

1945

### Book Review

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## TERRITORIAL FLORIDA

*Florida During the Territorial Days*, by Sidney Walter Martin. Athens, The University of Georgia Press, 1944 (308 p. \$3.00).

Pioneer Florida, as does the pioneer era of most countries, holds a good story, and Dr. Martin has caught much of it; and being a good story-teller, tells the story or series of stories well, so the reader is sure to be interested.

First comes the acquisition of Florida as a part of the manifest destiny of the United States. Then, as a preparation for telling about the cession, there is a bit on the Spanish Floridas, of General Jackson's incursion in 1818, and the long negotiations leading to the treaty signed on February 22, 1819, in which the Florida cession was but one of the questions settled. Much space is given to the pre-ratification contests, a major political issue in this country as well as in Spain, with England's sub-surface encouragement of Spain's continued resistance.

Most of the second chapter is an entertaining account of Andrew Jackson's colorful part as star in the drama of the first few months of United States sovereignty, his continuous impatience with the not to be hurried Spaniard, and his extraordinary arrest of the former Spanish governor. Details of certain happenings which are not widely known are brought out, and the chapter ends with a quotation from the *National Intelligencer* that the acquisition of Florida was "an event among the most important in the annals of our country since 1803."

A chapter on "Government and Politics" treats interestingly of the set-up of the territorial government which at first was entirely appointive and hence under the direct control of Washington. But

in 1826 the choice of the Legislative Council was given to the electorate, and by degrees the privileges of self-government were extended; but notwithstanding efforts to the contrary, the governor was appointed by the President throughout the territorial period.

The national political parties had their loyal supporters in Florida, and Whigs and Democrats have their heated contests on local as well as national issues in Professor Martin's pages.

Governor DuVal, who is due and receives a chapter, is another colorful figure who is made the most of.

The confirmation of land titles was one of the most important questions which had to be settled in the first decade, and if it were not so already, it was made the most complicated and the most long-drawn-out, so this chapter is one of the longest in the volume.

Except for Jackson's entertaining impetuosity, that which will interest the general reader most is what is told of the social and economic conditions. More so than on the average frontier, Florida's newcomers covered a wide range of social standing. Crackers drifted down from the backwoods of Georgia and the Carolinas, small farmers took up "armed occupation" lands in the central peninsula and northwards, and genuine aristocrats came to make a start in the Tallahassee region while the country was still a wilderness.

And in the latter district there was the same wide range of fortune: at first the crudeness of the frontier, to be followed soon by the sudden wealth of outside money borrowed as capital, to be mostly spent as income—the proceeds of the faith bonds; then the inevitable crash, to be followed by the slower building-up of a cotton-planting economy there.

All of which gives the opportunity for an interesting narrative.

But the opportunity does not end there; for the Seminole war in Florida was by far the longest and the costliest in life and property and money of all our Indian wars, retarding the settlement and development of peninsula Florida for the better part of a decade.

There is a chapter on "Internal Improvements" which is longer than warranted by results if not in interest, for of the numerous projects described the majority were never even begun and only a handful were completed, for which of course the writer is not to be blamed. Many of these improvements were roads, which might well have been "opened" instead of the author's "built." The short-lived banks with their rosy prospects and fantastic capital are included in internal improvements, which it was hoped they would be.

The last chapter is on the coming of statehood. There is an account of the St. Joseph convention which drafted a constitution for the expectant state to be submitted to Congress; a discussion of the important contests in its framing, reflecting the controversial political questions of the day: the banks, and the desirability of statehood itself with the fight of the East for division and two states; and the adoption of the constitution at the polls; and statehood itself.

As is often the case when writing in a field which is largely virgin, errors have crept in, and they are numerous; but the book is written for the general reading public to whom accuracy is not paramount. The author was thorough in his research, having gone to all of the principal sources of primary material; but due perhaps to the abnormal conditions of the time, the volume was evidently put into and

through the press in haste and without the checking and rechecking so necessary in historical work. Many errors are doubtless typographical, others are apparently the result of hasty use of the author's own notes, while some statements seem to have been made without a careful weighing of the known facts.

As the result of the experience gained in the writing of this his first book the author's next volume, which will also relate to Florida, will undoubtedly take a high rank.