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Tequesta, 1946

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TEQUESTA, 1946

Tequesta, The Journal of the Historical Association of Southern Florida, 1946 appeared while our last issue was in press. This is published annually by that Association and the University of Miami, as a bulletin of the University. The editor is Professor Charlton W. Tebeau, who is now the head of the history department of the University.

This issue contains five articles and a "Historical Bibliography of South Florida" compiled by the Publication Committee, in which titles of more than sixty selected works are listed. These are mainly history and description, and for many titles there is a line or two in explanation of their contents.

In the leading article Mr. David O. True tells some of the choicest of the many yarns of buried treasure along the coast which he has been collecting for years—the yarns, not the pieces-of-eight. But don't ask for proof that any of the treasure has ever been found, or even that there was ever any at the foot of one of these rainbows! Scrutiny might spoil the charm of the narrative—just let the collecting and the digging go on.

A subject of never failing interest in Florida's history is the business of wrecking on the Florida Keys. Dr. Albert W. Diddle treats of this in "Adjudication of Shipwrecking Claims at Key West in 1831." This contains specific facts, with details of certain cases, reports of shipping at Key West 1826-1830, and some wrecking statistics to 1860.

Another article by the same author is reprinted from *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, "Medical Events in the History of Key West." As a member of the medical staff of the Marine Corps during the late war, Dr. Diddle was stationed at Key West, and this article is one result of his research there.

The most popular and undoubtedly the most interesting history is that told by the pioneers, and some of our own generation are pioneers of southern Florida. One of these is Dr. John C. Gifford, the pioneer forester of that region. His "Some Reflections on the South Flor-

ida of Long Ago” tells much that we are keen to know—especially how nature and her products were adopted and adapted by the pioneers, and there is much of such interest in his article. He begins with the Indians who “chewed gum, ate corn on the cob, and [smoked] tobacco. . . . I can often locate” he says “an old Indian camp-site by the wild cotton plants and cacti growing around it. . . . Our tropical Indian played with rubber balls, and the word ‘caoutchouc’ is probably in imitation of the sneeze produced by the smoke in coagulating the gum of the tree. . . . Intermittent fevers were common throughout the South, and the Florida-quinine, or Georgia-fever-bark, was a common household remedy.”

Dr. Gifford continues, “When I first settled in South Florida the country was still wild. It was covered with a thick growth of Caribbean-Pine on the rocky highland. There were many blazes on the pine trees. I soon learned that these blazes marked the tasks for the comptie gatherers. There were homesteaders here and there, and their only cash crop was comptie starch. Barrels of snow white starch were shipped by sail boat to Key West and then elsewhere by steamer. Here and there were little comptie mills. Many of the settlers depended on this comptie starch while waiting for their groves to grow. It was essential to the life of the backwoods settler. . . . This industry died a natural death with the exhaustion of the comptie, and was followed by the sawmill which left very little in the way of natural resources. . . . The pineapple industry was once the largest in the world on the East Coast of Florida and the Keys. It is now almost a thing of the past, and has gone to Cuba, Hawaii, and the East Indies. In the early days cassava, or yucca, or tapioca was a common Florida plant.

“To me the past relationship of plant, place and people is real history.” [As it should be to all historians].