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Book Review: Florida Plantation Records, By Ulrich B. Phillips

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BOOK REVIEW

Florida Plantation Records from the Papers of George Noble Jones. Edited by Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, Ph.D., Professor of American History in the University of Michigan, and James David Glunt, A. M., Instructor in History in the University of Florida. [Publications of the Missouri Historical Society.] (St. Louis, 1927, x, 596 pp.)

Among historical students it is a truism that no reasonably accurate and complete history can be written without a wealth of source material. The lack of such matter has been & great handicap to all writers of Florida history. However, more and more of the original documents are now being brought to light and published. For the Spanish period the work of the Florida State Historical Society and of Herbert Eugene Bolton is particularly notable. Through the instrumentality of the National Government the documents in Washington relating to territorial days will soon be made available. The latest addition to this lengthening list of pioneer works is the volume now under discussion.

The heart of the old South's civilization was the plantation, and its prosperity rested on the production of cotton. In a general way every one knows the chief features of this industry, but the actual everyday life on the cotton plantation is a sealed book to most of us. In Dr. Phillips' work there are one hundred and eighteen pages of letters written by the overseers of two Middle Florida plantations, El Destino and Chemonie, to the owner, George Noble Jones, between February 9, 1848, and May 3, 1858. In this correspondence with its phonetic (probably a more accurate term would be non-phonetic) spelling and its

ungrammatical language, we see life on a Florida plantation in all its grim reality, -with its hopes of bumper crops ruined time and again by the elements, with its diseases and its crude medical treatments, with its routine of work, and with its punishments. It is unfortunate that not a single letter of the war period has survived, and comparatively few of the disastrous years of the reconstruction nightmare.

Following the correspondence there are about three hundred pages of transcripts taken from the daily journals made by the overseers of the two plantations between January, 1847, and August, 1857. At first sight these journals seem devoid of great interest. However, the cumulative effect of hundreds of entries enables us to form a fairly clear picture of plantation life, which supplements the impressions gained by reading the overseers' letters.

The remainder of the source material in the volume consists of various inventories of slaves, livestock, implements and foodstuffs, of bills, of lists of needed supplies, etc. Considered in their entirety these records of El Destino and Chemonie supply us with valuable information about antebellum conditions in the Tallahassee country ; although, as the editor suggests, records of other plantations must be brought to light and studied before we can generalize.

Professor Phillips, the chief editor of the collection, is a native of Georgia. He has been engaged for more than twenty years in collecting source material on southern history and has published a number of authoritative works in this field. It is consequently to be expected that his forty-two page introduction is as valuable as any other part of the volume. The titles of the subdivisions indicate its scope: Plantation Records in General, The George Noble Jones Papers in Particular, The Plantation Realm and the Province

of Middle Florida, The Owners of El Destino and Chemonie, The Overseers, The Slaves, Freedmen, Up-keep and Output. When the statement is made that it has the scholarliness and breadth of vision found in the author's *American Negro Slavery*, nothing more need be added.

The assistant editor, James D. Glunt, instructor in history in the University of Florida, has a brief article on El Destino and Chemonie in 1925. It is difficult to decide what the purpose of the article is probably to give a popular touch to the volume, or perhaps to show the changes wrought by fifty or sixty years in the cotton plantations of the old Lower South. If the latter is the purpose, this article will be of greater interest to later historians than to those of the present generation.

The reviewer hopes that the book will be read by Floridians who are interested in the records of their state and that it will stimulate them to unearth and preserve other plantation material.

JAMES OWEN KNAUSS.