

STORY OF EARLY DAYS OF TRAIL HISTORY IS INTERESTINGLY TOLD

Supplies and Men at One Time  
Carried by Barges Up Canal

MOTOR VEHICLES ARE USED TODAY

Completion of Trail in Sight

By F. Irving Holmes

Four or five miles west of Carnestown on the north side of the Trail is an old derelict of a dredge -- the Moneghan. Once it represented practically the entire equipment engaged in building the Tamiami Trail in Collier --then Lee--County. With creaking joints and clanking, screeching machinery it struggled onward through the tropical landscape, until, like the Deacon's "one hoss shay," it went to pieces all over all at once, and was abandoned to rot and rust in its present resting place. It was there when I came to Collier County in the spring of 1924. The Trail it had been instrumental in creating was not comparable to the broad, high, smooth highway that now traverses this section. It was literally what the name implies--a trail--two ruts on a slight elevation, but at that, as good as the rest of the road from Fort Myers.

Then the motor trip from Fort Myers was a seventy mile succession of bumps, holes, and washouts--a hazardous adventure-- an uncomfortable experience of from five to seven hours duration. Carnestown was then "trail's end." There was no highway from this point to Port DuPont, nor from Port DuPont to Everglades. You simply abandoned your automobile at the side of the road, uttered a prayer that enough of it might still be there to navigate with when you "went out" again (of course tools and everything else of a portable nature would be missing), and considered ways and means of getting to Everglades. You could, of course, walk the ties of the Deep Lake railroad for three miles to DuPont, where you could get a boat to take you to Everglades, but the ties were not evenly spaced, some were sure to be missing, and others under water. It was hard walking, and if you were burdened with grips and packages--as you usually were--your hands would not be free to slap mosquitoes.

Journey is Difficult

You decided to consider walking only as a last resort,

### Story of Early Days (Cont)

and turned expectantly to a telephone that was housed in a box attached to a pole. You "Cranked her up," lifted the receiver from the hook and, if you were lucky, ultimately heard a faint "hello". You then gave your name and present address and requested that a Deep Lake Railroad car be sent to remove you from here as soon as possible--the mosquitoes were bad, it was raining, and you were hungry. You talked fast so as to get your message through before the line went out as it usually did before the party on the other end had an opportunity to indicate what action, if any, would be taken with reference to your request.

Being optimistic you waited, knowing that the chances were even that ultimately a flivver, equipped with railroad car wheels, would come clanking over the uneven rails. You and the driver would then manipulate the vehicle onto a home made wooden turntable, rotating on an iron peg driven in the ground between the rails, and after several attempts succeed in getting its nose pointed for DuPont again with all four wheels on the track. At DuPont you rounded up a boat for the last mile of the journey to Everglades. If it was in the middle of the night--as it frequently was--you first went to the men's bunk house and tried to pick out a boatman in the dark. Usually you awakened a carpenter or plumber--or all three before you located your gondolier. Eventually, of course, you came to know the boatman's peculiar snore and could get him out without disturbing anybody else.

### Bay City Dredge Purchased

But to get back to the Moneghan dredge. It was, as has been stated, right where it is now. The travelable road had been completed as far as Carnestown. A few miles of grade had been thrown up--but not levelled off--east of Carnestown towards Miami. Most of this work had been done with the "old Marion" (affectionate name for the floating Marion dredge still doing service on various jobs in the country) but when I arrived a "new fangled" Bay City dredge mounted on caterpillars had just been acquired and set up. I am told that it had been purchased only after great deliberation. I was regarded -- skeptically by many-- as an experiment and local opinion was about evenly divided as to its merits.

Men had to be trained to operate it, camps had to be established and--worst job of all--gas, oil, food, and all

### Story of Early Days (Cont.)

other material and supplies had to be transported to it. Transportation was at irregular intervals via the Deep Lake railroad to Carnestown, at which point men and materials were transferred to motorboats or to barges towed by motorboats, thence down the canal to the point where the dredge was operating. Cars frequently ran off the track blocking the railroad, barges had a habit of sinking in the canals, and motorboats went aground or developed temperamental engines. Everything happened that could happen, but somehow, somehow, Otto Neale and his men succeed in keeping the dredge working steadily on one shift with only a moderate amount of time out for repairs.

### Many Men Still On Job

Otto is still on the job, and will see it through. Many a time have travelled up and down the canals with him in his launch inspecting the work. Hours and hours of time were consumed on these trips, with Otto's old dog "Brownie" curled up on the choice seat in the stern, or following along on the canal bank with tongue hanging out and an injured look in his eyes--a shameful way to treat a good and constant mother.

Many of the men who helped set up and operate that first "Bay City" are still on the job. There must be a fascination about this job of trail building that grips and holds the men engaged in it. The Trail organization was the least disturbed of any of our organizations by the hysteria that sent the whole state clean crazy during the "boom." Men on other jobs quit by the wholesale, lured by the prospect of easy money in real estate or by unheard of wages in the new "profession" of clearing and staking out subdivisions--wages away beyond the limits of our enterprise or any other legitimate one. The morale at Everglades and in Collier County, so carefully and painstakingly built up, was "shot to pieces" in short order. The labor turnover was enormous. There were, of course, men in every department who remained steadfast and who made it possible for us to "keep on carrying on" after a fashion. Many of these men are still with us. They have my profound respect and admiration, as have also many others who were obliged to leave for one reason or another. The trail organization was, of course, affected but it was not disrupted. It has since been enlarged from time to time by necessary additions until it now consists entirely of picked men of proven worth, many of whom gained their experience in the early days of the first "Bay City."

## Story of Early Days (Cont)

### New Equipment Added

This dredge had worked so satisfactorily that it had been decided to "experiment" further with Bay City equipment, and a "skimmer scoop" had been purchased, its function being to level off the grade and make it travelable for vehicles. The road from Carnestown to Port DuPont was finished, and later, from DuPont to Everglades; bridges were built across Barron's River at DuPont and across Palm Creek and across the canal at Carnestown, where a barge with plank approaches had served for many months. Automobiles and trucks supplanted motor boats and barges and provided a much quicker and more economical means of serving the dredges, even though they were daily increasing the distance from the base of supplies. The roads were scraped and rolled; bridges were built to replace the two planks that afforded hazardous crossings at most of the creeks and rivers. As the work speeded up additional equipment was purchased until the original units had been multiplied several times.

With constantly improved conditions, adequate equipment, a seasoned organization, and accumulated experience the quantity and quality of the work has steadily improved until it seems that it is now as near perfection as it is humanly possible to attain. If the truth of this statement is questioned, I can only invite you to inspect for yourself the magnificent boulevard that is the Tamiami Trail in the eastern end of Collier County and the western end of Dade county, where Alexander, Ramsay and Kerr are operating three "Bay Cities" on double shift, together with "skimmer scoops", scrapers, rollers, dynamite equipment, and all the paraphernalia of the expert road builders art. But a few hundred feet remain on Alexander, Ramsay, and Kerr's contract--the beginning of the end is in sight--the Tamiami Trail is almost an accomplished fact--a dream come true.

### Forty Miles Completed

Forty miles or more separate this battery of smooth running "Bay Cities" from the decrepit old Moneghan. Between the two the history of the Tamiami Trail in Collier County, as I know it, is written in rock, and earth, and water, and wood, and iron. Even the story of the new county's struggle to provide finances for the work is clearly written so that "he who runs may read"--a story that would have had a sad ending long since had it not been for the resourceful and practical assistance of Mr. Barron Collier.

### Story of Early Days (Cont.)

The point at which the state relieved the county of the burden is easily discernible as it marks a definite improvement in the quality of the work. Dr. Fons A. Hathaway, chairman of the state road department and one of the best friends South Florida ever had, is proud of the road Alexander, Ramsay, and Kerr are building under their state contract; Collier county is proud of it and soon the whole state will be boasting of it.

### West Portion Soon Finished

The "Bay Cities" will not be abandoned, like the Moneghan, at the farthest point they reach--they will return and bring up that part of the road built under county contract to conform to the portion built under state contract, and when this work is finished the Tamiami Trail will take its place in highway history as an outstanding accomplishment.