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WHY DRAIN THE EVERGLADES?

A Travesty On The Great Seal Of Florida

(By MINNIE MOORE WILLSON)

*Read and kindly
return*

The problem of Everglades drainage hangs in the balance with an equilibrium so fragile that the quiver of an eyelid would change its course, then "Why Drain the Everglades?"

Federal Court investigations, followed by indictments, uncertainties of ultimate success in reclamation, disappointed purchasers of water covered land, all come up before the public, with the question of the honor of Florida always in the back ground.

Florida, from the day of her discovery by the merciless Spaniard has been a battle ground. With her climater, her soil, her waterways and her paradise for bird and wild animal life, together with her peculiar and wonderful geographical position, she should be today the Empire State of America, and a haven of rest and loveliness for all people, but alas! for the greed of supremacy over her areas, she is discredited by many and her banner sullied, whether justly or unjustly it is for the moralist to decide, yet certainly the eyes of the reading world are on Florida and her Everglade drainage affairs.

A year or two ago the Engineering News of New York City asserted in most positive tones that the "reclamation of the Everglades is being ignorantly and inadequately carried on by the State of Florida and reclaimed swamp land being sold to unsuspecting purchasers at high prices on the strength of the State's good name, through the public officials who publicly endorsed the work."

For the confiding purchasers all over the United States, who bought land deep under water, only sympathy should be felt. Florida sold these lands to speculators, and they in turn, backed by the high endorsement of Florida's officials then in power, had little trouble in reselling to small purchasers. Many of these victims are in poverty today, having invested their years of savings in this "Eldorado of Everglade riches". Thousands of these buyers invested because of their faith in Florida's officials. It seems today that Florida should make good any errors made by her official representatives. She is able to do this and may do so by refunding to these thousands of buyers, who have as yet nothing but overflowed lands.

That the last engineering report, advised by the 1913 Legislature and which survey cost the State \$40,000, is not as rosy hued and optimistic as Everglade land owners would like to

see it, may be ominous to a continuous dredging proposition. There is nothing impossible for Americans to accomplish, when it comes to necessity, but to attempt and guarantee successful drainage now, it would require a sea wall around Okeechobee or the surface of the Glades must be filled in above all danger of overflow. This, a century hence, may be the keynote for Everglade reclamation.

MILLIONS OF ACRES UNTENANTED.

Until Florida populates her millions of tillable and untenanted acres, certainly she need not reach for the uncertain and problematical Everglades. The millions of dollars that Florida must yet appropriate to even reclaim in part the vast tropical swamp, could be better used in other ways. "Good Roads" would claim thousands of well wishers to such a movement, and as before referred to, the land victims all over the United States could be recompensed in full for the money they confidently expended in the purchase of overflowed lands in the Everglad country. It is believed that if the voice of the red blooded citizenship of Florida could be heard, they would not only ask that these dissatisfied people have their money, but that the Everglades be left as they are. In this way the honor of the state would be vindicated, the upheaval, where Federal Courts are in conflict with our Circuit Courts, where lawyers and speculators continue in legal fight, the strained situation

would be calmed to the better reputation of Florida and to the ensuing friendship of wronged and much aggrieved Everglade land buyers.

NO GOOD REASON FOR DRAINAGE

There seems no really good reason at present for drainage of the Everglades, while there are many reasons why they should be left in their present state.

Florida at her last Legislature made her first step toward providing homes for the Seminole Indians by a bill granting 235,000 acres of swamp and almost worthless land to these native Americans. That even the first recognition was denied to these Everglade dwellers is a matter of history as well as regret by thousands of patriotic and humane citizens. How kindly would thousands of Americans have felt today toward the administration had this act been granted and this much at least been adjusted toward the wishes of the people.

As is well known, the writer believes that the Everglades belong to another race-- to the Seminole Indians by a United States treaty and that all encroachments are against justice and right, and that as an abiding place and a refuge for these forest people the Everglades are especially adapted.

To spare this Okeechobee country to this vanishing remnant of the aboriginal American is the duty of this Christianized Country.

AN UNSEEN HAND AT WORK

From a moral point of view and to those who believe in a retribution and that "cause follows effect", it looks as if an Unseen Hand is at work, more powerful than all the courts of earth and that in a mysterious way the Everglades will yet be saved for the original owners-- the Seminoles of Florida. Every Floridian believes in "fairplay" and just as soon as the people of the State understand how cruelly fair play has been denied the Seminoles, they will rise up and demand it.

It is believed, that with the drainage investigations now started, with the Everglade lands sales in a quiver of distrust by the whole country, that a decade will pass before rosy hued advertisements and the enticing blue printed plats will have any effect upon the buying public, and in the meantime, if no lands can be sold, Everglad land speculators who have so urgently recommended and endorsed the drainage scheme will turn their attention to other and better fields and to the better advancement of Florida as a State.

A WILD GAME PRESERVE AND BIRD REFUGE

The United States, together with the State of Florida, is simply able to hold the Everglades forever for the native red people, for her wild animal life and as a winter home for the migratory birds of the North American Continent. For her bird life from an economic standpoint, if all sentiment were laid aside, this great and mysterious tropical jungle should become a matter of serious consideration.

When our American people, as a body, awaken to the needs of the helpless creatures within her great boundaries, for our wild animals, for which reservations are being purchased at fabulous prices in other States, for our wonderful birds and for the proud, but vanquished remnant of the old Seminole, justice will be done and a century of dishonor, in part atoned.

THE GREAT SEAL OF FLORIDA

With this simple justice done, then will the great Seal of Florida, beautiful in its conception, carry out its original meaning. The State Seal of every State document makes the impress of a Florida Indian with outstretched arms, welcoming the white strangers of other lands, and the inscription reads, "In God We Trust". The use made of Florida's beautiful seal must often bring a blush of shame to those who love their state and know her dealings with her native and home-loving Seminoles.