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Book Review: Florida-A Way of Life

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BOOK REVIEWS

Florida-A Way of Life. By Mike Smith. (New York, E. P. Dutton, 1959. 272 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$3.95).

Although the obvious purpose of this 272-page volume is to be helpfully informative for tourists and for new and potential citizens of Florida, Author Mike Smith has accomplished more. A truly historical contribution underlies her presentation of the State's cultural, industrial and institutional development at the present time.

In only 15 chapters the author presents "Florida-A Way of Life" with such objectivity and enthusiasm that the appetite for Florida grows as the reader pursues the book. Mike, whose real name is Mary Ellen, has a wide and intimate acquaintance with her subject. Besides being a native Floridian, she gained additional knowledge by traveling about the State on writing assignments with her journalist husband, the late Tom Q. Smith, to whom she has dedicated her book.

That the book's first chapter should be concerned with Florida's most important asset-its weather-is a logical first step in describing the State's way of life. Pointing to the fact that Florida's reputation "serenely rests upon climate," Author Mike gets dramatic: "It is the fastest growing large state in the Union. It is a new and exciting industrial empire where midget enterprises have grown into giants in a few years. It is a frontier for the engineer and the agriculturist who look toward Central and South America. It is a haven for the retired, a billion-dollar vacationland, the year-round home of millions of people and the hope of millions more."

While conceding that Florida's climate is not always a blessing unmixed, the author points to the occasional unpleasant humidity and cold spells as "tantalizing near-perfection," so that all can be forgiven. Injection of statistical realism here and throughout the book is no snag to reader enthusiasm for it provides backbone for the lively narrative.

With the caption, "Florida Once Over Lightly," the second chapter provides a backdrop of Florida history, against which the

succeeding chapters present verbal pictures of life in various parts of the State. This volume is not intended to be a history, but the author obligingly injects historical background wherever it is needed to make the present more understandable. This writer feels the author has done this adequately, except in the background of Miami Beach history where mention of the Lummus brothers, (J. E. and J. N.), as No. 2 developers of the beach, was omitted. Only John S. Collins preceded them.

There is a sparkling outpouring of facts and humorous anecdotes for home seekers, tourists, job seekers, investors, industrialists, sportsmen and those planning retirement in Florida.

For the year of the book's publication the reader can learn about rent and purchase price of homes, salary scales, hobbies available for pleasure and for profit, and various cultural advantages for all age levels. Real estate investments which are to be eyed with suspicion, and safe approach in selection of homes, are included. Delightfully unimportant things are mentioned, too, such as where to get Key Lime pie and turtle steak, and where to find the best fishing.

With a look into the future and with a summary of the missile achievements at Cape Canaveral, the author concludes with this simple statement: "Florida plans to take part in the conquest of space."

With this book, Mike Smith has achieved brilliantly for the decade of the 1950's what Sidney Lanier, George M. Barbour, John Temple Graves and Margaret Deland did for Florida in the decade of the 1880's. They produced volumes descriptive of the Florida of their own day. C. L. Norton did it for the 1890's, and Kenneth L. Roberts and others for the "roaring twenties." Thus Mike Smith stands at the head of a distinguished line of writers as she presents "Florida - Way of Life" to her own generation.

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