

EIGHT ROYAL PALM HAMMOCKS IN FLORIDA

Senator Fletcher's Timely Suggestion

Urgent and repeated requests continue to come from points all over the State and country asking for information concerning the Indian legends and history connected with the Royal Palm hammocks, so plentiful in Southern Florida.

Particularly is there a desire to know more of the Royal Palm State Park, formerly known as Paradise Key.

This tract of 960 acres lies forty miles south of Miami, Florida, having been deeded by the State through legislative action to the Florida Federation of Woman's Clubs. Later, through the generosity of the late Mrs. Henry Flagler, an additional 960 acres was made over to the club women to be used as an endowment to help support the State Park.

Regarding the Seminole history of this tract (Paradise Key) no authentic facts can be established. Many parts of the Park are marshy and consequently have been uninhabitable, and, so far as records show, the Indians did not make homes nor cultivate to any extent, the approach to the Key being very difficult. It was not necessary for the Seminoles to make arduous trips when the entire State was an open hammock wilderness or prairies and all parts open for their occupancy. In reality, all the lands south of Peace River belonged to the Seminoles by the Governmental treaty of 1842, which fact makes the Seminoles the real owners

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of all these broad acres, were they able to battle for justice and their legal rights.

Did the Seeds Drift from the Sea?

Whether the first seeds of the Royal Palm drifted in from the sea, as in the days of long ago did the cocoanuts on many parts of the coast, can only be a matter of conjecture. It has been scientifically proven by botanists and naturalists that the varied flora as well as the fruits of these South Florida regions were first brought there from the Antilles and Yucatan, in a few instances by human hands, but more generally by "common means of birds" and the drifting of the turbulent and the ever recurring tropical storms coming from beyond Cape Car-toche. While there are seven or eight beautiful Royal Palm hammocks in lower Florida, the magnificent Royal Palm hammock of Cape Romano has a history entitling it to priority of name, as the "Queen of Royal Palm Hammocks"—having upon its forest covered area 500 feathery topped and smooth trunked Royal Palms. Added to this is the wonderful "butterfly colony," where myriads of the yellow butterfly propagate, making the scene a maze of yellow and green, where life and landscape blend into a mosaic of wondrous beauty.

To describe this island would require many chapters, because of the limitless wonders of green prairies and glades, dense vine-hung hammocks, mysterious bayous, waxen magnolias, flaming vines, shy and brilliant orchids, all heightened like a picture under glass by the stately Royal Palm—Florida's exotic tree, with its sculptured, polished trunk.

The Seminole history of this Palm-canopied forest is vague, yet my belief of this sentinel and towering Palm hammock points to Indian origin.

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Concerning the Royal Palm hammocks on the southwest coast of Florida I am able to speak more authoritatively, because historical records so license.

Of one hammock only, in this brief article, will I attempt to give any historical points.

The Royal Palm hammock to which I refer is on Harney river and has a considerable number of Royal Palms and its history is very American, being closely connected with Seminole Indian history.

Those who are cognizant of the last war with the Seminoles, know that the skirmish, or war, was the result of a feud between the old chieftain of the tribe and Col. Harney's surveying corps, about 1850. The Indians were living peacefully on their own land and happy, so far as solitude and peace made the Seminole in those days.

Old Billy Bowlegs was an agriculturist of unusual ability, having much to make him and his band prosperous. Among other growths were his banana plants, which were the pride of his heart. For some mischievous or, one might say, Satanic reason, Harney's men, during the night, slipped over and hacked the banana plants to pieces. Absolute ruin was the result. When accosted by the aged chieftain the surveyors admitted the outrage, giving as an excuse that they did it just "to see old Billy cut up."

The old chieftain was broken-hearted, yet full of revenge, and the result was that war was brought on; troops were called, the Indians that could be captured by blood hounds or induced to surrender, were removed to the West and an expense of many thousand dollars was tacked onto the government.

I have digressed enough to show that Indians of this Bowlegs band were well trained in agri-

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culture and horticulture. With the old chief-tain's delight in gardening and the raising of many food stuffs he also had an eye for the beautiful and planted the seeds of rare plants over the reservation. The stately Royal Palm withstood nature's turbulent warfare, and planted, as they were, all over the reservation, many of them being placed in symmetrical style, they grew until they formed avenues lining the walks and Indian trails.

Many of these palms have lately been removed or destroyed but enough remain to show the horticultural taste and love of this beautiful tree by the Indians seventy years ago.

Knowing these facts from historical records, it is easy to believe that Florida Seminoles are responsible for many of the exquisite Royal Palms that stand like towering sentinels, dotting the Southern part of the peninsula; for it is well known that the Seminole believes in the preservation of nature and that the preserving and planting of seeds, rather than destroying them, is a gift to the Great Spirit.

There will always be a thrill in the name of "Everglades," even when the 'Glades have ceased to be a mysterious land of jungle and tropical loveliness. "Crossing the Everglades" continues to be a theme of song and story and this story cannot close without a brief reference to the Royal Palm State Park, which has been given such extensive publicity and has caused a Washington writer to make a very pertinent, yet friendly, story of this Royal Palm Park.

The writer seems to have given the subject close study and speaks of the wonderful trip "across the 'Glades" and of a special study of the State Park and adds that an "interest in the Zoological Park at Washington prompts the comparison," and having learned that the Fed-

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erated Club women of Florida have undertaken to promote a State Park "takes off his hat" to the ambition and energy of Florida women, but asks: "Why is this great organization obliged to carry a burden which is a work that will require \$100,000 if the Park is promoted and protected, and made into a beauty spot, such as tourists expect to see?" adding facetiously: "It is a man's job."

Another point made by the Northern correspondent in his research work is the pertinent question: "Why do club women need a lodge or club house of such pretensions, with sleeping chambers, a dining room, garage, etc., etc., as has been erected on this State Park—forty miles from the magical, enchanting and vitalizing city of Miami—a city gay, Bohemian and Roman-like in splendor? These chaotic times make the millennium seem far in the future and to avoid even the suggestion of 'road houses,' should come first in the minds of the women who are working solely for uplift, progress and morality."

The writer continues in an easy, swinging style as the subject is discussed and, offering no reflection upon Florida, asks why this land of singing birds and "golden apples" does not call upon her men to finance, and particularly the beneficiaries who own thousands—yes, tens of thousands of acres of land adjacent and who are bound to be benefited by this colossal scheme of a State Park of such dimensions.

With such corporations as the Model Land Co., the Dade Muck Land Co., as well as the Cape Sable companies, business reasons alone would insure help if asked for and success of the Park plan guaranteed.

The women of Florida have been ambitious and optimistic, and the romance attached is most appealing, and had it not been for the

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terrific burden that the Huns have put upon, not only Florida, but all America, the Park might have gone on and been financed as first planned, but today it is a "heavy haul," and must have help from the entire citizenship if a success is made.

Women who are straining every nerve and energy to keep the "home fire burning" with their uplifting work for the betterment of humanity and being needed for children's home work—industrial schools, education, etc., etc., need every ounce of their strength for these charitable objects.

Characteristic of Jacksonville's patriotism, and while 400 miles away from the Royal Palm Park, she commends the idea of a State Park and yet editorially the Times-Union says, "Profits will be derived all along the line leading to the Park from visitors who will come," hinting sufficiently for help from financiers "along the line," while another paper, published at Homestead, a few miles from the Park, says: "The State Park is truly altruistic, but will constitute a gateway to the Cape Sable country which is a commercial development project," and adds that, "While Cape Sable in the past has been practically a 'No Man's Land,' the coming of the highway and the State Park are all that are needed to bring this country into quick development."

It seems that by laying aside romance and altruism and the idea of women operating a park of such mammoth dimensions as well as so far from civilization, that to go to work on business principles is all that is necessary to make the Park a realization of romance and beauty.

With millionaire corporations already being benefited and with optimistic prospects ahead, the million dollar corporations owning so many

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thousands of acres adjoining on all sides, would not dare to refuse to finance the scheme and guarantee the success of the Park as one of South Florida's tropical reservations, as well as a great asset.

Putting it mildly, I believe, after reading and studying the Washington writer's ideas, that if such men do not see a "golden bag at the end of the rainbow," then, unquestionably the work is too big and too strenuous for our women, and smaller beauty spots or parks, with bird sanctuaries, all over the State, such as grace the intellectual and truly uplifting, beautiful town of Winter Park as well as that incomparable spot, known as the millionaires' Paradise, Palm Beach by the Sea—parks such as these, as well as other progressive towns in Florida possess, could be arranged for—each county or community caring for its park—the money, perchance, to finance same to be supplied by the county but under the custodianship of the club and other progressive women of their respective counties.

In other words, let the slogan appear all along the Dixie Highway: "Come to see my County's Park—our Beauty Spot."

Senator Duncan U. Fletcher on Parks

In closing, no stronger nor more opportune sentiment could be voiced than the words of Florida's distinguished and fearless senior senator, Duncan U. Fletcher, who always has Florida's welfare at heart and writes from Washington as follows:

"Think the establishment of parks in the various counties or communities is a most excellent one. These parks would add greatly to the attractiveness of the community and would show what possibilities and advantages the

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State offers in the way of charm and beauty. Not only that, but each park would be a means of determining these advantages, which would be unequaled.

"For instance, Rock Creek Park and Potomac Park constitute the most desirable investment this community could make.

"I would hesitate to contemplate what Washington would be without them. Similar enterprises could be most advantageously undertaken in every community in Florida."

With such ideas, may we, the club women of Florida, not have a park and a bird sanctuary in every county of Florida, where our residents and our thousands of tourists may reach easily and enjoy, not only the study of horticulture and bird life, but also a social intercourse, where a children's center for play and nature study may be made, and where the 100 per cent. American may make friendships, lasting and beneficial?

Trusting that this much mooted subject will receive the thoughtful and kindly consideration of Florida's citizenship, I am, with greetings,

Sincerely yours,

MINNIE MOORE-WILLSON.

Kissimmee, Florida.