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## The Editor's Corner

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## THE EDITOR'S CORNER

For years the Editor of the *Quarterly* has considered the inclusion of a new section. Letters and other items of interest will be published from time to time in this section of our publication. The first letter is from Major Keenan, who has a large and valuable collection on the Seminole wars and who is an authority on names and locations.

Frostproof, Florida  
September 3, 1960

To the Editor:

You may have anticipated my interest in Dr. Reynold M. Wik's "Captain Nathaniel L. Wyche Hunter and the Florida Indian Campaign, 1837-1841," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Volume XXXIX, Number 1 (July, 1960) pertaining to the Seminole War as contained in the Hunter Diary. If you did you made a "bullseye."

First let me thank Dr. Wik for an article which gives an insight into the personality of our men at that time that can be learned only through those diaries and letters. For the benefit of World War II veterans, they can see that crabbing and gripping was not a new invention.

So, if you do not think I am out of order, I would like to make a few observations, which may be of use to students.

The diary mentions Fort Huleman. This should probably have been Heileman. It is so easy to misread "u" for "ei." When the 2nd Dragoons arrived in Florida for this term of service they went without delay up the St. Johns and with equal dispatch turned around and went to Fort Heileman on Black Creek (now Middleburg). Fort names accumulated over the years do not include any Huleman.

After being graduated from West Point, Hunter resigned but was later reappointed and joined the 2nd Dragoons. However, he was not commissioned Captain until he left Florida, or at the time he left.

Swearingen is not spelled correctly in the diary: it is Van Swearingen. This post was in St. Lucie County. To reach the site today one may take a country road leading east from the

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Sherman R. R. station, a few miles S.E. of Okeechobee, go about eight miles until one comes to a bridge. The fort was just across the bridge: Sec. 33, T-37-S, R-37-E.

After Lieutenant Hunter abandoned Fort Van Swearingen (he was ordered away as Dr. Wik states), the fort was burned by accident. Hunter then built Fort Hunter on the east bank of the St. Johns about a mile and a half up the river from present-day Palatka. Here he entertained his sister. The site is now occupied by a house.

Hunter's sister complained about the accommodations she had there. Wonder what she expected at that time and under those circumstances? She remarked about the gates opening out like barn doors. Gates to all forts (except in the movies) opened out. If opening in, they would act like a funnel, but opening out would cause confusion to attackers.

However, Miss Hunter must have liked the place because she named it New Buena Vista. The lake she describes was a wide expanse of the river at Palatka that she could see from Fort Hunter.

Hunter was quite a man, but like some of us today let our pens run wild and get off base. He crabbed and kicked but never chickened.

Let me repeat, Doctor Pat, these lines are not a criticism of Doctor Wik, but a word of thanks for his telling us what he found. I hope others do likewise because there is so much of the inside story that we do not know. My cordial regards to him.

Sincerely,  
Edward T. Keenan

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Ruby J. (Mrs. James T.) Hancock is responsible for the following letter and news item on the site of the Battle of Okeechobee. Mrs. Hancock is a former Officer and Director of the Society.

Lake Placid, Florida  
September 29, 1960

Mr. Fred B. Sarles, Jr., Historian  
Richmond, Virginia.

Dear Mr. Sarles:

I made the trip to Okeechobee yesterday to get some information you wished on the Okeechobee battlefield. I am enclosing copy of an article appearing in the Okeechobee News, November 3, 1939 issue, about the dedication of the memorial erected by descendants of Col. Richard Gentry and the Florida Society of the D. A. R.

I personally knew W. I. Fee, the Historian, of Fort Pierce, Florida, and Judge Henry H. Hancock, the two men who established the battle site of the Battle of Okeechobee. They were about a month tracing Col. Taylor's route from Fort Bassinger to the site of the battle.

To digress from the story. In 1898 Judge Henry H. Hancock and his brother James, both licensed surveyors, were commissioned by the government to re-survey or survey the lands along the lake shores of Okeechobee in the vicinity of the town of Okeechobee. Hopkins survey of 1881 of the territory - the lake shore or meander-line of the lake - was far to the north and east of the lake. Due to canals and drainage in the 1880's and lowering of the lake level, the above survey was made. The battle of Okeechobee was fought in these unsurveyed battlefield lands. I have visited the battlefield several times, once with Mr. Fee trying to locate the site where the officers and soldiers who were killed were buried. We were unable to establish anything definite. I later returned to the area for another look. In the pine and hammock land adjoining the battlefield, I found a ditch or a trench about 100 yards long which had been dug many years ago, as evidenced by the growth of trees and palmettoes on the embankment. The final disposition of the dead in this battle, to my knowledge, has never yet been conclusively proven. Some say they were dug up and interred in St. Augustine - they don't seem to have a record. This perhaps could be established from the archives in Washington or maybe from the heirs of Col. Gentry in St. Louis, Mo. I interviewed a Mr. Wesley Raulerson, age 82, who was born in Fort Bassinger and he told me he had talked to a Mr. William Underhill who was in the battle of Okeechobee. About 1880 Mr. Underhill moved to Fort Bassinger. He was quite an old man when he married there and raised a family. His descendants now live in the town of Okeechobee.

In summarizing, I wish to state I have every confidence in the ability of Mr. W. I. Fee and Judge Henry H. Hancock's decision as to the battle site of the battle of Lake Okeechobee. The battlefield with relation to the memorial marker on U.S. 441 lies north and east from the lake shore to the pine and hammock woods - probably  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles. The present owners of the land of the battle site are Mr. K. Solman and Mr. Ray Rowland, both of Okeechobee, Florida. The legal description of the lands within the battlefield are in Sec. 31, twp. 37 south range 36 east, also sec. 36, twp. 37 south range 35 east, also lands along lake shore of Lake Okeechobee west of route 441 on the Great Lakes subdivision in sec. 6, twp. 38 south range 36 east. Adjoining this property on the north along route 441, Mr. Tom J. Jones owns 20 acres.

A very interesting story I shall relate, when on one of my exploring trips to the old battlefield, accompanied by Major Keenan of Frostproof and my brother Park of Sebring, looking for something to further identify the battle site. The muck battlefield had been ditched, drained and plowed in preparation to planting pasture grass. I looked up the tractor driver and inquired of him if he ever plowed up anything-an old gun, or anything that might be found on a battlefield. His answer was "no." He stated the only thing he plowed up was the skeleton of a man. We discussed his story at some length. He stated it was covered by about a foot of muck. In a short time after being exposed to the air the skull fell to pieces. He took one of the leg bones and put it upon a fence post which was about 100 yards from us. We all then went to examine the bones. Sure enough it was a human thigh bone. The major and my brother looked at one another in a daze. Major says, "Albert, that is sure to be the bones of the soldier who was killed and never accounted for," as reported by Gen. Taylor in his letter of January 4, 1838, from Fort Gardiner to Brig. Gen. R. Jones, Adj. Gen. U.S.A. Reference, Sprague Florida War 1848, page 208.

Major Keenan of Frostproof now has the leg bone. Who knows, it could easily be the bone of the missing soldier in the battle of Okeechobee. Being embedded in the acid muck or peat could well have preserved it. With the great strides in modern science, it is certainly within the realm of possibility that this leg bone is the remains of the lost soldier in the battle of Okeechobee.

chobee. If such were substantiated, he should be given a military funeral and buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

If I can be of any further assistance to you, please feel free to call on me.

I am very truly yours,

Albert DeVane,  
Lake Placid, Florida.

OKEECHOBEE BATTLE SITE  
ESTABLISHED BY HISTORIAN

*(Okeechobee News, November 3, 1939)*

Hon. Spessard L. Holland of Bartow will be the principal speaker here on Armistice Day at the dedication of the Historical Marker of the "Battle of Okeechobee" which was fought four miles southeast of the city of Okeechobee near where Connors Highway is now located one hundred and one years ago this Christmas day.

The erection of the monument was made by the Daughters of the American Revolution and the dedication ceremonies will be in charge of that organization assisted by the American Legion, the local post having invited all of the posts from the nearby cities. The plaque bearing the names of all those who were killed in this historical battle will be donated by the family of Col. Richard Gentry, who was killed at the first volley fired by the Indians in that battle. After the dedication ceremonies which will be held at the site off the battle everyone is invited to attend a barbecue sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary which will be held at the Legion Hall. The Auxiliary will charge 40 cents per plate for the grown-ups and 20 cents for the children. The proceeds from this will go to the Sons of the Legion to be used by that organization. Post Commander Hutto urges every Legionaire to be present.

HISTORY OF BATTLE

Site of the battle of Okeechobee, turning point in the Seminole Indian wars and described as the bloodiest fight of the 37 listed engagements, has been established at a point south of the city of Okeechobee by W. I. Fee, of Fort Pierce.

This Christmas when residents of the lower East Coast celebrate their holiday, it will be just 101 years ago that Col. Zachary Taylor led a force of 800 men into battle against a force of about 382 Indians in the cypress land on the shore of the lake and emerged victorious with 27 dead and 111 wounded. Two soldiers were scalped.

For years legend had placed the battle on Taylors creek virtually in the heart of the present city, but Fee has definitely placed the site south of the present city. Old war maps of Colonel Taylor, letters, and other maps in the archives in Washington were studied. Colonel Taylor on his war map showed the site but to reach it through the swamp appeared impossible. H. H. Hancock, superintendent of public instruction of Okeechobee county, however, came to the area in 1900 to survey the lands over which the battle was fought and from his old maps and examination of the area the site was definitely settled.

#### PLAQUE TO BE PLACED

On Armistice day the Daughters of the American Revolution will dedicate a battle monument on the site facing Connors highway about five miles from the present city. The plaque will be donated by descendants of Col. Richard Gentry, who led the Missouri volunteers into the battle and was killed at the first fire from the Indians. Senator Holland of Bartow will deliver the address.

#### AIDED BY MAJOR

Fee's search took him to St. Louis where he met Maj. William R. Gentry who aided the historian with data in the hands of his family and arrangements were made for his daughter to unveil the monument.

Colonel Taylor had been ordered to take his army into the area and destroy any Indians in the territory. He started out from Fort Gardner which was on the Kissimmee river about 12 miles east of the present site of Lake Wales, and arrived at Fort Basinger, which as a community still exists. He left 188 men there and started again with an army of about 800. They marched along the river and Christmas eve arrived at Taylor's Ford which

is about three miles north of the present city of Okeechobee. Their march continued to Mosquito creek and the second Taylor's Ford where an Indian was captured with a new rifle and a supply of powder and ball.

#### FIGHT WAS ON CHRISTMAS

At 11 a.m. Christmas day the troops jumped off into Nubbins slough south of the second Taylor's Ford into waist-deep water. At the first volley from the Indians Colonel Gentry was killed. The advance pushed the Indians back into the deep cypress woods on the shore of the lake and at 3 p.m. they gave ground and fled.

It was the twenty-first battle of the Seminole war and after that although 16 engagements were reported, history shows them to be mainly skirmishes.

To this point Fee has traced the events of a century ago with great accuracy, but the burial ground of the forces is still undetermined. Colonel Taylor's maps show the burial ground but all bodies were disinterred later and taken to St. Augustine. Fee said there is much uncatalogued data in Washington on the battle and that next summer he hopes to go to Washington and establish this location.

#### TO PREPARE PAPER

Establishment of the site of the battle in conflict with legend has brought a request from the state historical society for Fee to prepare a paper for the annual meeting, and a rebirth in the interest in Florida historical facts has brought him so many invitations to speak before schools and civic clubs that he finds himself unable to fill all engagements.

In the 50 years which Mr. Fee has lived in the Indian River area, he was consistently told by pioneers that the fight took place within the present city limits of Okeechobee. Just for fun he set out to see if the legend was true and found that like most legends it wasn't. His findings also are being sent to the war department in Washington.



The year 1960 was the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of William Jennings Bryan. The following tribute to the memory of the "Great Commoner" was inadvertently omitted from the last issue of the *Quarterly*. Although this article does not relate William Jennings Bryan to Florida, he was active in the state during the latter part of his life.

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"THE PEERLESS LEADER" WAS IDOL OF MILLIONS

by BOYCE HOUSE

Perhaps no American political leader inspired greater devotion on the part of vast numbers of Americans than did William Jennings Bryan. His foremost rivals in this regard in the first 125 years of the Republic were probably James G. Blaine and Henry Clay. The name of the magnetic Blaine was itself a campaign cry which stirred audiences to frenzy; and Clay was such an idol that, when he lost to Polk, men wept and, in many places, business was at a standstill while citizens stood in groups and talked in hushed voices.

In 1896, Louis Brownlow was a youth living in a small Missouri town in the Ozarks. He tells in his book *A Passion for Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955) that, when the papers came, "we were thrilled to the marrow of our bones" by the "Cross of Gold" speech which won Bryan his first nomination for the presidency. Then, when Bryan lost the race to William McKinley, Brownlow says, "For me, a boy of seventeen, it was the climax of my introduction to politics; never again was I to feel so deeply that the very life of the world was tied up in my party and my candidate."

An uncle of a young Kentuckian was so grieved and shaken by Bryan's defeat that he became seriously ill, took to his bed and remained there a year. The nephew was Alben Barkley, who became a United States Senator and Vice President. He derived a large degree of his early inspiration from Bryan's speeches and career.

In 1900, Bryan again was the nominee. Brownlow had come of age and was a reporter on a small-town newspaper. He yearned for a job on a big city journal, and at last an offer came, on Oc-

tober 1. But he delayed going to the new field for more than a month. Why? Because, he says, "I could not, even to achieve my dearest wish, forego the opportunity to cast my first vote for the Peerless Leader of the Democracy, William Jennings Bryan."

Many men made freak wagers in that first campaign. Some vowed not to shave until Bryan was elected. As a schoolboy in Mississippi in 1909, I recall seeing, in the paper, a picture of a man who had made such a vow, and he had kept it for thirteen years.

The enthusiasm which the Nebraskan evoked even after he had been defeated was such that a Montana newspaperman was stirred to verse. The day after Bryan's visit in 1897, Charles H. Eggleston's "When Bryan Came to Butte" was published in the *Anaconda Standard*. The final lines went:

" Ah, when Bryan came to Butte, greatest mining camp  
on earth,  
Where the people dig and delve, and demand their  
money's worth;  
Though the Wall Street kings and princes spurn and  
kick them as a clod,  
Bryan is their friend and savior, and they love him  
like a god.  
Did they meet him when he came there? Did they  
make a little noise?  
Were they really glad to see him? Do you think  
it pleased the boys?  
'Twas the screaming of the eagle as he never  
screamed before;  
'Twas the crashing of the thunder, mingling with  
Niagara's roar;  
All the whistles were a-screeching, with the bands  
they set the pace-  
But the yelling of the people never let them get  
a place.  
Dancing up and down and sideways, splitting lungs  
and throats and ears,  
All were yelling, and at yelling they seemed wound  
up a thousand years.

Of the earths great celebrations, 'twas the  
 champion heavyweight;  
 'Tis the champion forever and a day, I calculate,  
 For it knocked out all its rivals, and, undaunted,  
 resolute,  
 Punched creation's solar plexus-  
 When Bryan came to Butte."

That same year of 1897, Bryan spoke in a Utah town surrounded by mountains, from the second-story gallery of a hotel, his audience being miners with lamps on their caps. While the orator spoke, the shadows deepened; and twilight had settled as he closed with, "All my life, whether in victory or defeat, I will fight the battles of the people. My life is pledged to their cause through all the years to come." Instead of applause, there was silence-complete, absolute. Then a miner took off his cap, and another, and another until the entire audience stood with bared, bowed heads. Then the cheers came, such cheers as seemed to shake the very mountains.

While Bryan was on his trip around the world in 1905, a Nebraskan, who had supported him in all his campaigns, was stricken. The extreme rites had been administered and the members of the family were in the room. The dying man gestured and when the doctor stooped, he pointed to a picture of the Peerless Leader on the wall and whispered, "When Mr. Bryan gets back, tell him that his picture was before me to the last."

The loyalty which the Great Commoner inspired!

In 1896, Bryan spoke in Springfield, Illinois. In the throngs, there was a lad of sixteen. With him was his "best girl," wearing in her hair a prairie rose and holding her head high as her gold chums ignored her. Twenty-three years later, every detail still engraved in his mind, that observer, on a ranch in Colorado, wrote a poem. Says the poet's biographer, Edgar Lee Masters (in *Vachel Lindsay*, New York: 1935), the youth in Springfield had seen "that marvelous feat of physical strength, of amiable, smiling, satirical, oratorical, courageous, invincible crusading all over the country, in which Bryan traveled 20,000 miles and spoke to hundreds of thousands of people, with no radio, no magnifiers, with no newspapers to help him, with no other speakers of moment to help him, with no money to pay legitimate expenses, with

nothing but himself, his youth, his charm, his matchless skill of meeting hecklers and managing hostile audiences." Masters, too, had come under the spell, for he had seen and heard all this.

A century hence, Masters continues, when men want to get "the spirit and the meaning, the color and the drama of Bryan's campaign of 1896, of Bryanism in general," they will turn to Lindsay's poem, "Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan." (These quotations are with the permission of the publisher, The Macmillan Company, New York, *The Golden Whales of California*, by N. Vachel Lindsay, 1920, 1948.)

The poet declares that Bryan "sketched a silver Zion" and calls him "the one American poet who could sing outdoors," "prairie avenger," "gigantic troubadour, speaking like a siege gun," and "that heaven-born Bryan, that Homer Bryan." Then he describes the tragic outcome of the campaign:

"Election night at midnight:  
 Boy Bryan's defeat.  
 Defeat of Western silver.  
 Defeat of the wheat.  
 Victory of letterfiles  
 And plutocrats in miles . . .  
 Defeat of the aspen groves of Colorado valleys,  
 The blue-bells of the Rockies,  
 And bluebonnets of old Teaxs,  
 By the Pittsburgh alleys.  
 Defeat of alfalfa and the Mariposa lily  
 Defeat of the Pacific and the Long Mississippi.  
 Defeat of the young by the old and silly.  
 Defeat of tornadoes by the poison vats supreme.  
 Defeat of my boyhood, defeat of my dream."