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NEWSPAPER MOTTOES IN ANTE-BELLUM FLORIDA

by WILLIAM WARREN ROGERS

SOUTHERN NEWSPAPERS before the Civil War were individualistic, caustic, and for the most part politically partisan. The typical newspaper devoted a page to foreign news, contained a section devoted to literary items, and had an outspoken editorial page. Editors borrowed liberally from each other, usually but not always citing the sources of their borrowings. The last page was filled with advertisements but they were also scattered throughout the paper, frequently appearing on page one.

Florida fitted into the Southern pattern and in 1840 had ten newspapers. An authority on territorial journalism has estimated that these papers had a combined circulation in 1845, the year statehood was achieved, of 3,500 to 4,000 copies.¹ By 1850 there were still ten papers, one tri-weekly and nine weeklies, but their circulation had increased to 5,750. During the next decade the number of papers and readers increased significantly. In 1860 two tri-weeklies, one semi-weekly, and nineteen weeklies were being published in Florida. These twenty-two journals had 15,500 subscribers.² As a result of being passed from hand to hand, the papers reached a more numerous audience than that indicated by the subscription lists.

Florida newspapers were characterized by both frontier crudeness and upper South sophistication. Editors, obviously educated in the classics, filled their columns with metaphors, sprinkled their prose with Latin phrases, and made analogies between contemporary politicians and Greek heroes. Their knowledge of the Bible was exhaustive. Yet these same men denounced their enemies with vitriolic attacks and venomous slanders.

As the only medium of mass communications, the newspaper

1. James Owen Knauss, *Territorial Florida Journalism* (DeLand, 1926), 42.

2. *Compendium of the Ninth Census, 1870* (Washington 1872) 510-511. In 1870 Florida had twenty-three newspapers but their circulation had slipped to 10,545.

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was an outlet for the opinions of persons not actively connected with its publication. The result was that a sizeable portion of every issue was concerned with letters to the editor. Florida correspondents often cloaked themselves in such noms-de-plume as "Justice," "A Loafer," "Crito," "Sand Hill," and "Medicus." Arguments between two parties might go on for weeks with contributions from still other disputants expanding the points at issue. The fields of discussion were unlimited and ranged across politics, theology, economics, and education.

Some Florida editors adopted mottoes that were intended to set the tone and express the basic policies of their papers. They placed them on page one directly beneath the paper's name. The mottoes were patriotic, economic, religious, political, or geographic. Several Florida papers graced their front pages with Latin phrases. Floridians did not share the prejudice of an Alabama editor against foreign languages. The Alabamian wrote that a journal would do better to have no legend at all if "the English language is too poor to furnish a suitable sentiment for a paper printed in that language and read entirely by English speaking subscribers. . . ." ³

Among several Tallahassee journals employing Latin mottoes was the *Florida Courier*, which in 1831 advocated "*Nullius Ad-dictus Jurare In Verba Majistri.*" The *St. Augustine East-Florida Gazette* used this same shibboleth in 1781 when Florida was under British rule. It meant "No more said than to affirm words of truth." The territorial capital's *Star of Florida* had the extended "*Veritas, a quocunque dicitur, a Deo est. Ex principiis nascitur probabilitas; ex factis vero veritas* (Truth by whomsoever said is from God. From the beginning is born probability; from facts come truth). The Gallic "*Laissez nous faire*" (Leave us alone), was prominently displayed by the Tallahassee *Floridian & Advocate* in 1830 and doubtless had both economic and political implications.

In 1859 the *East Floridian* at Fernandina proclaimed "*Sum Homo Et Puto Nihil Humanum Aliencum A Me*" (I am a man and I think nothing human alien to me). The Cedar Keys *Tele-*

3. William Warren Rogers, "Alabama Newspaper Mottoes from 1865 to 1900," *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, XX (Fall, 1958), 565. The author is indebted to Miss Barbara Lou Rich, a student at Florida State University, for aid in compiling Florida newspaper mottoes.

graph believed "*Magna est Veritas et Prevalebit*" (Truth is great and shall prevail). The *Apalachicola Commercial Advertiser* in 1846 had "*Libertas, Constitutio, Et Nostra Patria*" (Liberty, constitution, and our native country). "*Tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur in illis*" (The times change and we change with them), adorned the masthead of the *St. Joseph Times* in 1839.

Other newspapers expressed their sentiments in the more pedestrian English language but they were no less patriotic or extravagant in their pleas for the triumph of eternal verities. In 1846 the *Tampa Florida Peninsular* believed "Virtue, Economy, and Intelligence, are the true elements of National Greatness." Two papers in the 1840's that adopted similar slogans were the *St. Augustine Florida Herald & Southern Democrat's* "Principles and the People," and the *Apalachicola Star of the West's* "Principles, not men." In the 1850's the *Jacksonville Standard* also used "Principles, Not Men."

In the decade before the Civil War subscribers to the *Madison Southern Messenger* were advised to "Be Just, And Fear Not." In the same period the *Key of the Gulf*, published at Key West, resolved to "Ask Nothing but what is Right-Submit to Nothing that is Wrong." The *Ocala Conservator* adopted "Liberty, Union, and Equality" as its credo. Two newspapers of the 1840's with identical slogans were the *Ocala Argus* and the *Palatka Whig Banner*. They declared themselves "Devoted to Justice - Judge from Our Acts."

Theological admonitions were a popular form of motto. In 1858 the *Jacksonville Weekly Republican* mixed religion with patriotism by pledging "Resistance To Tyrants-Obedience To God." The *Tallahassee Florida Sentinel* announced "In God Is Our Trust." In 1838 readers of the *St. Augustine Florida Herald* were told, "Let all the ends thou aim'st at, Be thy country's, thy God's, and Truth's."

Several newspapers displayed an economic orientation. The *Apalachicola Courier's* 1839 maxim was "The origin of Commerce is coeval with the first dawn of Civilization." In 1846 the *Southern Journal*, published at Tallahassee, endorsed "Free Trade, Low Duties, Separation from Banks: Retrenchment, Economy; and a strict Construction of the Constitution." "Devoted to Agriculture, Horticulture, Domestic and Rural Economy," the *Ocala Tropical*

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Farmer was an indefatigable promoter of Marion County.

In supporting the general welfare, Florida newspapers varied from the universal good will of the *Jacksonville News*' "Our Country," to the chauvinism of the *Columbia Democrat's* "The South In The Union-Out Of The Union The South."⁴ It was not rare for a paper like the *Apalachicola* to support "Not the glory of Caesar, but the welfare of Rome," although the increase in sectional strife between the North and South was reflected in newspaper mottoes. In the 1840's the *Pensacola Live Oak* stood for "States Rights and Southern Interests-Measures Before Men." This sentiment was echoed in the 1850's by the *Ocala Marion Star* which declared "In the Sovereignty of the States Lies the Safety of the South."

Some papers deliberately avoided controversy. Two of these were published at Ocala: the *Florida Mirror* was "A Family Paper; Devoted To News, Literature, Science, and The Industrial Arts," while the *Florida Home Companion* was "An Independent Family Newspaper." In 1852 the *Florida News* at Jacksonville quietly stated that it was "A Family And Political Paper." Few papers in the United States could match the peacefulness of the *Pensacola Neutral*. Its editor adopted the motto, "Neutral in Politics, Respectful in religions, vigilant in business, I am with all, and for all."

Another type of motto was the quotation from a famous person or document. In 1839 the *Tallahassee Star* used Washington's statement "In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it should be enlightened." The remark, "The Fabric Of American Empire Ought To Rest On The Solid Base Of The Consent Of The People," by Alexander Hamilton adorned the *Jacksonville Florida Republican* in 1848. The *East Florida Herald*, in St. Augustine, borrowed from the Declaration of Independence and asserted, "All men are created equal-they are endowed with certain unalienable rights-among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Mottoes that defy precise classification were also used. One adopted by newspapers throughout the country was employed by the *Marianna Florida Whig*. The slogan was "Education and a

4. The *Columbia Democrat* was published at Alligator (Lake City) and ran a secondary and less militant slogan, "Politics, Commerce, and Literature."

free press, the fulcrum and lever which move the world." In 1840 the Jacksonville *East Florida Advocate* used what was described as an "Old Proverb," in setting forth a truism glorifying unstinting effort. The newspaper declared, "I can't never accomplished anything - but I'll try has achieved wonders."

Newspapers that did not adopt slogans were as capably edited as those that did, yet the practice was widespread. The various mottoes, from ringing proclamations of sectional defiance to platitudes of doubtful substance, were a colorful part of Florida's ante-bellum newspaper history.