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Book Review: The Story of the Chokoloskee Bay Country; with the Reminiscences of Pioneer C. S. "Ted" Smallwood.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Story of the Chokoloskee Bay Country; with the Reminiscences of Pioneer C. S. "Ted" Smallwood. By Charlton W. Tebeau. Copeland Studies in Florida History. (Coral Gables, University of Miami Press, 1955. Pp. 88. \$1.00.)

Devotees of local history who find their major interest in the story of the individual and his activities in his own community or elsewhere will delight in this book. Certainly it is a significant contribution to the field, for it is the story of individuals who pioneered in a region which, until the present, has undergone almost no physical change and has maintained essentially its frontier character. The tens of thousands of persons who have traveled along the Tamiami Trail, a few miles to the north, have been aware only of what seemed to be an impassable if not impenetrable stretch of the Everglades. The history of the area has seemed equally inaccessible. Yet Dr. Tebeau has produced an absorbing account of settlers, itinerant preachers and visiting priests, and of the economic life of the area.

The story of the Chokoloskee Bay area begins with the settlements of aboriginal Indians whose mound-building activities have left rich finds for archaeologists and anthropologists. After 1800, when the early Indian inhabitants had left the scene, the Chokoloskee Bay country was visited successively by Seminoles, military expeditions engaged in operations in the Seminole Wars and, beginning about 1870, a succession of settlers who had come to make their way on the Florida Frontier. Settlement was never very heavy but those who came were unusual and colorful.

Its inhabitants supported themselves by hunting and fishing, gathering the plumes of wild birds, turtling, and hunting raccoons and alligators for their skins. As late as 1910, "the residents of the Chokoloskee Bay country could move at will

from fishing to farming to wood cutting or charcoal making, to hunting, to clam digging, to employment at the clam cannery." Farming, now largely gone, was once the country's most extensive economic asset. Winter vegetables, consisting largely of tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, cucumbers, cabbages, eggplants, melons, onions, bananas and sugar cane, were shipped by water to the Key West market and later trans-shipped to New York in Mallory Line steamships. At present, commercial fishing and the tourist business provide the area with its main source of livelihood.

The latter half of the book is devoted to the reminiscences of Charles Sherod "Ted" Smallwood. Although much of what Smallwood has written deals with areas other than the Chokoloskee Bay area itself, it does give an excellent picture of the South Florida frontier of half a century ago. Smallwood covered a considerable amount of territory and, while he was a peaceful man himself, he seems to have been on the scene where violence occurred. His reminiscences are simply told yet they are the words of a story teller. One might well regret that he had not met Ted Smallwood in his lifetime and listened to him recount his experiences.

Chokoloskee Island has now been connected to the mainland by a causeway, the building of which marks the end of an era and heralds a major transformation. As in so many areas of the state in recent years land values have soared, a motel constructed and the scourge of the wooded lands, the "bulldozer," is making its inroads.

Charlton W. Tebeau in this, the first of a series of studies of the southwest area of the peninsula, has done local history a major service. In his own writing he has caught the spirit of the Chokoloskee country, and in presenting C. S. "Ted" Smallwood's reminiscences has preserved its language and its quality. The book is well prepared with clear, readable type

and has excellent photographs of old settlers, landmarks and habitations.

FRANK B. SESSA

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