

## Judge Henry Hudson Hancock, 1868-1951

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The name Hancock is prominently identified with pioneer history of Florida. Around the middle of the nineteenth century they came into the new state and took up land. Many of them married into territorial families, and were influential in making Florida an integral part of the Union. Also when the tragic division came with the Civil War, they were well represented in the ranks of the South. Some are buried as far away as Franklin, Tennessee. Those who remained behind were members of the militia and raised beef to help feed the Confederate army.

Here they prospered and aided in formation of new communities which began their record for public service that has been characteristic of their descendants, among whom was Henry Hudson Hancock. He is remembered for his long and distinguished service to mankind. After his move from Polk County to the Lake Okeechobee region (a tremendous undertaking at the time), he continued to be set apart as a leader in business, political and social activities that had begun in the nineteenth century and lasted well into the twentieth.

Judge Hancock, as he was to become familiarly known, was born in Polk County, Florida, January 30, 1868, at his father and mother's homestead set among orange groves, timber lands with grazing cattle just west of Fort Meade, Florida, the scion of one of Polk County's foremost families. His father was James Thomas Hancock (always 'James' to his family and friends) and his mother was Serena Willingham. Both natives of Georgia, they did not meet until their families had moved and settled in Polk County, Florida. The first Hancocks to enter Florida were from Thomasville, Georgia. In the main, they were cattle herders who had spread to what is now Madison, Florida, then spread on down the west coast of the peninsula with James Thomas Hancock's family homesteading and taking up more land on the banks of the Alafia River in Hillsborough County. As a young man James set out on his own and took up a homestead in Polk County. There he met and married Serena

Willingham, the daughter of the richest man anywhere around. She was a pretty self-possessed girl with dark eyes and abundant coal black hair above a high forehead (those of her children who most resembled her were Henry and his sister, Isabel). His wife proved to be a woman of great stamina.

Serena's father had come from Scotland, a mere lad thought to have been impressed by a ship's captain who brought him to a port in Virginia where he escaped. He made his way southward to east Florida and married into the Baker and Hilliard Families. His wife, Annie, was the first person to be buried at the Basinger Cemetery now in Okeechobee County. William Willingham it is said had ten thousand head of cattle grazing on Kissimmee Island. His wife died while accompanying him there and it was impossible to get her body back to Polk County to the Willingham cemetery; however, today the Basinger Cemetery is a well kept historic pioneer burying place. There are those who say Serena had traces of Spanish blood, her facial features gave these hints some credence. Her husband, James, was blue-eyed and had light brown hair which bore out his English and Scotch-Irish heritage.

They built a spacious house on their homestead much in the tradition of southern pioneer dwellings of the more prosperous where they raised their twelve children. As James acquired more land, he planted more citrus, bought and sold timber land and ran several hundred head of cattle. Not only did the Hancocks do well materially speaking, James took on an active part in his community's affairs. He served as chairman of the County Board of Commissioners, was a school trustee and performed any service he was called on to do willingly, and left behind an excellent reputation as a wise counselor to his family and fellow human beings. Both he and Serena set an example to their children as being citizens of distinction and usefulness.

Serena inherited the Willingham homestead near Fort Meade and after she became a widow, she moved back there. Following her husband's death, she divided the estate giving each one of her children a section of land and a hundred head of cattle. The Willingham house where she grew up was one of the first 'fine' houses to be built in this part of Florida, a sturdy hand-pegged two-story dwelling painted white and with gingerbread trimming on the broad veranda. In the 'front room' was a huge fireplace made of limestone, large blocks hand cut from the Peace River by her father. Her oldest son James Thomas Junior, had married before his father died, and his patrimony had been given to him for a wedding present; he had already built his own large white house, and so Serena gave the Willingham place to her second son, Robert Washington, and she moved in with him and his family. To her youngest son,

Durham, she gave the Hancock homestead she had shared with her husband. Also Serena had inherited what would be today a sizeable fortune in Spanish gold. Long after the last of her family to live at the Willingham place, one could go there and find those hopefully digging for a fortune in gold around the fireplace where it was rumored William Willingham had buried his gold. Today it is owned by a phosphate company, beneath the homestead was another fortune that the Willinghams did not know about in their day. She saw to it that each of her children built a home on his or her property as well as planting a grove. True pioneers! Records of 1853 shows the Hancocks and the Willinghams among the earliest settlers of central Florida.

To pioneers in general and to Southern ones in particular, kith and kin, whether saint or sinner, cemeteries are an important part of their lives along with family reunions and church dinners 'on the ground'. But funerals and cemeteries have priority even over births and weddings! Of course, the Hancock and Willingham clans each had its own cemetery located near their homes and in view of passersby. It was a Sunday afternoon pastime to go to the cemeteries, a social occasion not unlike the Chinese of whom they knew very little, but today these provide invaluable records for Florida historians. Both the Hancock and the Willingham cemeteries are still maintained and burials continue in the Hancock's. Judge Hancock, however, is the only one of his immediate family not to be buried there. It was his wish to be buried in the country that had lured him as a young man, and so he rests at the Okeechobee cemetery.

Even at the present time to attend a Hancock funeral is something to remember! In no way is there any irreverence meant, for they pay utmost respect to one of theirs who has departed this life no matter how distant the relationship or how he has spent his life. Blood to them, indeed, is thicker than water! It is an event! The news spreads quickly and widely. They gather one and all, not only Hancocks but in-laws and in-laws of in-laws. One could never believe there are so many 'kissin' cousins left in the world! Then there are the friends and friends of friends along with the preachers and the politicians. These funerals are held out in the open at the site of the cemetery. One of the criteria of just how much esteem one of them is held can be judged by how many preachers hold sway, in the main, 'hard-shells' (some who are more urban seem to prefer Presbyterians). The 'mourners' make no complaint of their long-windedness for it prolongs the handshaking, hugging, kissing and getting up on the news of those whom they have not seen since the last occasion. A distant cousin was heard to reply when she was asked about some pleasurable event, "I never had such a good time since the last Hancock funeral." The events, however, embody a great deal that was important

to a large portion of the South, mores and customs so much in the flux of change, the younger generation will forget simply because they do not have them to remember.

James Thomas, Junior, known as Jim, became a civil engineer, a very good one. His surveys were accurate and dependable and so he was asked to go into the Kissimmee River Valley and Lake Okeechobee region to make accurate surveys where there were not any. Today his *Hancock Meander Line* and corners he set there are used and respected by any surveyor who desires a true description. Government engineers had been sent in, but to them it was such a wild and unwilling land they never penetrated far enough to make a true charting and only guessed at the lay of the land. Often Judge Hancock would chuckle and his deep brown eyes would twinkle as he said, "Had I built my house according to those government engineers, it would right now be sitting in the middle of Lake Okeechobee!" It was his brother Jim's assignment that was responsible for Henry's move from Polk County. Henry also had some knowledge of civil engineering (as did their father) and so Jim enlisted his aid for the very difficult task.

Before Henry Hudson Hancock had left Polk County to take up a new homestead in the Lake Okeechobee country, he was an educator and a public figure of some consequence. Not only had his grandfather set an example, as did his brother, Jim, but especially from his brother, Bob, (Robert Washington) who was just older than he. Bob from the outset had chosen to be a leader in public affairs. Sunday mornings would find him leading the singing in church, but mostly through the week he was off to chair the county commissioners, the school board, politicking or some kind of meeting. He was a well known figure around the county seat of Bartow twelve miles away. Often his mother would chide him, "Bob, you are so busy 'tending to other peoples' business, you don't have time to 'tend to yours.'" Nevertheless, Bob Hancock did distinguish himself in what he liked best—county and state politics. He was a personal friend of Henry B. Plant and a member of the Florida Legislature. At that time he wielded a great deal of influence in getting Plant to serve isolated communities with his railroad. Also he was one of the founders of the citrus exchange and its first field secretary. In his last term in the legislature Hardee County was carved out of huge Polk. Personally, he was not against it but his constituents were. He thought he should abide by what those who elected him wanted, and so he resisted such pressures that the new county would be named for him if he voted for it. He declined the honor and suggested it be named for the new governor, Carey A. Hardee.

Henry was the most scholarly inclined of James and Serena Han-

cock's children. He was eager to go to school and did well. His basic education was received in the schools of Polk County including the Summerlin Institute at Bartow, a school financed by Jacob Summerlin, the wealthiest cattleman in Florida, himself practically unlettered but who had a great respect for learning. Many leading figures of central Florida received their formal educations there. Jacob Summerlin was a distant relative of Henry's.

On completion of high school, Henry was issued a teacher's certificate. Barely eighteen he began teaching school at the same continuing his education by going to normal and summer schools along with self-education. He became principal of the school at Fort Meade then later Avon Park, Florida. But, in the meantime, he received his inheritance and felt he had to leave the profession he loved to give it his attention; however, he was appointed a member of Polk County's school board. When he decided to accompany his brother, Jim, to help make the surveys of the big lake country, he resigned from the school board not knowing at the time it was his first act of severing his official ties with Polk County and its affairs.

In the meantime, too, he had married. His bride was practically "the new girl in town," Jane Sturgis. Jane had been born in Branford, Florida, but she grew up at Waldo, Florida, where her father was an early railroad man. When she was seventeen her mother, Martha Jane, was left a widow and faced the task of making a living. She and her daughter left Waldo and went to Fort Meade where Mrs. Sturgis ran an inn, in the main, to accommodate the new railroad. Also she acquired a piano for her daughter who was a somewhat accomplished musician. It was not long until Henry Hancock, who liked to sing, was visiting at the Sturgis Inn to the point that the townsfolk were beginning to notice how much time his fine Tennessee walking horse spent at the hitching post in front of the Sturgis place. It was June 30, 1889, when Henry Hudson Hancock married Jane Sturgis in her mother's parlor.

Jane's fragile appearance with her gentle blue eyes and soft smile often concealed her iron will, patience and a sly sense of humor. All of which she needed in abundance for her life with Henry. It was a happy union. The Henry Hancocks had seven children, five born in civilized Polk County and two more born in a wilderness she did not even know about at the time of her marriage. She outlived her husband by eleven years. From the time the two brothers, Jim and Henry Hancock, astride their Tennessee horses, left the sandhills dotted with small blue lakes and descended into the lush green valley of the Kissimmee River, Henry was entranced with the boundless horizon of the green valley meeting an azure sky and it cast a spell over him. This pristine wilderness awed and

fascinated him. Unlike the government engineers, he wanted to explore it and did not fear it. Henry exclaimed to his brother that he thought it a beautiful country, one in which he might want to homestead. Jim with less romance in his soul reminded his brother they had come to do a job and would do it, but once it was done he wanted to return to Polk County as soon as possible. Once they explored it, Henry was determined more than ever to homestead on the north shores of Lake Okeechobee.

This was January, 1901, when the Hancock brothers had come to this strange and unique world — the entrance to the Everglades. Before they had left home they knew that January was the best time to set out. It was the 'dry' season, however, back then there were no real droughts as of today. As they approached the Kissimmee River, their trained eyes saw that it was a 'drain' (much as African Rivers) and what is called "a braided river." Its multi-channels with their hurrying currents suddenly would narrow and this cut bluffs which were the only semblance of permanent banks. The river, its water the color of strong tea, flowed from northwest to southeast cutting a wide valley depression from Lake Tohopekaliga to Lake Okeechobee. Before it emptied into Lake Okeechobee its huge delta was a series of swamps, backwaters, lagoons, dead rivers, ponds, islands and sandbars. It was easy to observe it battled forever with wind, water and land (later with people!). Solitude brooded here! Along the river it was teeming with aquatic life. Fish could be caught with the bare hands except for the largest of the big-mouth bass. Their meals were cooked over an open fire and always had a pan of fried speckled perch or the big bass, often both. From the ponds and the lagoons beneath the water lettuce came the sounds and croaks of myriad frogs including that of the jumbo bullfrogs; it sounded like a convention without any rules. On the sand banks, especially where water had recently receded and fish were still gasping for air, lay great slimy piles of cotton-mouth moccasins with their wide ugly mouths agape ready to feast on the dead fish or bite anybody who disturbed them. Jim and Henry had been careful even though expert horsemen to avoid the snakes. They watched out for the tortoise gopher holes where the danger was two-fold, a horse could stumble in one of them risking breaking a leg and at the same time being bitten by a huge diamond back rattlesnake that had holed up there. Once they saw a rattler they guessed was about eight feet long swimming gracefully across a lagoon toward a hillock of saw palmettoes on the other side. Alligators were everywhere along the oozy banks of the river as were turtles of all kinds and sizes. Some were sunning and others were sliding in and out of the water. All about them were the aquatic birds. Gorgeous ones! One could hardly believe there were so many in the world! Wailing limpkins, snowy egrets that hung from the

willows like ornaments on Christmas trees, big white American ones that stood about with the herons, great and small, galinules and even plenty of Everglades kites back in 1901. Except for the limpkins, they watched silently the intruders trespassing on their domain. Overhead were flights of ibises both snow whites and glossies, and off to themselves standing in a ring were big birds that belong to the stork family called by the natives "ironheads," from the rusty-colored topknot on their big black heads above their large white bodies. The ironheads were doing nothing more than concentrating on the little pond frogs they were going to eat but they reminded one of praying elders. The most unusual were the anhingas commonly called "snakebirds" and for good reason. When swimming only long twisted necks and their heads could be seen, a bird with no oil in its feathers and so when out of the water spreads its broad black wings on a bush to dry like a Seminole's wash. In a glade nearby were a flock of the luscious pink roseate spoonbills and three tall sandhill cranes that always went in pairs unless with a young one. Birds, Birds! Aquatic and of the air. Giant woodpeckers and other flickers, colorful painted buntings, kingfishers — just too many to name — of course, the Hancock brothers had been dining well along the way on quail, doves and wild turkey.

Flora and fauna everywhere! Flags, mallows, small white water lilies. It would take an expert to identify them all. Jim and Henry Hancock knew more about the fauna: rabbits; opossums; armadilloes; the land tortoises, called 'gophers'; foxes, otters; deer; bobcats; black bears and panthers, Florida pumas. They saw the bears sauntering near the bay galls and one night heard a panther scream and so they got up and built up their campfire and then went back to sleep. They felt they had explored the west side of the river enough for the timebeing, so Jim and Henry decided to look for the best place to ford the river to keep their instruments, saddle bags and guns dry. They came to some islands and sandbars and saw cattle tracks, the concave "banks" of the river made fine grazing, there they crossed over without any trouble. On the other side they saw reddish rangy cattle grazing and some deer and they were sleek. Jim told Henry he thought they would soon come to Peter Raulerson's. As they rode along, they came upon more of the cattle and before them a man on horseback leisurely riding in and out of the cattle. They spurred their horses and caught up with him. It was Peter sitting tall in his saddle astride his cow pony. The cattle were descendants of Spanish cattle as was the kind of horse Peter rode, these were fast and cut herds quite well but because they were a small breed always called 'ponies.'. Peter Raulerson, known as 'Pete,' also was a native of Polk County. Relatives there often spoke of his wandering down into the lake country.

First, he had settled at Basinger ten miles to the north of Lake Okeechobee, but the land was for the taking so for his own reasons he moved on. He likely decided that if his wife, Louisiana, and their several children did not mind the isolation, why should he worry about what his relatives thought?

The Raulersons understood the country's climate and terrain, so they had built a big two-story house of virgin pine, a square structure with a bannistered porch that went all the way around it. Louisiana and her husband were hospitable people and welcomed the Hancock brothers. Long after the surveys were made, Jim would return periodically to stay with the Raulersons and preach at the 'Hardshell' church built on their homestead. After the 'meetin', he, Pete and Louisiana along with their friends and relatives would sit on the cool porch to discuss their interpretations of the Bible. In spite of Jim's powerful preaching, Henry did not become a 'Hardshell' (Primitive Baptists, a denomination of the lower South).

Henry selected a homestead on the east bank of Taylor's Creek just opposite the Peter Raulerson's on the west bank. Taylor Creek was a water-way into Lake Okeechobee, two miles to the south of the homesteads, named for Zachary Taylor who fought the famous Seminole Battle of Okeechobee, Christmas Day, 1838. Peter Raulerson gave Henry some good advice, which he took. First of all, he advised him to drive his cattle down from Polk County and build a temporary shelter for his family. In the meantime, he would look after the cattle until Henry could bring his family. This was the tradition of the pioneer cattleman, each had his own marks and brands, used the common range and never mismarked even a motherless calf.

Henry Hancock's son, Clyde, still lives at Okeechobee. He recalls the 'cattle drovin' (drive) and when his family moved to the Lake Okeechobee region very vividly. "I will always remember the day my father told us we were going to move to Lake Okeechobee. First he was going to drive the cattle down. He was making preparation for him and his brother, uncle Martin, to make the drive. Even though we had cattle, I had never been allowed to be a cowboy and that was why I wanted to be more than anything. I thought this was my chance so I begged to go along. But Papa kept saying I couldn't go. It was too much of an undertaking to have one as young as I tagging along. Finally, Uncle Martin interceded and said, let the boy go, it will be good for him. Later this proved to be right when it came time for the family to go. My father, though, told me there would be only two horses and I would probably be a 'walkin' cowboy.' This hopefully would discourage me, but it didn't. My mother made an extra bedroll of some old blankets and put some extra supplies



in the saddle bags for me. I have never been so happy in my life! I really did walk much of the way, I got very tired, my feet hurt but I did not complain because so much of the trip was fun. We hunted, fished and cut swamp cabbage, the tender heart of the sabal palm. By the natives it is cooked with bacon in a heavy pot. Now it is a gourmet salad served raw or canned and called "hearts of palm." All one needed was a gun and a fishing line to eat well off the land. The second day out was my birthday. I was twelve years old October 22, 1901 and I never had such a fine birthday! As we went into the Kissimmee River Valley, I thought it the most beautiful sight I ever had seen. Endless green beneath a high blue sky. It was like a world at the beginning!"

With the hundred head of cattle ready to cross the river, Henry decided he would send his bull across first and the cows and calves would follow. The bull became excited and fled from the shallow waters of the islands and sandbars and jumped into a deep lagoon where he went round and round. This almost caused a stampede, but fortunately there was a small paddle boat nearby and so Henry got into it and with the paddles subdued the bull and drove him back to the crossing place where he obediently did his duty and led the herd safely to the other side. Clyde said, "Papa never backed down about anything he was determined to do."

They turned the cattle out with Pete's on the common grazing land (no fences in those days), then they went to the Peter Raulerson place where they stayed until Henry constructed a log house as a temporary shelter for his family. Later there would be the big white one after Captain Hall had brought down the river the implements and tools to cut and polish the lumber for it, glass for the windows, paint etcetera. After the log house was completed Henry, his brother, Martin and Clyde returned to Polk County to complete the arrangements for the big move.

Henry had sold his patrimony in Polk County against the wishes of his relatives and neighbors; however, they were glad to have him and his family stay with them until school was out, besides it would take at least three months for their furniture and household goods to finally reach their destination. These had been sent by rail to Kissimmee, a small cow town located on Lake Tohopekaliga, where Captain Benjamin Hall's little paddle wheel wood burning steamboat (an extension of the railroad's service) would when the unpredictable river could be navigated take them on down to Lake Okechobee. If by any chance, their things arrived before they did Peter Raulerson would see they were cared for.

Up to now Henry's relatives, friends and neighbors had thought him a very intelligent fellow, but his stubborn decision to move to the wild isolated country near the big lake made most of them think he had lost

his senses, especially when he decided to buy a wagon and a pair of oxen. In fact, Henry was a very logical and sane individual for he knew that was the only way for his family to make it over the dangerous and varied terrain. The world owes a great debt to oxen! In spite of his lack of experience with this kind of transportation, he went ahead and acquired the wagon and bought a pair of sturdy oxen from Judd Pylant, a shirt-tail relative of his from the fact that Judd had married Bob's wife's sister. This put them on familiar terms, and so Judd joshed the proud and vain Henry Hancock the day he came to drive the oxen to his brother Jim's place where his wagon was. "What are you going to do when the mosquitoes eat your oxen alive, your 'victuals' give out and Indians come along and scalp your family?" At first, Henry tried to tell him that none of these were going to happen but there was so much doubt as Henry could sense in Judd's mind that he gave up trying to rationalize his move. Then came up a fellow, they knew as Roebuck, who voiced the same sentiments as Judd. Henry's temper at this point had reached more than the boiling point. He yanked at the oxen a bit too hard and before he could say "whoa," they had dragged him down the little sandhill into the inevitable little lake at the bottom of it. Of course, there was laughter at the top of the hill. But he was determined to conquer the unruly beasts and did not look back. He clung to the rope of the yoke, kicked with his feet until he had the animals out of the water and docilely lead them on to his brother Jim's place. By this time he no longer cared how much he was laughed at.

Also Clyde tells when his family left Polk County, "it was a fine day in the late spring of 1902 when we left Fort Meade. The weather continued to be pleasant the five days it took us to make the journey. Papa went on ahead riding his horse, but he left orders that Mama and the girls, Ruth, Elsie and Janie Belle were to ride at all times in the wagon except when we camped. It was a good thing I went along when we drove the cattle down. I was put in charge and drove the wagon, I had got used to the oxen before we left. My younger brother, Winnie (Winfield Scott) rode the other horse and his job was to look after the guns and the dogs. We had four fine cow dogs, hound and bulldog, which were worth a great deal to a cattleman, even at that time a good cow dog could bring well over a hundred dollars, and they were good for hunting too. Needless to say, Mama and the girls always had plenty of fresh game and fish — we all went fishing — to cook for our meals. We almost grew tired of quail and young wild turkey. Once Winnie shot a limpkin and cooked it, but we refused to eat it so Mama told him to let the pond birds alone. Also we had plenty of staples in the wagon and so every night we had fresh bread and hushpuppies to go along with the swamp cabbage, fish and game.

Too, guavas, pawpaws, sour oranges and berries provided supplements to our diet. We camped in the hammock, circumscribed high ground, where we played on the swooping limbs of the big live oaks, and before supper went swimming in the chain of lakes of the Kissimmee. We avoided camping near the bay galls that were blooming at this time, beautiful slender shining green trees growing close together covered with waxy white blossoms that glistened in the sunlight, but these were the haven of the black bears and the panthers. It was a wonderful five days! We loved the hunting, fishing and camping; and sleeping under the stars at night. There were the thousands of beautiful birds. We liked the roseate spoonbills best of all in spite of their funny scooping bills. And the flowers! Lupines covered the sandhills, red lilies on the prairies, the purple and white flags at the edges of the ponds and lagoons, spidery white lilies and mallows of the marshes, orchids and air plants dangled from the cypress trees. The girls would pick them and put them in a fruit jar for our 'table'. Mama always spread a cloth at night for our evening meal. Sitting around our campfire at night Winnie liked to tease Mama and the girls by slipping into a thicket and screaming like a panther or claiming he had seen Indians approaching our camp. But Mama just laughed at him and said his antics were enough to scare anything away from us. We arrived at our new home near Lake Okechobee not even tired, but Papa had bad news for us. Our household goods had not yet arrived! He, however, had been given a letter that morning by the mailman who rode horseback once a week from Fort Drum to deliver mail to the Raulersons and him. It was from Captain Hall who said if he would cut three cords of wood for his wood burning steamboat, he would bring our things free of charge. Papa lost no time handing Winnie and me an axe and putting us to work cutting wood for Captain Hall. By return mail he told the Captain that the wood would be waiting for him. Within two weeks the little steamer made its way down the tortuous river and up Taylor Creek to our place. One of the most exciting days of our lives was when we heard the boat's whistle.

It did not take long for the Hancocks to settle in the log house while they were making plans for the new one. The big white house was completed in 1906. It was built from hand cut virgin pine, hand-pegged, and Henry remembered his rare visits back to Thomasville where he admired the columned houses. So, he cut and rounded, smoothed and polished columns for his own house here in a strange wilderness that had never seen a house like it. Around it he built a picket fence to keep livestock and other intruders from the yard filled with Jane's fruit trees, shrubs and flowers, many of which she had brought with her from Polk County and others were given to her by Louisiana Raulerson, who had a green

thumb for anything she planted. There were citrus of various varieties; guavas, the small cattlya and the large white ones (she had brought the seeds with her), especially good for making guava jelly; surinam cherry and alligator pears (avocados). Alamandas, flame vines and jasmine overran the fence. There were rose cuttings, hibiscus and devil's backbone from Louisiana plus the annuals from seeds (saved from year to year). The one flower that was the thriftiest of all, the phlox, Jane weeded out. She said they were 'cemetery flowers.'

At first, it was a somewhat savage existence and took fortitude to make it more civilized. One of the first things they did was to build a foot bridge across Taylor Creek which made it easy to neighbor with the Raulersons. Their children played together and there was so much day to day adventure for them, they did not mind their isolated existence.

Two more children were born to the Henry Hancocks, Martin and Robert. Henry had been busy enough to provide shelter and necessities for his family, and now in 1907 he had been appointed Justice of the Peace for his end of the large county of Brevard. The county seat was Titusville, which meant he had to be away from home for long periods to attend court there. There was no way to go except by horseback and during the rainy season crossing the Allapatty (Allapattah) Flats between his place and Fort Pierce could be treacherous. Sometimes he was not able to cross them for days, once he and his horse had become mired there and he had feared for the safety of both. Too, his grove at the Opal hammock, several miles to the northeast of his homestead, was demanding his attention. There was no time for him to continue a makeshift school for his and the Raulerson children. Also Louisiana Raulerson was concerned. So he contacted his old friend, Willian N. Sheats, state school superintendent, and told him their need for a regular teacher. A maiden lady, evidently with missionary zeal in her soul, came to teach the little school. Her name she said was Tantie Huckabee ('Tantie' was probably a form of 'auntie', often Southern spinsters like to be called that by nieces and nephews and children of their friends). Some have described her as being a formidable red-headed old maid, but this is not true. There are those still around who went to school to her, and they say she was a beautiful woman with white hair, a trim figure, and an engaging smile with a musical voice enhanced by her native South Carolina accent.

Now that they had a school, it was time Judge Hancock decided to apply for a post office designation. It was granted. Miss Tantie was held in such high esteem that he wrote 'Tantie' on the form for the new post office. It was called that until the new county was formed. The outside world began to discover the lake country. Until the boom, the largest group of invaders, even more so than the farmers, was the commercial

fishermen, largely men void of family ties who had come to make great catches of fish from the abundant waters of Lake Okeechobee for Boothe Fisheries of Chicago (the largest in the world), Standard Fisheries and others. The companies built fish houses along the banks of Taylor Creek where they iced and packed fish for northern cities.

In many ways the fisheries brought prosperity to the region, in others a great deal of troubles. For the most part the fishermen were a bibulous bunch, especially on Saturday nights after they received their pay. This payroll set moonshiners to work in the high palmetto thickets; a gambling parlor behind the front of a 'Trading Company' also built near the fish houses and an establishment known as 'Miss Fanny's'. To cope with Monday morning's docket, Judge Hancock set up his court in a shack near the trading company and for a jail he found an abandoned freight car; however, by this time the legislature had formed Saint Lucie County from Brevard and Osceola counties which made the county seat of Fort Pierce nearer than Titusville, but still forty miles away. The more obstreperous ones were sent there to jail.

Separating it from Saint Lucie, the legislature created Okeechobee County in 1915 and it had its own county seat. Judge Hancock was appointed its county judge, duties he had been performing all along. The first building of any consequences in Okeechobee County was its two-story brick jail. The county court took quarters over O.W. Davis's new furniture store. Sanford farmers had discovered the magic black soil at the north end of the lake (Pahokee, Belle Glade and Chosen had not come into existence). Henry Flagler's spur to the region was to accommodate these farmers as well as the fisheries, and the railroad began the development of the new town of Okeechobee (no longer Tantie). The train came in three times a week, freight cars and one passenger coach sandwiched in between them and the caboose. It turned around at Okeechobee. Some of the early riders say that by the time one made the journey from Orange City Junction to Okeechobee, a horse and wagon would have been faster; however, that one uncomfortable day coach connected the isolated region with the outside world where there were no paved highways into it until the boom.

Flagler's Model Land Company laid out the new county seat of Okeechobee on a grand scale. One of its outstanding features was a large mall dedicated as a park named for Flagler. The north side of Park street saw no development until the boom, but on South Park Peter Raulerson's oldest son, Louis, built a modest brick structure to house his general store and the post office. The Model Land Company had advised a young man from Saint Augustine that the farmers needed a hardware business in Okeechobee, and so Ellis Meserve rode the first train to Okeechobee

where he remained to go into business and built a wooden pioneer structure that housed his hardware goods and living quarters. Also he married Peter Raulerson's youngest and prettiest daughter, Faith. Somehow a Hungarian named Albert Berka found his way to the region and set up a bakery. These and O.W. Davis's furniture also housed in a wooden two-story structure with a corrugated tin roof along with two other buildings that adhered to the same architecture. They with the *Northern Hotel* and across the street *The Southern Hotel* (at least, the new town did not take sides) comprised, in the main, the business district of Flagler's new town. The anomaly was the installation of a great whiteway. Not only were its gleaming white globes, that were lighted up all night, placed completely around the mall, but reached out where there was nothing but raw land and white stakes. These shone for miles mostly lost on the local scene but when one came in on the train that usually arrived after dark, one might be astonished to see deep in the Florida wilderness what might be another Paris! By day the illusion was utterly dispelled.

In 1916 due to the great efforts of Judge Hancock and the support of Louisiana Raulerson, a large red brick school house was completed in time to have its first senior high school graduating class, four pupils, in its spacious auditorium.

Judge Hancock served as county judge until 1922. Thereafter he was mayor of the town several times, served as county school superintendent more than once and occupied whatever office that called for his talents. His mother had a penchant for naming her sons after men of achievement, and "Solon" would have been more suitable for her third son than "Henry Hudson." Over the years he was issued nine different certificates for public office from various governors.

1922 brought some respite in Henry's busy life, a man who was careful of his civic duties. It gave him time to devote himself to cultural matters such as his love for music; he played several wind instruments and sang tenor. At his urging the town built a bandshell in Flagler's mall and he organized a band. He ordered instruments and taught anybody willing to learn free of charge. It turned out to be a rather respectable band and for many years performed weekly concerts. His best trombonist was a moonshiner but when it came to his band, it was not a day in court.

This also was the year he and his wife took a trip to New York City. The Judge had visited the Florida's 'Gold Coast' enough to be impressed by the white palm beach suits and panama hats. He purchased a white suit and a snap wide-brimmed panama hat for the trip (fortunately his wife wore her usual dark blue). They went by train to Jacksonville where they boarded the Clyde Line's "Apache." Once aboard the ship, the

Judge donned his new clothes. By nature a sociable man and a good storyteller, he was as his wife related on their return, "the most popular passenger on the boat." On their arrival in New York, Judge Hancock went ashore clad in his cherished white suit and panama hat. While registering at the hotel, his wife noticed her husband seemed to be getting everybody's curious attention, it was in the days when it mattered what one wore in the city. Jane Hancock began to look around and realized why everybody was looking at her husband. She moved closer to him and whispered, "Henry, I think you are the only man in New York in a white suit!" Unperturbed he completed the registration, but once in their room he changed to his dark suit and left his new clothes hanging in the closet until the return voyage.

By this time mission boards were active in the region, especially the Southern Baptist and the Methodist. When she was twelve years old back in Waldo, Jane Sturgis Hancock had joined the Missionary Baptist Church (Southern Baptist). She was pleased when the mission board in Jacksonville recommended a new church at Okeechobee. Her husband became a member of her denomination and was made chairman of the board of deacons. Also of the building committee, choirmaster and was superintendent of the Sunday school for seventeen years. He, however, made no effort to proselyte his son, Winnie, who became an active member of the new Methodist church. He was too aware that culture of a community represented its environment and so he welcomed the influences that would improve it. Also Judge Hancock dedicated much of his time and himself to the formation of a new chapter of his lodge, the Free and Accepted Masons. The new one at Okeechobee was number 237, of course, he was worshipful master.

Aside from political and civic accomplishments, the Judge enjoyed success in other enterprises such as cattle herding, his orange grove which produced what is now the famous Indian River fruit, and boat building. The latter was a good-sized craft he operated, in the main, to haul his fruit across the lake to Fort Myers where the yankees were providing a good market for it. Those who remember the *Serena*, named for his mother, praise its appearance and worthiness. Judge Henry Hudson Hancock lived a good and worthwhile life. He made the move to the lake country from his secure surroundings in Polk County with no regrets. There he had lived on the same site while serving three Florida counties. He had survived pioneer hardships, boom and bust, vicious hurricanes which left his sturdy house standing without much damage while the binder boys found theirs flattened and lost beyond redemption. Bank failures were not his lot for he had his fortune in the land and things he loved never thinking of their intrinsic values if it meant the greater good.

His sons and grandsons marched off to war because they were called by their country. The great depression affected him and his family little except what he read in the papers and his heart went out to those who suffered and so he made every effort to see that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected the next president. He used his keen intelligence for what he thought was best, right and just. A genial and compassionate man. His relationships with his family, community and country were of the highest order. After a brief illness, just short of his seventy-fourth birthday, he died at his home January 7, 1951. Those attending his funeral at the First Baptist Church of Okeechobee found it overflowing with relatives and friends who had come to demonstrate their affection and respect for a good man.

#### FOOTNOTES

\*Mrs. Hancock married James Thomas Hancock, a son of Robert Hancock, and lived until after his death on a ranch at Okeechobee.