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Tequesta, the Journal of the Historical Association of Southern Florida

Florida Historical Society
membership@myfloridahistory.org



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TEQUESTA, THE JOURNAL OF THE
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF
SOUTHERN FLORIDA

The publication of the first number (March 1941) of this periodical is a noteworthy event in the writing of Florida's history. Professor Lewis Leary of the University of Miami is its editor, and it is issued as a bulletin of the University. Its forthcoming appearance was noted in our last issue where its board of editors and plans of publication were mentioned. Nine articles with a column of Notes and Queries comprise this issue, and their interest and historical value call for a brief review of each:-

*Pre-Flagler Influences on the Lower Florida
East Coast*

In the leading article George E. Merrick writes the early history of the East Coast and makes a good story of it-and it is thus that history should be told. He is the one to tell it, for nature made him the historian of that territory.

As for history, the region did not exist in colonial times except as a shore to be wrecked upon, so the story begins with the coming of the first of the Conchs from the Bahamas, towards the end of the second Spanish period. These Conchs were a "sea-loving, sea-using, sea-knowing people," who brought their sea and seashore life from the shores of their native islands to the shore of Florida. They settled very sparsely from Lake Worth to Key West which became their market town. With them came their customs, their architecture, their fruits and vegetables, their speech ; and something of all these, thinks Mr. Merrick, survives there today.

Northwards the shore, and of course the interior, was a wilderness and virtually uninhabited

except for the "Houses of Refuge" every twenty or thirty miles maintained by the government for the succor of the shipwrecked. The keepers were mostly these Conchs, and it was not until the 1890's that they were abandoned.

Wrecking was an accepted industry, and salvage supplied many of the needs of these people—the material of their houses, their furniture, and often even their food.

Later, sponging also grew into an industry. Coconuts were everywhere, and then came pineapples which were shipped on sloops to New York. Then came a number of Englishmen, some drifting from the West Indies but a few coming direct enough to make a noticeable English influence. Mostly they raised vegetables which were picked up by steamer at Key West.

Another influence was that of the Bahaman negro, who from the 1870's through the 1890's was the only heavy laborer on the coast. To their knowledge of agriculture in a "coral-rocky" country Mr. Merrick attributes much of the success of the plantings which were begun with skepticism by the settler from the northwards. These negroes put their skill in the use of the native coral limestone into some of the oldest buildings in Coconut Grove and elsewhere.

A French influence is traced also in the 1880's, but the cracker influence was earlier and more pronounced. Beginning in the 1850's adventurers were drawn into the region from the nearby states. They lived much as did the Indian, working commercially only in coontie starch making, with trapping as a main reliance.

Then came a connection by boat with the old established Indian River settlements, and from there by stern-wheeler to St. Augustine and Jacksonville and the "Celestial Railroad", a narrow-

guage portage road from Jupiter on Indian River to Juno on Lake Worth.

The tourist influence began in the 1880's with the famous Peacock Inn at Coconut Grove with its English flavor and service.

Adventurous tourists first came by sailing packet from Key West, but later coming from the north by land and inland waterways.

But the lower East Coast development of today really began with the series of severe freezes between 1884 and 1896 when ruined citrus growers from further north came by ox-cart, on muleback, by stagecoach, sailing-boat or sternwheeler, took up homesteads on the coast, and then for the first time pushed into the back country, "the first steps away from the sea, away from the long-accustomed West Indian culture," to be followed by the Flagler railroad "which brought the Magic City into being."

The Caloosa Village Tequesta

Though the few Tequesta Indians were scarcely a subtribe, their location gives them an interest and an importance out of all proportion to their numbers, for on the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century they inhabited the Miami region. Dr. Robert E. McNicoll, professor of Latin-American history in the University of Miami and director of its Hispanic-American Institute, brings together and condenses what has come to light relating to them and their town on Biscayne bay.

He has culled the well-known early sources, Laudonniere, Herrera, Dickenson, and Barcia, as well as the more recent but less-known Ruidiaz, *La Florida* . . . (Madrid 1894), and recounts some of the customs and other description given us by Lopez de Velasco preserved in the Archivo General, Seville, and in his *Geografia de las Indias*

(Madrid 1894). From Rubin Vargas Ugarte, *Los Martires de La Florida* Dr. McNicoll reproduces in full one of a number of letters written by the Jesuit missionaries in Florida. This was discovered by Father Vargas in the archives of the Vatican and translated by him. The English translation appears in *The First Jesuit Missions in Florida*, United States Catholic Historical Society, *Historical Records and Studies*. XXV (1935). This long and interesting letter was written by Brother Villareal, in charge of the Biscayne mission, to Brother Rogel then on the west coast. It describes the situation in Tequesta, the relations between the Indians and the missionaries, and their reactions to religious teaching.

From all, a fair idea may be had of the manner of life and customs of these natives of Florida—for the Seminoles of the 18th and 19th centuries were then Creeks in Alabama and Georgia.

Bradish Johnson, Master Wrecker

The inclusion of an article on some event or phase of the history of Key West was certain, and there it is on the one subject that first comes to mind when the Key West of the last century is thought of—wrecking. Nowhere else in this country, possibly nowhere else in the world, has just such a business grown up—evolved—to meet the need of certain unusual conditions. Here was a town of several thousand people in which nearly every able-bodied man was a wrecker, either on-the-side or as a vocation. Even the preacher was a member of some crew or had a wrecking sloop of his own ; and one of these, in the tale of Judge Browne in his *Key West, Old and New*, broke off his sermon when he saw a vessel pile-up on the reef, and he and his congregation raced for their boats and the wreck. So Vincent Gilpin, who has for

years been gathering material on the subject, contributes the story of *Bradish W. Johnson, Master Wrecker*.

As Johnson was the last of the wreckers and died but a quarter-century ago, some of his contemporaries have told Mr. Gilpin much about him ; and making the most of such an opportunity and advantage, he gives us a full account of the man's character and exploits. Both are interesting and the tale is well told.

But the hey day of wrecking was nearly a century ago, for it reached its peak in the 1850's. It is unfortunate that no Vincent Gilpin was there then to write what might well have been the epic of the Keys—a story of brawn instead of steam.

General Problems of Florida Archaeology

No period in the history of southern Florida has been overlooked, and two articles on the pre-historical era are included—one by Dr. Doris Stone of the Middle American Research Institute of Tulane University. Dr. Stone is chairman of the committee on archaeology of the Florida Historical Society and has contributed two papers to this *Quarterly*. These were on the connection between or the relationship of the cultures of Florida and Mexico, and Florida and the West Indies.

In the present paper this discussion is carried further and that relationship brought out more clearly. Archaeological sites in Florida, from their location, structure, and other features are divided into three categories : mounds, keys, and shell heaps. The mounds, found mostly in the northern part of the state, are more closely related to those in the other southern and the central states, yet their pyramidal form and a portion of their contents relate them to Mexican culture.

The key sites are on the west coast and are low terraces and platforms of shell built on canals or other water passages for water traffic, indicating a people familiar with the sea and primarily fishermen and traders instead of agriculturists. Their culture, as might be expected, is more clearly related to that of Mexico and the Antilles.

The shell heaps of course are near the sea also, but their builders were evidently of a simple fisher culture. The stratification of the heaps indicates a series of occupation and suggests greater antiquity than the other sites, hence they represent the oldest cultural attribute found in Florida.

While intercourse and influence from the northward are evident, Dr. Stone turns to Mexico and the Antilles for the origin of Florida's pre-historical peoples.

Pre-Columbian Man in Southern Florida

In his contribution to *Tequesta* Karl Squires, a naturalist and archaeologist who has for long carried on investigations in southern Florida, tells of the historical as well as the pre-historical inhabitants of the region. Beginning with the Seminoles and their coming into northern Florida in mid-eighteenth century and their drift into southern Florida a hundred years later, he tells of their forerunners the Caloosas and Tumucuan. Backwards again he digs into the mounds to describe their forerunners in turn, and agreeing with Dr. Stone, he looks southwards for the origin of Indian life in Florida.

The Episcopal Church in South Florida, 1764-1892

The longest article in the volume is an account of the establishment and a detailed history of the Protestant Episcopal Church in this area by Dr.

Edgar Legare Pennington, rector of the Church of the Holy Cross in Miami.

During the British occupation there was but one settlement in the whole region—that of New Smyrna, and only one of any consequence, Key West, when the diocese of Florida was organized in 1838. But the parish of the latter, notwithstanding its isolation, was one of the seven in the state which joined in that organization, and the history of St. Paul's is a part of the history of Key West from that year.

But of more general interest is a narrative and excerpts from the diary of the Right Reverend John Freeman Young, bishop of the diocese of Florida, 1867-1885. Bishop Young's account of his journeyings through the wilderness from settlement to settlement is source material for the history of the region. There are no adventures, no detailed descriptions of the infants which were to become cities, and little comment, but there is an appeal as well as definite value in every such journal written by an intelligent and observant man, and especially in this one.

To Miami, 1890 Style

A diary of another kind is that of Mrs. John R. Gilpin which is a record of a family expedition accompanying the tax collector sailing in a sharpie along the coast to Biscayne Bay in the spring of 1890.

One page of a diary or letter, such as this is or Bishop Young's, is more successful in taking you along with the writer and more convincing than is several pages of any other record. This is an ordinary diary written with no effort at ornament or wit, but if you would sail down the East Coast fifty years ago and make the circuit of Biscayne

Bay and see just what Mrs. Gilpin saw, here is the opportunity.

From Lake Worth to the Bay the total "human interests are the lone mail carrier once a week and the three Houses of Refuge built by the government . . . a surf-boat housed, with only a keeper." Entering the Bay they find at Lemon City only "a store and several houses built back among the pines. To my delight I see the dock is full of Indians, 30 of them, with squaws, papooses and camping outfit. . . . Walk back among the pines and come across a settlement made by a German, Malthaus -see the mother and six children . . . ready to show us everything about their three-year-old establishment pineapples, cotton plants, avocado pears, etc. They manufacture the comptie starch, the roots grow everywhere through the woods. This is the industry of the Bay, the only thing at which they can get any money."

The History of Air Transportation in Florida

Thomas P. Caldwell was a pioneer in air mail service to Florida in 1928 and that has been his business since, so he can speak with authority here. Beginning with the world's first air transportation line between St. Petersburg and Tampa in 1914 he tells of the first flight on January first, and its successful operation for several months before service was suspended. But "Florida was to maintain its position of leadership in commercial aviation" for in 1925 Florida Airways Corporation began the operation of a round trip daily flight between Miami and Atlanta; and in 1935 "Florida, with the greatest number of cities served directly by air transportation of any state in the Union, attained the number one position in aviation, and Miami became the largest airport of entry in the world."

An Annotated Checklist of Florida Maps

John Matthews Baxter, who has made maps his hobby, here compiles a list of fifty (1502-1915) "which seem most important to the student of Florida history and local geography." These are largely from Phillips's *Maps of America in the Library of Congress* and Lowery's *Maps of the Spanish Possessions within the Present Limits of the United States, 1502-1820*.

A department of Notes and Queries, and a list of the officers and charter members of the Association complete *Tequesta*, a publication notable both in interest and in historical value.