

Biscayne Sketches at the Far South

By James Buck

With an introduction by Arva Moore Parks*

INTRODUCTION

In 1877, a young bachelor named James Buck decided to leave his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts and settle in South Florida. Buck's co-workers at the Riverside Press in Cambridge had encouraged him in this move so they could find out if the glowing reports they had been reading about South Florida were really true. If things worked out well for Buck, several of the other pressmen and their families planned to join him there.

James Buck arrived in the Miami area in late 1877 and settled near the Jack Peacock family in "Jack's Bight," which was located in what is now south Coconut Grove. Buck built a thatched roof "shanty" and began planting a wide variety of tropical fruits and vegetables. Life in the wilderness proved to be too much for Buck and he only lasted six months. Broke and discouraged, he returned to Cambridge where he remained until his death in 1927.

When Buck returned to Massachusetts, he wrote the following article in response to what he described as "Florida Fever." He hoped to have it published in a Boston newspaper, but it is not known if he succeeded. He did succeed, however, in discouraging his fellow workers from moving to South Florida.

In 1955, Paul A. Clifford, Buck's grandson, found Buck's handwritten manuscript and 1878 diary in an old trunk in Massachusetts. His one-hundred-year-old grandmother, Abbie Buck, supplied some additional information about Buck's brief stay in the Miami area. She, it turned out, was one of the reasons James Buck returned to Massachusetts.

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Ironically, Clifford had moved to Miami in 1951. He was the first member of his family to come here since 1878. Fortunately, Clifford realized the importance of these documents and donated them to the Historical Association of Southern Florida. James Buck's "Biscayne Sketches" are a valuable addition to our knowledge of South Florida during the frontier era.

Arva Moore Parks

INTRODUCTORY Being Discursive and General

*Oh land where the feathery palm trees rise,
And the stars beam undimmed from azure skies.
Where feathers and flowers show hues so bright —
And mosquitoes and fleas nip day and night.*

How the foregoing fragment *might* have ended will probably never be known. Perhaps a suffering world would have been afflicted by as many stanzas as compose the immortal "Rime" of Coleridge, had not the author been suddenly obliged to stop and scratch, wreaking revenge for loss of poetic "inspiration" by a somewhat abrupt though just conclusion.

But we are in "Sunny Florida," the "Land of Flowers," etc., a State which has suffered by over-praising and though such a thing may be impossible in the case of the *Miniature's* patrons — too much advertising. Perhaps it would be better to say, however, that Florida is injured by injudicious advertising, rather than by an inordinate amount of publicity; for undoubtedly she has attractions and advantages, but the interested and enthusiastic parties who have generally conducted the business of introducing her to the outer world have, metaphorically speaking, written with pens of gold dipped in ink of the brightest *couleur de rose*, causing them to entirely overlook and ignore the existence of some minor circumstances which other less imaginative people might call defects, or drawbacks to a state of otherwise perfect bliss; thus causing too many persons needless vexation and disappointment, which, by a fair presentation of facts, might have been avoided. For, alas! regard to truth compels the reluctant statement that experience (hard master!) shows that perfection does not exist on this earth; and neither Paradise nor poor old Ponce de Leon's Fountain of Youth will be aught but fleeting, tantalizing visions "till the coming of that period, yet hidden in the womb of time," when all things shall be restored to more pristine beauty.

Let him who dreams of "sitting under his own vine and fig tree," and luxuriating in the shade while plucking golden fruit from bending boughs, without previous anxious outlay or exertion, awake from his delusion, and either go to work where he is or be prepared for plenty of it if he expects to succeed after coming here. Health there is here, to be sure, and healthy locations where it is nearly impossible to be sick at all, but there are also localities which are no doubt decidedly unhealthy.

Fine lakes and bays abound with immense quantities of fish and turtle; but the waters are mostly shallow and full of bars, and navigators must be constantly on the alert or be "stuck." Grateful breezes swell expanding sails, and stir the balmy air to a delicious temperature, wafted from the bosom of the Gulf Stream; but sometimes there is an excess of that same wind, by rather more than "a jug full," when roofs fly off and things generally show a decided "shaky" tendency. Good soil also exists in many parts of the State, and doubtless to some extent in every section; but it would be impossible to find, short of absolute desert, any poorer or more forbidding looking surface and natural products than large tracts of this State exhibit to the agriculturist. Coral rocks and saw palmetto! Did you ever labor among them? Then, if not emigrant of small means, pray, and strive diligently, to avoid such a fate! 'Tis true that people do manage to exist — it can scarcely be called living — and without much apparent exertion, even in the most sterile sections; but no ambitious Northern man or woman would covet such a vacillating, aimless life, gorged one day and starved six!

To sit at ease and read the glowing descriptions of a Lanier, a Hicks, or a Gleason¹ is one thing, to encounter the often quite unromantic reality is frequently a decidedly different affair, and apt to be rather distasteful to him who comes without a good backing of brains, pluck, or capital. Justice, however, compels the acknowledgement that the latter named gentleman has given to the intending immigrant in his most recently published essays on South Florida, a more correct and disinterested view than those formerly disseminated, affording in the main a trustworthy guide to the topography and natural advantages of this section.

Then again much has been said of winter as the "dry" season in this semi-tropical climate, and the advantages of that period have been descanted upon. Picnic parties (!) could lay their plans a long time ahead without fear of having them frustrated by the quirk of the weather and the thrifty husbandman or other outdoor worker scarce need lose a day for months together on account of stormy skies. But for the past year or two weather affairs appear to have become somewhat unsettled at least in

Southeastern Florida, the past winter has proved the wettest *dry* season within the recollection of the most venerable cracker and cloudy days have been the rule rather than the exception.

Mild and equable as the temperature undoubtedly is, especially in the region bordering on the Gulf Stream, nevertheless let no one expect to get along comfortably at all times without warm clothing and good houses. "Northers" have been frequent the past season (though, singularly, the coldest winds during so-called "northers" are from the westward), and a temperature of 50° F. is felt as keenly here as a much lower degree would be at the North. On the other hand, there are times, especially in summer, when the nearly vertical sun shines oppressively hot though the average temperature is decidedly agreeable to a person not infatuated with cold weather.

Gorgeous and entrancing pictures have been drawn of the luscious fruits and wealth of other tropical and semi-tropical productions, whose name is legion and whose value is immense, springing almost, if not quite spontaneously from the soil, and the immigrant or traveler whose mouth has watered at the mere description is apt to be slightly taken aback on arriving here and finding that what was put on paper for accomplished fact was merely an outgrowth of the author's fertile imagination, something which perhaps might be, but has no present palpable existence. Indeed, though where the soil is suitable nearly everything *can* be raised, a large portion of the surface is not capable of making a paying return of any kind of crop; and at the best but little comparatively has been accomplished. The new comer looks for orange groves, and sees instead large, flat, rocky tracts or sandy soil thinly covered with nearly worthless pitch pine; instead of luscious sugar apples he views and *feels* the trenchant sandspur; he "asks for bread, and they give him a (coral lime) stone" — lots of 'em among other things. Certain interested parties have written of the celebrated maumee apple in a way to convey the impressions that they are nearly as plenty hereabouts as briars and things undoubtedly are; while in reality there is but one pair (male and female) of bearing maumee trees in all Dade County!² Of insects it is scarcely necessary to speak — they must be expected in warm countries; and during certain seasons in certain localities notably on the keys, they are unbearable by any one not endowed with a rhinoceros hide. The incriminating mosquito, the nimble and microscopic sand fly, the familiar flea, the industrious warlike ant, with many others, each have their day — and it is frequently a long one!

Yet, in spite of drawbacks which after all, are inseparable from human existence, life here has its agreeable phases, and, to certain classes

a sojourn in this swampy land may be made both pleasant and profitable; as may be gathered, perhaps, if not from the foregoing, at least from succeeding chapters.

II. ALONG THE SHORE Being Descriptive and Reflective

The unsophisticated and expectant voyager who, en route to the promised land of Miami and the Seminole, sets foot for the first time in that quaint and foreign looking collection of boards and shingles called Key West, will be likely to receive a shock 'ere long. That blow to his nervous organization will be felt on first beholding one of the two remarkable craft which convey Uncle Sam's mail bags to the Biscayne Shores, and which compose the only public means of transporting persons and property to the same destination. But, unless the traveller has means to charter a more commodious vessel, he or she might as well submit to fate and take the inevitable discomfort of such close and leaky quarters philosophically; being assumed that sooner or later (probably the later) the sable-visaged but good natured Andrew³ will pilot through, after numerous hard fought conflicts with the prevailing sand banks. And the latter circumstances should prove additional encouragements, since they show that on the inside passage the bottom is never far off, thereby materially lessening the danger of drowning.

Key West! With a population primarily and alliteratively composed of Conchs, Crackers and Cubans. What a curious sight is presented to the untravelled Northern eye as the steamship swings to her place at the dock! A heterogenous and mottly throng, of all shades, jostle and bowl about the gangway, while the inevitable ebony-faced young darkies grin and grimace as they perch upon the tops of posts and every available roosting place. The queer little pony-like horses, attached to equally ridiculous looking and Lilliputian drays or go-carts, bristle and push through the swaying crowd, drawing fabulous and toppling loads of merchandise or baggage, drawn by shouting Africans with cracking whips. Then, again, the characteristic street auctions, where, by dint of much maneuvering and liberal use of "gab" (not always unmixed with oaths and maledictions in both indifferent English and Spanish) articles of differing values are hammered away to miscellaneous and gaping crowds, who run hither and thither about the principal streets and wharves, as fresh proclamations by bell and voice seem to promise matters of greater interest or novelty. Fruits and other importations are sometimes sold at astonishingly low prices by these street sales, being generally in such case bought in by other vendors

to retail at an advanced price, in smaller quantities. "Gentlemen, how much am I offered for this delicious guava jelly, by the box or in the lot. Such an intelligent and highly respectable looking assembly surely won't let such an opportunity slip to procure a nice luxury for next to nothing! Five cents a box! You are crazy! The duty on it is more than that! You couldn't buy it at wholesale in Havana for twice the money! Diablo! John put the things away. We'll try something else. Such a miserable, degraded, lowlived crowd of loafers as this can't appreciate anything decent!"

The northeast trades blow cool and refreshing, but the noonday sun beats down hotly upon the nearly deserted streets and the narrow lanes where green pools of filthy liquid fester and contaminate the air. Nor are such sights confined to the localities where rickety and nondescript cabins most do congregate, but in more aristocratic quarters small regard to cleanliness and health is exhibited, in some instances. A notable example is or was visible near the public square, in the higher portion of the town, where a handsome house, surrounded by fruit trees and ornamental shrubbery, had within two pools and partly within its own yard, a large pool of the filthiest description – a very plague spot! And yet complaint is made of the unhealthiness of Key West in the hot season!

Notwithstanding, it is a pretty place, with some nice residences, and considerable business is done, especially in the export of sponges and turtles, while some of the shops contain large stocks of miscellaneous goods. Two weekly newspapers are printed here – one of them being edited and published by a colored gentleman. To one who has left the dreary and chill November skies of the North the general aspect of the place is pleasing and the graceful cocoa-palms, sweet scented flowering shrub, and tropical bananas give a grateful sense of security from the icy hand of winter.

Yet, we may not linger, for, although the winds are ahead, the mail-boat must away, and we go with it on its slow and tedious passage, buffeting up among the Keys. The "captains" and crews of most of these boats are "Conchs," and sponging is largely in their hands. They are of Bahamian origin, and are simple-minded, generally honest well-meaning people, with a strong tendency to substitute *w* for *v* and *v* for *w*. They are tenacious of titles, and each little fishing smack or sponger has personages aboard whom etiquette demands should invariably be addressed and spoken of as "captain," "firstmate," or "secondmate." On reaching the wharf you see numbers of singular looking, agile insects scampering about, and ask the "captain" by what name they are designated. "Ve calls 'em *crawlers*, din!" Before you have been long aboard the boat you are convinced that, although you may have previously supposed you had seen

a fair representation of the cockroach race, that belief was a delusion, for here they are in such numbers and of such elephantine proportions that all past experience is dwarfed, and former supposed giants of that race are now remembered but as pigmies! But these as well as other unpleasant circumstances are but little heeded by those "to the manner born."

Passing along amid the everchanging hues of sea and sky, watching cormorants, cranes, and various other birds in the air and on the land and water, and sponges, shells and fishes of many hues and shapes in the shallow and translucent seas, we have upon our right the deep-blue, blood-warm waters of the Gulf Stream, while upon our left lies the long line of keys, reaching from a point south of Key West to Norris's Cut, above Cape Florida, a distance of 160 miles or more, — some just rising above high-water mark, others attaining considerable elevation, while nearly all are covered with a growth of mangroves, live-oak, crab-wood, and various shrubs and coarse grasses, although they are excessively rocky, so much so that upon large areas it would be difficult to find a spot where a shovel could be inserted and taken up full of earth. Notwithstanding this, pine-apples of excellent quality are successfully and largely cultivated on many of the Keys, notably upon Key Largo, and some vegetables and melons are raised for market to a considerable extent. But the prevalence of the coral limestone, (which is the underlying "pan" of all this region) upon the surface, and the exposure of the islands to the full violence of winds and hurricanes, render negatory any attempts at general agriculture or fruit-raising. At Key Largo is the lower end of Biscayne Bay proper, the expansion of water below, between the main and the Keys, which opens directly into the Bay of Florida being called Barnes's Sound. The islets abound with traditions of buried treasures, mostly deposited by piratical hands. Rachel's Key is a fertile little spot, but is at present inhabited only by numerous flocks of marine birds. The Keys generally, especially those where mangroves are thickest at certain seasons are noted for blood-thirsty swarms of mosquito; but Bamboo Key is a remarkable exception. Numerous witnesses testify that when tormented beyond endurance on neighboring Keys — and even upon the water in the immediate vicinity — upon reaching Bamboo Key they were entirely free from their attacks, and that without any apparent reason or any visible difference between this and neighboring Keys to account for the exemption. We have been informed by a gentleman residing on the mainland, whom no one would accuse of "drawing the long bow" (in fact, the Sheriff of Dade County) that in weighing anchor "put" for Bamboo Key as a harbor of refuge from persecutive mosquitoes, which were so thick as to actually blacken the sails, and so continued until just upon the point of landing,

when all would disappear as if by magic, and none could be found upon the shore of this favored Key." But a small number of the Keys can be said to be inhabited, and with the exception of Key West, the population of those is but scanty.

If the wind is fair we may make the run, among the Keys and along the shore, from Key West to the Miami River, in 48 hours — a steamer would do it in 12 or 14; but on this occasion we are beset by head winds and rough weather, and so consume five days in the passage; but at last on the fourth day we sight Cape Florida light and drop anchor for the night at Soldier Key, where a busy and unwonted population give life and animation to the little islet for a season, while engaged in erecting the new lighthouse which rises from the sea upon the outer reef.⁴ And the next day Miami and Biscayne are reached.

III

There are times in our lives when an interval of a few hours or moments only will cause an entire revulsion of feeling, so that it may be literally said then that "the things which we once hated we now love, and the things which we once loved we now hate." Thus people are continually carrying away disagreeable impressions of places and persons, hastily received under unfavorable circumstances, and retain them all their lives, when by a slight change of absolute environment at the moment, or by more extended and intimate acquaintance, those impressions might have been entirely reversed. The state of the weather, a few degrees difference in temperature, the condition of the digestive organ, or a slight disturbance of the delicate equipoise of that subtle mental machine called the brain; one or all may materially affect the character of a picture photographed (and it may be in indelible colors) as it were by instantaneous process upon the hidden nerve-control.

On some such manner we mused, after a rather gloomy and depressing voyage, in a leaky craft resembling a small fishing boat under lowering and oft times dripping skies, beset by head winds and rough seas, with the single occupation for hours of gazing with sinking heart upon the low, dark and almost repellent aspect of the line of shore; when suddenly within a few miles of our destination, the wind changed as by enchantment, the sun came out in all the soft-eyed splendor of a Southern winter morning, and with a slight variation of course, we bowled along before a gladsome breeze, over a smooth and limpid sea, with rising spirits and brightening countenances. Then, we say, we missed on the changes wrought in human feelings by variations of circumstances which in

themselves are but the ordinary course of nature and without special significance.

And while we thought, we were rapidly crossing the bay, and beheld before us a scene worthy of the tropics. The mouth of the Miami River, which we were about entering, was before us, flanked by high banks, well-built houses (the best on the bay) were on either shore, in fact the river's brim was fringed with really handsome and stately rows of fruitful cocoa-palms, while back of them could be seen the dense and vivid foliage of sweet-orange trees, royal bananas, lemons, limes, guavas, and the graceful, unsurpassed crowns of delightful maumees.

The Miami River, like all others on this coast, has a course of but a few miles, but is a full-grown stream at its source, bursting, as though propelled from a hydrant, out of the vast and accumulation reservoir of the Everglades, and forcing its widening way to the Bay. Indeed, at times, in the rainy season, so much fresh water is driven into this salt bay of thirty miles in length, from the various streams, that the entire body becomes freshened, and salt-water fish are obliged to leave for the time or die.

At the right, as we enter the mouth of the river, is the site of old Fort Dallas, two of the buildings of which still remain standing. What was once the officers quarters has been transformed into a dwelling-house, and has quite a solid and comfortable appearance, with its thick white walls, wide verandah, and extensive surroundings of shrubbery. The entire estate is now owned by the "Biscayne Bay Company" under the resident management of J. W. Ewan,⁵ who is also post-master, trader and representative of the county in the legislature.

A few rods up the river we come to the shore and make fast at a sort of natural wharf of stone. Here we step for the first time on the main land of the Floridian peninsula, and are soon cordially welcomed by kind-hearted Mrs. P.⁶ and her stalwart husband, Mr. E's chief assistants. The lady is a blooming and buxom specimen of the English type, and the worthy couple, with their three sturdy boys, are fitting representatives of the fast-anchored isle. Having thus found a safe harbor, after due rest and refreshment prospecting is the order of the day. Travel here must be chiefly done by water. Roads there are none, to speak of, except wood roads, and mere paths through the pine forests. But owing to the natural mingling of land and water surface – bays, lakes, creeks, tide-water, streams and fresh-water rivers – this mode of travel is generally a pleasure, if your craft is of light draft or flat-bottomed; for you have smooth water and commonly blessed with what the Conchs call a "wery good vind."

Near the head of the bay Arch Creek contributes its waters. It is a deep, narrow, and winding stream, abounding in fish, and derives its name from a natural bridge across its channel at a distance of two miles or more

from the Bay. The banks in the vicinity of the bridge are quite high, and precipitous, for the region. Some fertile hammock land is found on either side of the stream. At the Arch are two deserted habitations, one of which was once occupied by a gentleman from Maine, more recently quite noted in the vicinity of Boston, and who was traced here and arrested on a charge of forgery. Weeds and vines grow apace in this climate, and help to soon obliterate the vestiges of man's abandoned improvements. Further down the bay the eye is attracted by the new and nicely built cottage of Mr. and Mrs. S.,⁷ an elderly couple from Ohio, who came here some years ago, and by dint of hard labor and the use of some money have succeeded in producing a veritable little paradise from a most un-promising location on a pine ridge.

Luscious fruits, in almost endless variety, comprising nearly the whole range of tropical and semi-tropical production, reward their patient faith and industry. A short distance south, we find the hospitable mansion of W. H. Hunt, Esq.,⁸ to be also undergoing improvements, to correspond with the growth of the handsome rows of palms which stretch from the water's edge up the slight incline towards the house. Dr. Potter's⁹ new cottage stands a conspicuous neighbour. The Doctor came here with his brother, on account of the latter's ill health at the North, and they are laboring hard and successfully to build for themselves a comfortable home in this semitropical region.

There are some queer characters on and near the bay, whom, if we could wield the pencil of an artist or if we had the humorous descriptive powers of a Mark Twain, it would be a delightful task to sketch. But as we pass by "Old Dan's" collection of huts, we must not forget "Old Aunt Lizzie"¹⁰ an occupant of one of the aforesaid huts, and "maid of all work" to the establishment. She is undoubtedly very old, and, like many other ancient darkies, claims an antiquity which she can hardly prove, it is true, but which is equally certain nobody else can disprove. She was once a slave in a wealthy Virginia family, and by various mutations of fortune at last found herself stranded, a weather beaten old hulk, on this unknown shore. As near as we could understand, she dated back to the Revolution or beyond, yet she is as spry as many a younger woman, and boasts of her former prowess. "Why, bless yer soul, honey," said she, as two of the men tugged at a heavy barrel of starch, "I seen de taine dat I cud jes 'a slung dat bail on dis ole shoulder and toted it 'long most as easy's nuffin." We could not help pitying the poor old woman, and yet she was a comical sight, as we pushed away, standing on the end of the shaky old pier, with short pipe in mouth and with a very dilapidated and ill-fitting "suit" of men's clothes hanging on her shrivelled frame.

Some six miles below the Miami River, as we continue our rambles

by land and water, visiting by the way local celebrities, we are hailed, even before we reach the shore, by the cheery greeting of our friend Jack P.¹¹ the county Sheriff, who stands on the end of his wharf ready to assist us to land and to give us a cordial welcome to his roof as long as we like to stay. "Jack is as good hearted a fellow as ever lived," is a common remark, and we have proved the saying true. But two or three families¹² are at present domiciled between Jack's location and the southern end of the bay. Altogether there are some thirty families and single squatters on or near this sheet of water, some living quite neighborly while others are more remote. They are a mixture of various nationalities, but few are to be considered otherwise than fairly honest and well-meaning people, hospitable, and with no special antipathy to any new-comer who respects their rights, from whatever section he may hail.

And now, reviewing somewhat (with a risk of repetition and tiresomeness), after considerable travel and observation on this southeast coast of Florida, we find that on or near Biscayne Bay, and in the undoubtedly healthy locations, there is but a small quantity of land that can fairly be called fit for cultivation, or that offers sufficient inducement for a *poor* man to make his home upon. Much of the bay frontage consists of a kind of prairie, covered with coarse grasses and wild flowers, and in some spots (as in the neighbourhood of creeks and springs) rather marshy in its nature. But in some places the banks are high to the water's edge, and present a bold front. Then come the pine ridges — too rocky for cultivation — between which are the pine hollows or flats, extending back from one to three miles to the borders of the glade. Interspersed, irregular bodies, varying from half an acre to hundreds of acres, are the hammocks. The pine plots, and the hammocks constitute the tillable land; but only portions of the former are really worth tilling, with the present scattered population and uncertain market. All pine land must be enriched to obtain favorable results. This may be attained readily if one is able to procure and raise livestock, and nature furnishes a good supply in the shape of sea-grass, marine mud, etc. The former is washed upon the shore in winter at favorable points, and is a great nourisher of the sweet potato, as has been demonstrated even on poor pineland.

The pine-trees stand widely apart over the great tracts which they have appropriated to themselves. Among them the underbrush is generally of low growth, as one can see for quite a distance, and a tolerable cart-road can be made for the labor of a little leveling and casting aside of stone. The pine plots have sometimes quite a depth of sandy soil, and considerable areas are often quite free from rockiness. But it is in the hammock that one sees the natural capabilities of vegetable life in this climate most freely displayed. These are often rocky, but there are spots

where the surface is free from stone and the rich tillable deposits are quite deep. Native vegetation, however, takes hold and flourishes wonderfully in places where but little actual soil apparently exists and the great trees seem to throw their roots into and through the soft coral limestone, for sustenance comes from somewhere abundantly to supply these gigantic live oaks, tall mastics, palmettos, and the great variety of other trees, vines, creepers, parasites, and weeds, astonish the new comer and form almost impenetrable jungles in many places. These hammocks are of course harder to clear than the pine-plots, in which the principal obstacle is the root of the saw-palmetto, but they yield a rich and quick return for the expenditure. Here, especially, the banana and sugar-cane grow rank and luxuriant.

The Everglades, which term has been a sort of bugbear to many persons, are simply a succession of large opening flats – in the wet season covered with water, in the dry season only partially flowed – interspersed with numerous islands or keys, like those along the coast, some of them very rich in productions and more or less cultivated by the Indians who make their homes upon them. In fact, that whole region is very much of the nature of a vast lake, full of islands, with generally a hard bottom, not much swampy, at least in such portions as we have explored while the water is clear, and abounds in fish and some varieties of edible tortoises or turtles.

Springs of good water are common and wells are to be had by a comparatively small amount of digging. This latter may often be done with axes, through the soft rock, so that the well is already stoned, when the water is reached after a few feet of cutting. Many springs burst up through the bottom of the bay, and we see fresh water boiling up through the salt.

Yet such capabilities as the soil possesses are but little cultivated, most of those native here being too much of the hand-to-mouth character in their habits of living to care to expend time and labor in making a permanent home; while doubtless former troubles, of a local character, and connected with local quarrels, have deterred individuals from acquiring land in their own right. Therefore some depend almost entirely upon the sea for their subsistence, wrecks being first in importance – and a “good” wreck is of course a God-send to them and failing that, the lack is partially made up by turtling, sponging and fishing.

Another class, and they are not naturally altogether indolent either, depend principally upon the making of starch to exchange for the necessities of life and to bring in the small amount of cash necessary for the minimum of a luxurious existence. This starch is obtained from the root of a species of dwarf sago palm called “comty” or “contie” which grows

wild throughout the pine-woods, profusely in some places. The root is passed through a process of grinding, separating, and washing. The product affords a considerable market in Key West, and the West Indies, both as an edible and a laundry starch. Many grind by hand, but some are so "forehanded" as to use horse power both for "toting" in the roots and grinding, of course largely increase their production thereby.

Thus from Nature herself furnishing a partial subsistence, as well as other causes hinted at, the average Cracker or Conch seeks to lay no foundation for further worldly prosperity, though it is true he is not always entirely contented with his present lot. Not many of these classes can read, fewer can write, yet their ignorance is not so much to be wondered at, considering the lack of advantages to acquire the simplest branches of learning in this region; and as such learning would be of little practical use to them with their present surroundings, there appears to be not much incentive to self-culture. The "better classes," however, as we may call most of those of Northern extraction, or who pay more attention to cultivation and the beautifying of their homes, do not disdain to engage in the manufacture of the "conty" as an aid to subsistence while awaiting the slower operations of growing or to obtain capital for more extended operations.

As a sample of what can be done in the way of both ornamental and useful cultivation, where man and nature combine their powers, we may mention the elegant little estate of Mrs. G.,¹³ a New York lady. She has lately built a new house on the bank of the Miami, nearly opposite the Fort Dallas buildings. The soil is a river hammock, not very deep, either, but the development of growth is magnificent. Such orange trees, with boughs bending beneath the burden of such oranges, can hardly be excelled; and the buildings are so embowered and surrounded by a tropical profusion of almost every imaginable variety of fruit and ornamental trees, shrubbery, and plants that nothing but actual sight can present the same to the mind of one who has never looked upon the like.

"Well, well," says some patient reader who has taken the trouble to follow thus far our rambling sentences, "you are laying it on pretty thick for the bright side, now; but what about those treacherous Indians and savage alligators which swarm thereabouts?" The Indians in the vicinity are quite numerous — in fact no doubt far outnumber the whites. They are a remnant of the Seminoles, with perhaps a sprinkling of other tribes. As before remarked, some of them cultivate the fertile islands in the Everglades, and they are scattered all the way up through Big Cypress Swamp to the Northwest coast, and northerly to the Kissimmee River and Lake Okeechobee. They travel, by ways best known to themselves, on foot and in canoes, — according to the season, — through the mazes of the

glades, hunting, and on trading expeditions, from coast to coast. Now they are at Miami or New River, on the east, then they appear at Tampa, or Manatee, on the west. Sometimes only a few individuals will appear, at other times considerable bands with squaws and pickannies. Some of these Seminoles keep considerable live stock, sell chickens, make and sell a good deal of "comty" starch, and do quite a business in the surplus productions of their plantations, besides their trade in plumes, gophers, venison, terrapin, etc. The old generation of fighters is passing away, and those who remain declare that they have buried the hatchet forever. "White man plenty too much. Soldier too much." Of course the younger men desire to live only at peace and amity with those whom they well know to be much more powerful than themselves.

These Indians in the aggregate generally will compare favorably with the average whites, and certainly can not outdo them in the vices of a so-called civilization; although perhaps they may come near rivalling the dominant race in the noble art of whiskey drinking. This vice, bad as it is anywhere, is an especial curse here, and is really the only serious menace to the peace and safety of the region. Here, as elsewhere, white men, for the love of gain and perhaps for other motives, are found dealing out the maddening draughts, in the shape of whiskey as malignant and poisonous, probably as can be found anywhere. The Indians, squaws and all, with a few honorable exceptions, have learned to love the vile stuff, and at times imbibe as freely as the whites, to say the least. On such occasions Brickell's Point¹⁴ and vicinity is turned into a pandemonium and all night long the air resounds with yells, curses, and the report of fire-arms. This practice constitutes about the only real danger of any serious rupture between the whites and the Indian remnants in South Florida; for of course there remains the possibility of bloody quarrels, brought on by wild natures being heated up by the crazing liquor, followed perhaps by savage vengeance. It is a pity, for this reason if for no other, that this traffic cannot be stopped; for when sober, the Seminole is dignified, polite, a man of few words, and quite ashamed of the senseless gabble and riotous conduct he has displayed while drunk — which is more than can be said of some of the whites.

Alligators are rather scarce on the bay, and usually but a few are seen. In fact, the sportsman finds it difficult to get a shot a one, they have become shy, and we have never heard of any injury resulting from them here. Alligator steak is recommended as one of the sovereign tonics and strengtheners for the invalid who comes here; but, so far as we can learn, very few are able to come at that dainty, so they must generally owe their recuperation to other influences. It is said the reptiles are more plenty near the heads of the rivers, where they empty from the glades. Bears and

panthers occur to some extent, but they are rarely seen in the day time. An occasional panther is shot in the hammocks, and the bears appear most numerous on the sea-beach at the periods when the turtles are laying their eggs on the sandy shore, during the moonlight nights. On these occasions there is a rivalry between men and bears as to which shall first secure the treasures deposited by the unsuspecting and patient creature of the sea. Sometimes the human robber is able to add bear steak as a welcome addition to the coveted eggs.

So far we have learned, no more than two varieties of poisonous serpents are usually met with here, and those two species are by no means so plenty as the frightened imaginations of some people lead them to believe. These are rattlesnake and moccasin. A well-informed resident on the bay tells us that in ten years he has seen no more than an average of one rattlesnake per year; and the Indian — men, squaws, and children habitually go everywhere with legs and feet bare. We were able to learn of but one fatal bite from a serpent which had occurred in the vicinity of Miami for a long period. Yet it is always well to be cautious of course. We sometimes see scorpions, both white and black, especially about rottingwood, but their sting is not so serious as in some countries. It is said to resemble a rather bad bee sting. Centipedes are more rarely met with, and we have not had the pleasure of acquaintance with an individual of that family as yet. Of other poisonous creatures we hear and know but little, except that we have had an occasional unpleasant sensation from stepping with bare foot on some Portuguese man-of-war.

There are many other things which might be spoken of and made interesting by a keener observer or an abler writer; but, having to some extent at least accomplished the purpose with which we set out to write, we forbear further at this time to trespass upon the space of the editor and the patience of such chance readers as may have thus far followed these lines.

Of the Australo-Californian,¹⁵ who divides his time between selling whiskey, etc. telling wonderful tales, which out-Arab the Arabian Nights, but which he actually insists on having believed, — quarrelling and being quarrelled with by everybody on the bay, and of the astonishing law-suits resulting there-from; of a “hoofing” trip, by a small party, to Lake Worth and back, — of the kind reception to two forlorn and miserable tramps, by Mr. B. and his amiable family, — of attentions from “Steph,” at Life Station 3,¹⁶ — and of adventures both serious and ludicrous which befell on the way; of these and other matters we must not now speak, but reserve them (and perhaps observations on the southwest coast) for future possible communications.

To sum up, then we cannot recommend a removal to this southeast

coast by the man of small resources, who wishes to commence to get ahead in a short time. Better means of communication with the outer world, and consequent increased accessibility of market, will make this region more desirable for such men; but when that era will arrive, no one can now truly prophesy. So far, there has been much talk, but no accomplishment. Lack of capital is the great obstacle. But to the invalid, suffering from consumptive tendencies, bronchial complaints, or rheumatic affections, we think we can truly say that this bay is unsurpassed in the United States. Rheumatic troubles disappear in a surprising manner. It is like a veritable fountain of Youth. To these classes, and to persons of some means, who wish to avoid the rigors of a Northern winter, this section is much superior to even the more Northern parts of Florida. Being in immediate contact with the waters of the Gulf Stream, and surrounded by warm salt water, the climate is more equable, the air softer, there is little danger from frost, — even while ice is forming at Jacksonville, — and extreme heats are also avoided. Here may be found a fair supply of the larger game, plenty of small game, vast quantities of sea-fowl, and one can live and luxuriate at a comparatively small expense on fish, turtle, oysters, etc., of delicious varieties, besides enjoying free that luxury unobtainable at the North, a warm bath in the open salt-water almost any day in the year. So some time the peculiar advantages of this most southern portion of our American Italy will be as well known as any portions of the world, and the tide of winter travel, rolling along the still-dreamed of but then realized Jacksonville and Key West railway, will not turn until it has reached the southernmost limit of the Land of the Seminoles.

NOTES

1. Sydney Lanier wrote *Florida, its Scenery, Climate and History* in 1875. In it he described Rev. W. W. Hicks and Hon. William Gleason as "the stirring men of Dade County." pp. 55-56.

2. The maumee trees were located on the south bank of the Miami River on the property of Mrs. Eitta Gilbert.

3. Andrew Price was the captain of the "Governor Gleason," owned by William H. Gleason of Biscayne (Miami Shores).

4. J. W. Ewan, known as the "Duke of Dade," came to Miami from South Carolina in 1874. He was the nephew of one of the principal owners of the Biscayne Bay Company that purchased the "Ft. Dallas" tract on the north bank of the Miami River.

6. Mrs. Isabella Peacock and her husband Charles came to South Florida from England in 1875. In 1883, they moved to Coconut Grove and operated the first hotel in the area.

7. Mr. and Mrs. E. T. Sturtevant, parents of Julia Tuttle, came to South Florida in 1870 and later homesteaded in Biscayne (N. E. 103 Street).

8. William H. Hunt came to South Florida in 1868 with William H. Gleason. These two men dominated South Florida life until 1876.

9. Dr. Richard B. Potter and his brother George came to the area from Ohio in 1874 and homesteaded near N.E. 85 Street and 10 Avenue.

10. Dan Clark had lived in the Miami area since the 1850's. Lizzie Holland lived on his property and kept house for him. She was one of four Blacks living in Miami at the time.

11. Jack Peacock, brother of Charles, was living on J.W. Ewan's homestead in what is now south Coconut Grove.

12. The Luke Infinger, Samuel Jenkins and John Addison families are all mentioned in James Buck 1878 diary as residents of South Dade.

13. Mrs. Etta Gilbert had a ten-acre track on the south bank of the Miami River.

14. William B. Brickell opened a trading post on the south bank of the Miami River in 1870.

15. This refers to William B. Brickell.

16. Stephen Andrews was the keeper of the House of Refuge Station No. 3 that was located at Delray Beach.

LIST OF MEMBERS

Members of the Historical Association of Southern Florida enjoy the ongoing program of the Association, the special events, meetings, program series and publications: the quarterly *Update*, calendar of events, and director's letter; and the annual *Tequesta*. They have the use of the research library and the archives located in the Historical Museum.

Membership revenues benefit the public service and educational programs and projects of the Association.

The roster below is made up of the names of those persons and institutions that have paid dues since September 30, 1978. Those joining after September 30, 1979 will have their names on the 1980 roster.

The following code designates categories of membership: "Patron," single, (P), pay fifteen dollars per year (this category was changed to Individual Membership on October 1, 1979); "Donor," (D), twenty-five (this category was changed to Family Membership on October 1, 1979); "Contributor," (C), fifty; "Sponsor," (Sp), one hundred; "Benefactor," (B), two hundred and fifty or more; "Life," (L), one thousand. Honorary Life Membership (HL), is voted by the Board of Directors to recognize special service to the Association. The symbol ** indicates Founding Member; the symbol * indicates Charter Member.

Abbe, Robert B., Hialeah (P)	Admire, Mrs. Jack G., Coral Gables (D)	Alexander, Dr. & Mrs. Julius, Miami (D)
Aberman, Mr. & Mrs. James, Miami (D)	Albury, Mrs. Calvin, Key Largo (P)	Allen, Mrs. Eugenia, Miami (P)
Adams, Betty R., Homestead (D)	Albury, Dr. Paul, Nassau, Bahamas (D)	Allen, Raymond, Miami (P)
Adams, Eugene C., Miami (P)	Alderman, Jewell W., Coral Gables, (P)	Allston, Mrs. William F., Miami (P)
Adams, Mr. & Mrs. Nate L. II, Coral Gables (D)	Aldrich, Mr. & Mrs. Roy L., Jr., Miami (P)	Alpert, Maurice D., Miami (L)
Adderly, Mrs. Elaine, Miami (P)	Alexander, David T., Sidney, OH (P)	Altmayer, M. S., Blowing Rock, NC (P)
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