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Book Review

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BOOK REVIEWS

Lake Okeechobee: Wellspring of the Everglades, by Alfred Jackson Hanna and Kathryn Abbey Hanna. (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1948. 379 pp. \$4.00)

In the January 1948 issue of this *Quarterly* the writer reviewed Marjory Stoneman Douglas's *The Everglades: River of Grass* and stated without fear of contradiction that the author had made an outstanding contribution to the growing body of published Floridiana. The Hannas' volume on Lake Okeechobee adequately blocks in another space in the mosaic of recorded Florida history and description. It would be impossible to write these two volumes on segments of the Kissimmee river-Lake Okeechobee-Everglades watershed without some duplication, but to the credit of these authors it may be said that they have written their books with a minimum of overlapping detail.

The Everglades story in Mrs. Douglas's volume covers southern Florida from the Atlantic coast to the Gulf. The Lake Okeechobee region as construed by the Hannas, extends from the headwaters of the Kissimmee river to the oil wells at Sunniland in Collier county, over three hundred miles distant. While no hard and fast lines can be drawn which delineate the areas to be covered in these regional studies of the lakes and rivers series, nonetheless, the reader may rightly end in bewilderment as to whether the Disston developments at St. Cloud, eighty-five miles north of Lake Okeechobee, are a part of the same Okeechobeeland which also contains the Everglades National Park which extends over a hundred miles south of the big lake.

The time sequence of the Hannas' narrative lies largely within the present century. As has been said before, there are few sources available relating to the interior of southern Florida before the Seminole Indian war of the late 1830's. In consequence, the first one hundred pages of the Okeechobee story form an interesting introduction to the land of the big lake. Much informa-

tion, previously unpublished in a single volume, is woven into the account of the abortive attempts of the young state of Florida to promote the reclamation of its swamp and overflowed lands in the two decades before the Civil War. While the full story surrounding the political maneuvering between Florida's senators David L. Yulee and James D. Westcott Jr. remains to be told, the Hannas accurately highlight the intrigue of that episode. They introduce the invaluable Buckingham Smith Report and ably follow the "battles for land" as the one easily exploitable resource of Florida. The chapters on "Cow Cavalry" and "Gold on the Hoof" provide the transition from the renewal of Indian skirmishes in the 1850's to the Disston land purchase of 1881. The significance of these hitherto unpublicized phases of Florida history lies in the pioneering efforts of the hardy settlers who ranged their stock on the vast grasslands of Kissimmee Valley which became one of the important foodbaskets of the Confederate States.

The accounts of Disston's "Kingly Domain" will draw much attention, for here is the fullest and most accurate account of the controversial sale of four million acres of Florida's land for the sum of a million dollars during the Bloxham administration of the early 1880's. Few will argue but that the Disston operations gave proof to all previous contentions of the value of the muck lands of Florida when drained. It is hard, however, to visualize the Disston enterprises as "a model of efficiency and dispatch" (p. 97) in comparison with the State drainage efforts in later years, or to rationalize the citation, without comment, of State Engineer H. S. Duval's report of 1884 that Disston had permanently drained over two million acres of the so-called wet lands. Duval's optimistic figures were questioned by the committee appointed by Governor Edward A. Perry, which reported in February 1887 that the Disston Company had permanently drained 80,000 acres in the immediate vicinity of Kissimmee City.

With the settlement of the interior of Florida in the last fifty years, brought about in large measure through the promotion of outside capitalists, including Plant, Flagler and Disston, it was inevitable that the large unsettled areas in the Kissimmee Valley and the Everglades should become attractive as sources of potential profits from investments in land. The authors have presented fascinating pictures of Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, "State Father" of large-scale reclamation, and of the land boom of the early nineteen-teens. Here again, they have presented much new material, particularly on the spectacular real estate promotion, the collapse of the land boom, and subsequent Congressional investigations of the whole Everglades drainage scheme.

In addition to the central theme of the drainage of the Everglades (and included in this was the lowering of the water level of Lake Okeechobee), the authors have included a mass of incidental anecdotes and folklore for the entertainment of the reader. The tall tales of the Lake settlers and 'Glades pioneers, the Lake fishermen, the Ashley Gang, the Duchess of Moore Haven, and Thomas E. Will, to cite just a few, will regale the reader with stories whose base of truth is stranger than fiction and much more interesting! All in all, *Lake Okeechobee* is a work of absorbing interest, and to the uninitiated will provide a glamorous trip into a seeming never-neverland. As portrayers of the life and labor of the native and adopted sons and daughters of the Peninsular State the authors justify their established position in the field of Florida literature.

It is unfortunate that the Hannas were forced to meet a publisher's deadline date. This reviewer echoes the words of David O. True in that he "would like to have had them spend another year in just writing the book. . . ." There are several instances of hurried preparation, particularly the first sentence of the second paragraph on page 125. The continual usage of the phrases "course of empire" (p. 35 *et passim*) and "empire builders" (p. 91 *et passim*) tends to become monotonous, as well as the adjective "succulent."

The bibliographical notes are adequate, although mention should be made of several missing items, notably "The Minutes of the Board of Commissioners of the Everglades Drainage District" and the 1942 Florida Hearings (441 pp.) of the Congressional Committee which investigated the migratory labor problem in the Okeechobee region.

A few errors, especially in names, have slipped into the volume. The Florida Constitution referred to on page 120 is that of 1885, not 1887; J. E. Dovel should be J. E. Dovell (p. 172) ; Doyle E. Carleton should be Doyle E. Carlton (pp. 263, 283). The quotation on page 239 from John Newhouse's "Memories" to the effect that settlers might plant seeds and secure an income within a week is a misquote. Even the real estate men knew better than to lie that much. It should be noted that the John Newhouse manuscript "Memories of Early Days in the 'Glades" has no connection with the Thomas Elmer Will papers, though both are at the University of Florida.

The Hannas have written a book which will certainly have wide appeal, and their treatment of the subject-matter is excellent. In keeping with the perennial optimism so prevalent in the "Sunshine State" their conclusion that the area is not a vanishing Eden is good, but on the basis of the records of the past history of southern Florida is not too valid. Further evidence of this optimism may be found in their treatment of the problems of labor and of conservation in the Okeechobee-Everglades area, in which there is no real agreement. Similarly, no mention is made of the experiments of the United States Sugar Corporation in the field of sweet potato starch processing, experiments which seem to have ended in a very expensive plant failure and partial reorganization of this corporate enterprise.

Lake Okeechobee is another outstanding contribution toward the setting-down in print of Florida's little known history, and is a worthy product of two of Florida's foremost writers. Both the native son and the tourist will wel-

come this regional study with its full measure of information and entertainment.

J. E. DOVELL

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Lakanal, the Regicide: A Biographical and Historical Study of the Career of Joseph Lakanal, by John Charles Dawson. University of Alabama Press, 1948. (215 p. \$5.00)

The reaction from the French Revolution forced many of the active participants to flee the country, and among these was Joseph Lakanal who spent many years in our South, the greater part in Alabama. The story of these years-and the rest of his life-is now told for the first time by Dr. John C. Dawson, professor emeritus, The University of Alabama.

Born in Southern France in 1762 of a middle class family, Joseph Lakanal, possessed of a bright mind, began teaching in his youth. Imbued with liberal ideas, he led the revolutionary movement in his native Department. As a delegate to the French National Convention in 1792, he participated in many debates, in one of which he contended for the execution of King Louis XVI.

As a forward looking Republican, Lakanal urged a system of national education. He sought increased teachers' salaries, an extended curriculum, education for women, greater emphasis on physical education, prohibition of clergy teaching, and exchange of teachers with foreign countries. In 1793 he became Secretary of the Committee of Public Instruction of the French Convention. In this position, he was sent on several missions in France but whatever the nature of the journey he revealed an interest in education.

From 1797 to 1815 Lakanal served in relatively unimportant positions. He left France in 1816 and settled on a farm in Kentucky. Here he corresponded with Thomas Jefferson, Henry Clay and others. Shortly, he became involved in an abortive plot to restore Napoleon to the French throne.

In 1822 this restless Frenchman became president of the College of Orleans at New Orleans, and here he was able to put into effect some of his educational ideas. Opposition soon forced him elsewhere. He moved to Alabama, and it is Dr. Dawson's story of these years that interests us most. Finally in 1837, after twenty years in the United States, he returned to France.

Lakanal's diary, his published speeches, his papers and his books furnished the chief sources for this study. The author could have made the study more readable by paraphrasing many of the long quotations and shortening the book, by eliminating the numerous subtitles in all chapters and, if possible, by the addition of more details about the private life of the man.

GEORGE C. OSBORN

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THE STORY OF ST. PETERSBURG

In 1924 Karl H. Grismer published his *History of St. Petersburg, Historical and Biographical*. This has now been rewritten, brought up to date, extended to 418 pages with many additional illustrations, and republished as *The Story of St. Petersburg, The History of the Lower Pinellas Peninsula and the Sunshine City*. (P. K. Smith & Company, St. Petersburg. \$5.00)