game; consequently our stay was short. On one of the islands shutting in the harbor is another fishery, and likewise one on Palma Sola Point on the mainland at the head of the bay. There are many small keys and some larger islands. . . . All of these we left to port as we sailed up the harbor. Rounding Palma Sola Point we entered Tampa Bay, with the lighthouse on Egmont Key to the northwest.

As we sailed into Tampa Bay we saw the steamer from Key West sail in through the main pass, near the lighthouse on Egmont Key, and proceed across the lower end of the bay to a small village, near the mouth of Manatee River, and then continuing up the bay [it] met the steamer from Tampa, where we left them transferring passengers and cargo. We anchored at sundown near the mouth of Little Manatee River, and the next morning sailed up to the old town of Tampa, which we found rather a neat village, with some pretty residences surrounded by orange groves. The barracks consist of a number of well-arranged and commodious buildings, models of neatness and good order. The grounds are tastefully laid

out with well-kept parade ground, lawns and drives, and magnificent water oaks and other shade trees, rivaling our best parks in beauty and attractiveness. Several companies of artillery are stationed here. There is not much attraction for the sportsman about Tampa, on account of the scarcity of game; for the invalid and tourist, however, it is a pleasant place. Hillsboro River, the third of that name I have seen in Florida, empties into the bay at Tampa, a small and uninteresting stream.

Tampa Bay is a large body of water some forty miles long and ten miles wide, and is often rougher than the Gulf itself. We experienced several days of squally weather there, with the wind continually shifting, so that we were obliged to skip from one lee to another in quick succession. We lost our large anchor on the east side, but found it again the next day during a lull in the wind, but [with] a violent rain squall coming on we put across to Papy's Bayou, near the mouth of Old Tampa Bay, where we remained a day or two. The usual varieties of aquatic birds were here, and one day I grained a sting ray in shallow water while in the canvas boat, and had quite a tussle with it. We sailed down the bay to Point Pinellas, anchoring in Big Bayou. Here were plenty of fine oysters and fish. The peninsula lying between Old Tampa Bay and the Gulf and ending in Point Pinellas . . . is high and healthful, clothed with pine woods and a few hamaks. Quail are quite plentiful, and fine sport may be had with . . . dog and gun in the open pine woods. Mr. W. P. Neild has a fine orange grove near Big Bayou. The trees are eight years old, in bearing, and look remarkably healthy and vigorous. There are a number of mango and alligator-pear trees in the grove, with limes, lemons, guavas, shaddocks, etc. I judge Point Pinellas to be one of the most salubrious and healthful locations on the west coast. There are a number of ancient burial and domiciliary mounds on the peninsula, and it seems to have been a favorite resort or dwelling place for the prehistoric tribes. A lake near the point is famous for its large and numerous alligators. On some of the keys near Point Pinellas are deer and other game.

Rounding the point we left to port several large keys . . . and a number of smaller ones, and stopped at Boca Ceiga Pass[19]. . . . There is a fine beach, thickly strewn with shells, sponges, sea fans, etc., and frequented by pelicans, herons, cormorants, etc. We also saw here a few flamingoes and roseate spoonbills.

Proceeding up Boca Ceiga Bay, we went out at John's Pass into the Gulf with a light breeze. When within a few miles of Little Clearwater Pass, we experienced a dead calm. The boundless Gulf became as smooth

19See footnote No. 17.

as a sea of molten glass, while the setting sun loomed up, a huge red disc, in the soft yellow haze. It was such a calm as is invariably the forerunner of a storm, and we resolved to reach Little Clearwater Pass if possible that night. Putting Jack ashore to walk up the beach to discover the inlet, we poled slowly along in two fathoms of water, not far from the shore. The sun then sank into the . . . sleeping sea like a great globe of fire, sending up . . . broad, fanlike rays of molten gold, diffusing tints of amber and saffron through the dense and heavy atmosphere, while a deathlike stillness pervaded the scene. The broad leaves of the palms fringing the shore were in quiet repose, and nowhere o'er land or sea could be seen the tremor of a wing or the ripple of a fin; not the slightest movement was discernible. Even the pelicans, gulls and gannets had ceased fishing and sat quiescent on the white beach. All nature had been seemingly struck motionless as though by an enchanter's wand. The swish of the poles as they were withdrawn, and the water dripping . . . from them . . . , were the only sounds to be heard. Finally the yellow twilight seemed to sink into the sea, the stars began to twinkle through the haze, and the murky night closed around us.

Jack, returning toward the schooner from an unsuccessful search for the inlet, set fire to the beach scrub as he walked along, causing a long line of flame to shoot straight up into the still night, casting a broad red glare far out upon the unruffled waters. After supper we put out a second anchor, lengthened the cables, took in a double reef all 'round, furled and stoppered the sails, made everything snug and turned in. About two o'clock I was awakened by the main boom lashing around furiously, and found the Rambler pitching, rolling and straining at the cables like an untamed steed. I turned out to secure the boom, and groping around in the darkness for the main halyard cleat, I caught hold of Skipper's hand intent on the same office; it was so dark I could not see him. We lowered the boom and furled sail to the deck and secured it, and then looked out at the night.

What a contrast to the calm, serene and beautiful sunset of a few hours before! Then all nature seemed asleep—now she was raging in a perfect frenzy. The waters were tossed tumultuously, seething and hissing before a gale from the southwest, drenching us to the skin with spray. The swell was tremendous. It whirled and tossed the Rambler like a cockle-shell, the cordage creaking, the shrouds shrieking and the halyards rattling madly against the masts. The sky was black, the waters black, and the shore line still blacker. Inky scuds flew across the sky, northward, at a furious rate. The sombre sea heaved and rolled as in agony, with a sickly pallor of phosphorescence that only rendered the darkness more

visible. The breakers roared and thundered on the beach but 200 yards away. Oh, how we longed for daylight! We were bound for an inlet the exact whereabouts of which we did not know, and were ignorant how to enter it, if found, in the darkness. Skipper was for scudding before the gale under the double-reefed foresail, but as the anchors were still holding I counseled waiting for daylight, or so long as the anchors continued to hold. After paying out more cable we waited and watched the eastern sky for the first glimmer of the dawn.

It seemed as though the night would never pass away, but grew even blacker, were that possible, while the gale increased in violence. Squire and Jack were sleeping peacefully and calmly, perhaps dreaming of loved ones at home. We did not wake them; we only marveled how they could sleep so soundly with the elements at war around them. . . . Skipper and I sat in the cockpit watching the east with eyes of faith; but . . . would the day never come! We could not see each other, but our pipes glowed fiercely red in the black night—sparks of comfort, indeed. At last I saw a suspicion of dim light paling the eastern heavens, causing the flying scuds to assume a shade less black. Then I heard a shore bird twitter.

"Skipper," said I, "the day is coming!"

Soon the eastern sky showed a faint change, like the passing away of a dense mist, disclosing a heavy, dark curtain, against which could be indistinctly outlined the palmettoes on shore. Then a slight rosy tinge, like the delicate blush of a sea-shell, was perceived along the edge of the horizon—a narrow pink border to the dark gray curtain—and at last came the glorious day. We roused Squire and Jack, hoisted the reefed foresail, hauled up the anchors, and fairly flew before the fierce gale. It was but a few minutes ere we sighted the inlet, the breakers dashing furiously over the bar. As we neared it the day broke brighter. Then we rushed in between the lines of breakers, and over the narrow bar, and through the narrow inlet, and a hundred yards further [on] we reached a shelter and a harbor, with the water scarcely ruffled, under the lee of the beach ridge, while outside the storm demons still raged and howled.

After breakfast a schooner came flying in [through] the pass under a small sail rigged on a jurymast, her foremast having gone by the board. We sailed across to Dunedin and anchored. Clearwater Harbor has a number of settlers, their houses appearing to good advantage on the bluffs, surrounded by young orange groves. This is one of the few desirable points on the west coast. The banks are higher than any place we had seen. The bay is a fine body of water, shut out from the Gulf by several large

islands, . . . with passes between. Fish and small game are abundant. At Dunedin is a store and post-office. The next day we sailed for Anclote River, fifteen miles above. Near the mouth of this river are two stores and a post-office, and close by is an old Spanish well, where good water can be obtained. They were expecting a railroad at this place, and we found this same railroad expectancy and consequent "boom" at nearly every place on the Florida coast; though what benefit would accrue to the railroads was not apparent, for the transportation by sailboats seemed to be amply sufficient for the produce of the country.[20] A few miles up Anclote River is a large bayou, where good fishing may be had. Still further up the stream will be found Salt Lake and a salt spring, and near the source of the river a sulphur spring. Off the mouth of the river lie the Anclote Keys, behind which is a safe and deep anchorage, and where we found a fleet of fishing smacks driven in by the gale. On the fishing banks, some twenty miles off-shore, these smacks take red snappers for the Havana market.

From Anclote we proceeded ten miles northward to Pithlachesticostie River, called "Costie" for short, a small stream with its mouth completely blocked by oyster reefs; and ten miles further north we came to Bayport, at the mouth of Weckawachee River. The channels from the Gulf to the mouths of these rivers, and those above, are staked. Near the wharf at Bayport we ran on the broken mast of a sunken blockade runner, but got off without sustaining any damage. Bayport is an old place of some note, formerly quite important as a shipping point for cedar. It consists of a store, post-office, and a few pleasant residences. It is a pretty place, with some of the largest orange and lemon trees I saw in Florida. Mr. Parsons is proprietor of the store, and will be found an agreeable and intelligent gentleman.

We went up the river some two miles with the schooner, and then proceeded to the head of the stream, about ten miles further, in the small boats. The source of the river is a large spring, in a basin of an acre in extent, surrounded by a rim or ridge of considerable elevation. This "White Mountain Spring," as it is called, is a subterranean river bursting out at this point with great force, giving to the river below a very strong current until tide water is reached. The spring is fifty feet in depth and so clear that one's boat seems . . . suspended in mid-air[21] Great numbers of sheepshead and gars can be seen swimming near the bottom, but, as might be expected, refuse to take a bait in water so clear. The smallest object

[20]Despite Henshall's feeling that a railroad was unnecessary, Henry B. Plant's South Florida line soon entered the region, extending as far as Tampa by January, 1884.

[21]A first magnitude spring (one that discharges at least a hundred cubic feet of water a second), Weekiwachee is now a famous tourist attraction.

can be clearly defined on the bottom of pure white sand. The water boils up through great rents in the coralline rocks at the bottom, the boil being plainly seen at the surface. It is said that with a heavy cannon-shot the largest rent has been sounded to a depth of ninety feet. At the bottom of the spring, and for a short distance down the stream, are growing curious water plants, whose small elliptic leaves exhibit tints of red, purple and blue, which are reflected through the crystal waters with a strange and pleasing effect. We were well repaid for our row up the river against the strong current, in viewing the wonders of this spring. There is a store and a dwelling on its banks, and a large schooner was resting on its bosom, which had been built, and was being rigged, at this place. In the pine woods near the spring deer are numerous, and turkeys are plentiful in the hamaks.

Our return down stream with the current was an easy task and very enjoyable, for most of the way is through dense, low and rich hamaks abounding in semi-tropical scenery. Tall cypresses and palmettoes, swamp maples and Spanish ash nod to each other across the narrow stream, while the great white blossoms of the sweet bay and magnolia gleam like stars amid the dark and glossy leaves and fill the air with delicious perfume. The osprey hovers, screaming, over its huge nest on some . . . cypress; the swallow-tailed kite soars gracefully overhead; the great blue heron starts suddenly, with hoarse cry, from a secluded nook by the water's side, and lazily flaps away, with its long legs sticking straight out behind; and the ungainly water turkey or snake bird sits awkwardly on a limb projecting over the stream, tilting back and forth in vain efforts to balance rises from a large spring. Some of the rivers of the interior sudderly [*sic*] undecided whether to drop to the water or take flight. Black bass, sunfish, sheepshead and gar . . . , with an occasional alligator, can be plainly seen swimming along in the clear . . . water.

Returning to the Rambler we put back to Bayport and up the coast, ten miles, to Chessowiskee River. This part of the coast abounds in masses of black rock, called "nigger heads," for which the cruiser must keep a sharp lookout or he may come to grief, as they crop up to within a few inches of the surface. This river, as do most of the streams in this section, rises from a large spring. Some of the rivers of the interior sudderly [sic] disappear under ground, and most probably . . . reappear at the surface through these springs. At the mouths of the rivers are numerous oyster banks where sheepshead and drum . . . congregate. Ten miles further north we come to Homosassa River, and following the tortuous channel at its mouth we anchored a mile from the Gulf. The Homosassa is a beautiful stream, unlike most others on the west coast. It rises from two large

springs, and seems to have forced its way suddenly and with great violence toward the Gulf, cutting its way through the rocky soil by numerous channels, leaving many islands of coraline [*sic*] rock crowned by cabbage palms for the last four miles of its course.

The next morning we sailed up to the charming resort of Capt. A. E. Jones, four miles from the mouth of the river. This is the most home-like hotel in Florida, and under the able management of Capt. and Mrs. Jones has become a favorite winter resort for many Northern sportsmen and their families. There are two long buildings with spacious and comfortable rooms, all on the first floor, shaded by verandas, and facing each other, with a beautiful lawn between adorned by orange, lemon and fig trees, with the beautiful river in front and orange groves in the rear. It was formerly the home of Mr. Yulee,[22] but was abandoned and burnt during the war; the large sugar plantation adjoining, with its mills and machinery, being also deserted and destroyed and permitted to lapse into a state of tropical wildness. The fine fishing and hunting at this place is so well known, having often being described in FOREST AND STREAM, that I will not dwell upon it here; suffice it to say that we went out one day with Mr. Giles and Mr. Curtis, both of New York, and hunted a strip of hamak but a mile from the hotel, where I killed my last deer in Florida before a young deerhound belonging to Mr. Giles. We went to the springs at the head of the river in the schooner without difficulty under the pilotage of Mr. Curtis.[23] They are similar to the other river springs of this section, but the river itself, I think, is by far the most beautiful. To those wishing the comforts of a home while enjoying the fishing, shooting, boating, subtropical scenery and climate salubrity of the Gulf Coast, I would say, by all means go to Homosassa and put yourselves under the hospitable roof of Capt. and Mrs. A. E. Jones, whose efforts to secure the comfort and well-being of their guests are untiring and proverbial, and moreover, you will there meet with some of the best people of the North, to associate with whom will be one of your greatest pleasures.

One night while anchored off the wharf of Capt. Jones I was awakened by strains of melody floating over the water, and turning out I beheld several large lights floating down the stream above us. Soon I discovered it to be a long raft of cedar logs being poled along by negroes, whose dusky forms were brought out in strong relief by the blazing fires of pine-knots in hoop iron baskets, and whose clear and musical voices, singing

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22 One of Florida's most important former citizens, David Levy Yulee is probably best known for his long service as a United States Senator. The plantation ruins Henshall visited are now a state historical memorial.

23 Another first magnitude spring, Homosassa is acclaimed for its fish concentrations.

their . . . refrains, had been softened by distance and borne along the surface of the water in the still night.

The next day we were anchored near the mouth of the river, laying in supplies. Skipper was in the dingey tonging oysters. Squire was standing on the cabin roof watching for ducks and shore birds. Jack had gone ashore in the canvas boat to shoot snipe, while I was catching sheepshead. A sudden flaw of wind sent the foresail sweeping over the cabin roof, the boom striking Squire amidships and sent him sprawling into the river. I seized the conch horn and blew a terrific blast to attract the attention of the boys, for the scene was too good to enjoy alone. Jack and Skipper looked over just as Squire emerged upright with the water up to his shoulders. . . .

As we passed out into the Gulf from the mouth of the Homosassa, the negro boatmen were mooring the raft of cedar logs under the lee of an island, to await the arrival of the little steamer that was to tow it up to Cedar Key. . . . We put out into the Gulf some five miles, beyond the group of Martin's Keys, and ten miles northward came to the Sweetwater Keys off the mouth of Crystal River. The mouth of this river is beset with oyster banks, but about it is a fine clear stream navigable to its source, some twelve miles, where it arises from several springs, near which is the village of Crystal River. Along this pure and beautiful stream the usual fishing, game and oysters are to be obtained.

Ten miles further northward we came to the sand banks off the mouth of Withlacoochee River—called "Coochee" for short. This is a narrow, deep river, more than a hundred miles long, arising in Polk county, to the eastward of Tampa, and [it] flows northward along the eastern border of Hernando county, and thence westward to the Gulf. It is navigable for some twenty-five miles. As this river penetrates so far into the mainland, and flows through so extensive and varied a range of country, where the finest hunting, shooting and black bass fishing can be enjoyed, it is a desirable stream for the sportsman with a small boat. An entire winter could be profitably spent on this river. Connected with it is Panasofkee Lake, a large body of water but twelve miles from Lake Harris at the head of Ocklawaha River. . . . To the canoeist a delightful and interesting trip would be from Jacksonville up the sluggish St. Johns and Ocklawaha rivers to Lake Harris, thence by a portage of twelve miles (by wagons) to Lake Panasofkee and the Withlacoochee. From the mouth of the latter river it is but twenty miles to Cedar Key, inside the Keys of Waccasassa Bay, where the water is shallow and smooth.

Along the Withlacoochee the sportsman will find forests of pines,

with deer and quail, broad savannas and cypress swamps, abounding in herons, cranes, egrets, water turkeys, ospreys, eagles, etc., and ponds, lakes and bayous, the resort of innumerable flocks of ducks, coots, plover, snipe and curlew, while in the swamps and low hamaks can be found panthers, bears, wild cattle and hogs, and in the high hamaks squirrels and turkeys. . . . On the coast, between the mouths of the Withlacoochee and Anclote rivers, are numerous keys and many harbors, the rivers and creeks being only from five to ten miles apart, while lying outside, parallel with the coast and some ten miles distant, is St. Martin's Reef, breaking off the force of the sea and rendering this portion of the coast as smooth as a mill pond, and in consequence, the shores are green to the water's edge.

The rivers emptying into the Gulf between the "Coochee" and the Anclote have their sources in beautiful and wonderful springs, which burst out from the base of a high sand ridge running parallel with the coast, and distant from it some twelve miles. This ridge is covered by open pine forests, and eastward of it lie extensive hamaks of tropical luxuriance. . . .

From the mouth of the Withlacoochee we took our course northwest, direct for Cedar Key, where we arrived in the afternoon on the first day of May [1882], and the "Cruise of the Rambler" was ended.

Cedar Key is now a thriving and flourishing city of several thousand inhabitants. . . . Its principal industries are cedar and pine saw-mills, fishing and turtling. It is the shipping point for the produce, and the commercial emporium, of the west coast, being the western terminus of the Florida Transit Railroad, running across the State from Fernandina, and connecting the Gulf with the Atlantic. Lines of steamers connect it with Tampa, . . . Key West and Havana, Mobile, New Orleans and Galveston. There are several hotels: the Suwannee, the Gulf and Bettelini's, and many good stores. The sportsman can be fitted out with everything needful for camping and cruising except fine fishing tackle, fixed ammunition and cartridge shells.

The visitor cannot fail to be interested in the cedar mills of the Faber and Eagle Pencil Companies. The logs are here run through saw after saw, until finally reduced to pencil stocks and pen-holders, when they are packed in boxes and shipped East to the pencil factories to be filled and polished. Even the cedar sawdust is utilized, being packed in casks and sent to New York. Some of the machinery is very ingenious and interesting and will well repay a visit. Cedar is becoming scarce, even in Florida, and what we will do for pencil stocks when it is exhausted is hard to tell, for

no other wood will answer, and Florida cedar is the best in the world for the purpose.[24]

There are several fish houses where great quantities of fresh fish are packed in ice and shipped North in the winter. Thousands of green turtles are also shipped from this point. They are taken in gill-nets with a mesh of eighteen inches. These nets are not staked down as on Indian River on the east coast, but are anchored on the grassy banks and shoals, wherever the turtles are found, sometime [*sic*] many miles from shore. . . .

At length, on the morning of the tenth day of May, I stepped aboard the train of the Transit Railroad, and was soon rattling over the keys to the mainland, leaving behind the broad bay, the white sails, the skimming gulls and the mangroves. At last we were whirled into the pine woods and hamaks, and I caught the last, grand and glorious view of the boundless, blue Gulf, sleeping and shimmering in the bright morning sun. . . .

[24]Part of Henshall's premonition proved correct. Although Americans never had to do without pencil stocks, the excessive exploitation of timber was a decided factor in Cedar Key's decline in the late 1880s. The impact of wasteful practices in commercial lumbering and fishing on the community's history is illustrated in several exhibits of the Cedar Key Historical Memorial.