

MESSAGE OF GOV. W. S. JENNINGS TO THE LEGISLATURE OF
FLORIDA RELATIVE TO RECLAMATION OF EVERGLADES.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE,
Tallahassee, April 7, 1908.

Gentlemen of the Senate and House of Representatives:

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From a careful study of the history of our State and its wonderful development and progress, there seems to have been no question that has caused greater research and effort on the part of my predecessors as far back as the territorial days and almost continuously since than the problem of drainage and reclamation of the swamp and overflowed lands of our State. This question was discussed as of national importance as early as 1835 by men of national character, position, and reputation. It was the paramount question with our first Senators in the Congress of the United States, which culminated in the act of Congress granting to the State the swamp and overflowed lands in 1850, which was, in turn, granted by the State to the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund irrevocably for the purpose of aiding in the drainage and reclamation of the lands of the character designated as "swamp and overflowed." You must admit that, notwithstanding strenuous efforts have been put forth to solve this problem, it is to-day the paramount question before the people of Florida and is of sufficient importance to invite the attention of the lawmakers of the Nation to accomplish what the forefathers provided for. Notwithstanding the comparatively large acreage of lands granted by the General Government to the State of Florida for the purposes mentioned, it has been a gigantic undertaking—one that will require time, great skill, and a large sum of available money to carry out. We must realize that the acreage of lands granted have not been available. They have not been available nor salable for the reason that they are of the character of land designated as "swamp and overflowed," not tillable and without commercial value, and therefore it has been impossible to utilize such lands to drain and reclaim themselves, and thus the State has been placed in the attitude of the man who undertook to lift himself and so far has been almost as helpless in accomplishing the task.

EVERGLADES.

The Everglades of Florida cover an area of about 4,000 square miles, embracing more than one-half of that portion of the State south of Lake Okeechobee.

Little effort has been made to drain and reclaim this large area. One great difficulty in the way of reclamation has been the uncertain

condition of the title thereto, no patent having been issued by the United States Government to the State of Florida confirming the grant of the swamp and overflowed lands under the act of Congress of 1850. It has been held by decision of the Interior Department of the United States that the department retained jurisdiction over the titles to all lands granted under said act of Congress until the patent had been issued and delivered to the governor of the State and that any orders or approval by the department of any list of land numbers was subject to revocation and cancellation by the department at any time before the issuance of patents without notice. In 1897 the swamp land department prepared, examined, and approved list No. 87, embracing 2,942,000 acres, which list was approved by the Commissioner of the General Land Office, also by the Assistant Attorney General for the Interior Department and the Secretary of the Interior, and regularly transmitted to the land office in Florida, which only awaited demands for the issuance of the patent.

Soon after the transmittal of said list the attention of the Secretary of the Interior was called to the probable effect the issuance of this patent would have upon the supposed interest of the Seminole Indians in Florida, suggesting that the Indians might have some rights in the premises that had not been considered, whereupon the Secretary of the Interior suspended the order approving said list and appointed Maj. Duncan as Indian inspector to visit the Everglades and inspect the condition of the country as to the character of the lands, rights of the Indians, etc., and upon his report a survey was ordered of a portion of said lands, which resulted in an appeal being taken from the findings of the Commissioner of the General Land Office, which was sustained by the Secretary of the Interior and the approved list, No. 87, was canceled and revoked by the Secretary of the Interior as of the date of May 18, 1898. The land office of Florida was not informed officially, formally, or otherwise of any of the proceedings which resulted in the revocation and cancellation of said list No. 87, and it was assumed that the lands therein embraced remained subject to patent to the State of Florida whenever proper request was made for such patent. With a view to perfecting the State's title to these lands, I proceeded to Washington on the 21st day of March, 1903, and was then for the first time advised of the rulings above stated, which had been made subsequent to the issuance of the original list of 1898. A new list was then prepared, in accordance with the rulings of the Secretary of the Interior, embracing the same territory as that embraced in the former list (No. 87), except that thirteen 40-acre tracts (520 acres) were eliminated as "non-swamp land," together with the sixteen sections that had been erroneously embraced in the former list, said sections having been granted under act of Congress of 1845 for school purposes, and the patent has been obtained for the lands embraced in said list, aggregating 2,862,280 acres. * * *

The excerpt from the memoir of the peninsula of Florida (1841-55) is submitted to show the steady change going on in that portion of the State. Since the last exploration nearly 50 years have elapsed, almost four eras of 14 years. If from 1841 to 1855 the change was so great, what must have been the changes in the corresponding periods since that time? The Everglades have been crossed and

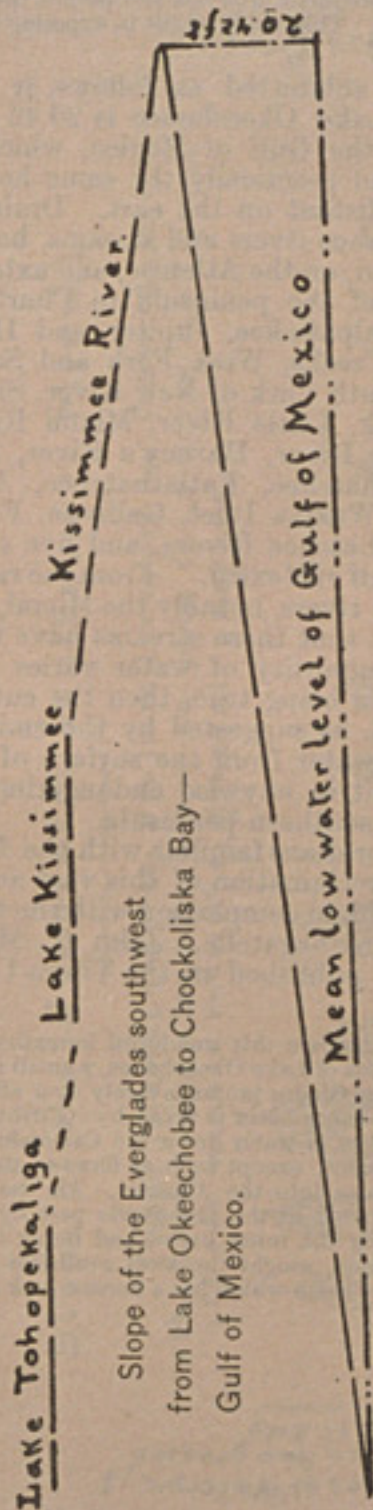
recrossed many times and in different directions since, always with more or less difficulty.

The few reports of surveyors and explorers added little new information about the Everglades until 1881, when the State contracted with Hamilton Disston to drain a large area of land bordering Lake Okeechobee and including part of the Everglades. In 1880-1882 a line of levels was made by Gen. Gillmore, under the direction of the United States Senate, to discover a practicable route for a ship canal across the peninsula. These and other surveys by Col. Charles Hopkins, Maj. Wirts, V. P. Keller, J. W. Newman, and others established the altitude of Lake Okeechobee, "the head of the Glades," at 21 to 23 feet above tide level, the difference in levels being accounted for by the different seasons at which the surveys were made. A subsequent observation and examination, made by W. H. Caldwell, assistant United States engineer, December, 1901, shows the level of the lake to be 20.42 feet above mean low-water level of the Gulf of Mexico. Lake Okeechobee covers an area of 1,080,000 acres. The bottom is hard sand and mud, water from 5 to 10 feet in depth, except in a few places of small dimensions, where the depth is 20 to 22 feet. There are four large islands in its southern portion. These observations show that the bottom of the lake at the deepest point is over 9 feet, saving these deep basins of small area, above mean low tide in the Gulf. Accompanying this is a profile showing the Kissimmee River and lakes, including Okeechobee, with their levels above tidewater.

In this connection it is interesting and important to speculate as to what would be the result were a ship canal cut through the Everglades with its bottom level 39 feet below the bottom level of Lake Okeechobee. What would become of the lakes that now make the peninsula so desirable? Would not a canal of the description proposed cut all the underground waterways and destroy all the lakes? A profile of the surface of the Everglades by J. W. Newman, civil engineer, is also submitted herewith. That the Everglades can be drained does not seem to be questionable, nor is it to be doubted that the simple drainage would redound greatly to the State, but the inauguration of any project that would exhaust the water from Lake Tohopekaliga, Cypress, Istokpoga, Okeechobee and others, and destroy them, deserves profound consideration.

Col. Charles Hopkins made a reconnoissance in 1883 from Lake Okeechobee to Shark River. James E. Ingraham made an expedition and crossed the Everglades in 1892, occupying 22 days. The reports of these and others confirm the early reports of the officers of both the Army and Navy as to the character of the soil, depth of water, and the fertility of the land. The report of Col. James M. Kreamer, chief engineer of the Okeechobee Drainage Co., made in 1886, says:

The surface of this soil is at times exposed, and it is only during or subsequent to a heavy rainy season it is possible to penetrate with a light skiff, and then advantage must be taken of the natural drains of the vast area. If there was an absence of the dense saw grass, no difficulty would be experienced in traversing the country in any direction. A 4-foot reduction of the surface of the waters of this region would be sufficient for cultivation. The surface of the lower Glades is well elevated above tide level, but, due to the rim of outcropping lime-rock extending along the Gulf and Atlantic borders, the waters are in a great measure impounded and retained at varying elevations above the tide. Levels and measurements taken at Lake Worth establish the



Scale: 28' to inch, vertical.

18 miles to the inch, horizontal.

Lake Okeechobee is 20.42' above M. L. W. level of Gulf.

From Lake Okeechobee to the Gulf by the present

canals and meanderings of streams is 87.25 miles;

air line, 54 miles. Lake Tohopekaliga is 65.26'

above mean low water of the Gulf or 40' above Lake

Okeechobee. From the Everglades (center) to Ponce

de Leon Bay, 66 miles. From the center of the

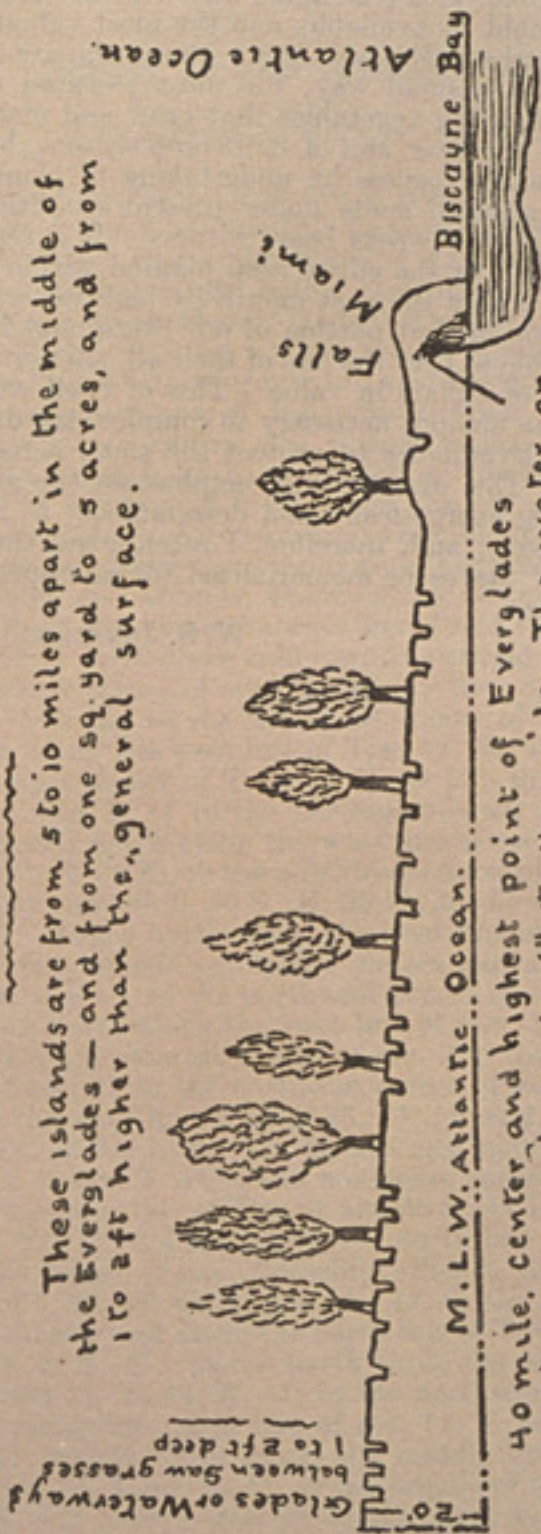
Everglades to Chockoliska Bay and the waters of the

thousand islands, distance, is 54 miles, making the fall

5.78' per mile.

Slope of the Everglades Southeast to Miami

These islands are from 5 to 10 miles apart in the middle of the Everglades — and from one sq. yard to 5 acres, and from 1 to 2 ft higher than the general surface.



40 mile, center and highest point of Everglades Fall of the Everglades is 6" to the mile. The water on the surface is held by this natural rock wall or dam, which has been cut through in a number of places by the action of the water in its effort to escape.

Thus it will appear that the drainage of the Everglades is entirely feasible and practicable, thus reclaiming 3,760,000 acres, a large percentage of which would be available, and the most valuable agricultural land in the Southern States. Again, those who are now undertaking to reclaim, in a small way, the most elevated tracts, and utilize them by cultivating vegetables that grow and mature during the driest season of the year, and of short crop seasons, hazard their entire year's work and expenses by undertaking to plant and grow crops in the most selected spots under present conditions, as the experience of the past few weeks bears witness. It is reported that from 70 to 90 per cent of the entire crop planted within this region has been destroyed within the past month by high water, which is a loss to the citizenship of that portion of our State, and falling upon those who are not able to bear the loss of their all, amounting to more than a half million of dollars in value. This of itself would justify the expenditure of an amount necessary to complete the drainage and reclamation of the Everglades to protect the small acreage already under cultivation. This disaster only emphasizes the great importance of undertaking energetically and determinedly to reclaim this vast and rich territory; and, therefore, I recommend that the Congress of the United States be memorialized for an appropriation of \$1,000,000 to this end.

W. S. JENNINGS, *Governor.*

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