

1983

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John Solomon Otto



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### Recommended Citation

Otto, John Solomon (1983) "Hillsborough County (1850): A Community in the South Florida Flatwoods," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 62 : No. 2 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol62/iss2/5>

## HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY (1850): A COMMUNITY IN THE SOUTH FLORIDA FLATWOODS

by JOHN SOLOMON OTTO

**H**ISTORIANS of the Old South have traditionally searched for generalizations that might hold true for the entire region. Despite their attempts at regional generalization, they have used sources that come largely from the plantation South— the tidal, riverain, and Piedmont areas of the Lower South, where cash crop plantations predominated. Wealthy planters who owned many slaves and who grew cash crops such as cotton, tobacco, rice, or sugar were far more likely to leave a written legacy than small farmers who owned no slaves and grew few if any cash crops. Moreover, visitors who penned travelogues describing conditions in the Old South typically toured the plantation belt, where they found most of the South's transportation facilities, and where they found lodging in the homes of hospitable planters. Even the surviving antebellum periodicals have tended to come from the plantation belt, for planters subscribed to a variety of newspapers, magazines, and journals. Therefore, by using these sources from the plantation South, historians have tended to overlook the "Isolated South"— the mountains of the Upper South and the coastal pine flatwoods of the Lower South— areas where inadequate transportation and poor soils hindered cash cropping and limited the growth of plantation slavery.<sup>1</sup>

Recognizing these problems, historian Eugene Genovese has called for studies of the constituent elements of Old South society— plantations, farms, towns, and counties— to allow

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John Solomon Otto is research associate, Center for American Archeology, Kampsville, Illinois. He wishes to express his appreciation to Dr. Stephen Kerber, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, and Kyle VanLandingham, Okeechobee, Florida. The research for this article was funded by an NEH "State, Local, and Regional Studies" grant awarded to the writer in the summer of 1982.

1. Edward Phifer, "Slavery in Microcosm: Burke Count North Carolina," *Journal of Southern History*, XXVIII (May 1962), 137-39; Julius Rubin, "The Limits of Agricultural Progress in the Nineteenth-Century South," *Agricultural History*, XLIX (April 1975), 364.

scholars to refine, correct, or replace their generalizations about the antebellum South. Perhaps the best unit for studying southern society on the local level is the county, the basic community of the Old South. Only the county contained a cross section of all the socioeconomic groups of the Old South, including farmers, livestock herders, and landless laborers as well as planters and their slaves.<sup>2</sup> To date, however, only a dozen or so studies have examined Old South communities, and most have focused on counties in which plantation slavery played a prominent role in local economic, social, and political life.<sup>3</sup> Only two studies have examined communities in the mountains of the Upper South, an area where general farming prevailed.<sup>4</sup> And finally, no papers have analyzed communities in the coastal pine flatwoods of the Lower South, an area where the open-range herding of livestock predominated.

The coastal flatwoods formed a narrow belt that stretched from Virginia to Texas. The sandy, infertile soils supported little more than scattered pine trees, shrubs, and grasses. Since flatwoods soils could not be profitably farmed without manuring, they held little attraction for planters. Livestock herders, nevertheless, regarded the flatwoods more favorably, for their cattle and hogs could range over the unfenced pinewoods in search of native forage. Cattle could graze on a variety of seasonal grasses and evergreen canes, while hogs could subsist on roots, sprouts, and berries.<sup>5</sup>

In most southern states, the flatwoods represented only a small fraction of the total land surface. The sole exception was Florida, where they dominated the landscape. But even in

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2. Elinor Miller and Eugene Genovese, eds., *Plantation, Town, and County: Essays on the Local History of American Slave Society* (Urbana, 1974), 2-3; Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball, *Culture and Community* (New York, 1965), 106-07.
  3. For bibliographies of community studies in the Old South, see Miller and Genovese, *Plantation, Town, and County*; J. S. Otto, "Slavery in a Coastal Community-Glynn County (1790-1860)," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, LXIV (Winter 1979), 461-68.
  4. See Phifer, "Slavery in Microcosm," 137-65; J. S. Otto, "Slavery in the Mountains: Yell County, Arkansas 1840-1860," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, XXXIX (Spring 1980), 35-52.
  5. Samuel T. Emory, "North Carolina Flatwoods," *Economic Geography*, XXII (July 1946), 203-08; Welden O. Shepherd, "Highlights of Forest Grazing Research in the Southeast," *Journal of Forestry*, L (April 1952), 280; Henry Hardtner, "A Tale of a Root—A Root of a Tale or, Root Hog or Die," *Journal of Forestry*, XXXIII (March 1935), 352.

Florida, the huge expanses of flatwoods were broken by scattered tracts of upland pine scrub, prairies, marshes, cypress swamps, and dense stands of hardwood forests, which were colloquially called hammocks.<sup>6</sup>

When the United States acquired Florida from Spain in 1821, Anglo-American planters and livestock-herders from the southern states began entering the new territory. Cash crop planters generally preferred the hardwood hammocks, which denoted more fertile soils than the pine flatwoods. In turn, herders sought out the sandy flatwoods which offered year-round forage for their livestock.<sup>7</sup> By the end of the 1820s, planters and herders had occupied much of northern Florida, but few Anglo-Americans had entered the extensive south Florida flatwoods which lay within the Seminole Indian reservation.

The Treaty of Moultrie Creek (1823) formally assigned the interior of Florida, south of what is now Ocala, to the Seminole Indians, who subsisted by hunting, gardening, and cattle herding. Disputes soon arose, however, between the Anglo-American newcomers and the Seminoles. Black slaves who escaped from Georgia, Alabama, and north Florida plantations found their way to Seminole villages, where they became highly-valued servants. The failure of Seminoles to return escaped slaves to Florida planters heightened the tension between native American and white settlers. And though the Anglo-American herders owned relatively few slaves, they accused the Seminoles of stealing cattle from the unfenced range.<sup>8</sup>

Complaints from Florida planters and herders contributed to the Treaty of Payne's Landing (1834), which called for the removal of the Seminoles to a new reservation in what is now Oklahoma. When the Seminoles resisted, the United States became embroiled in a costly war that lasted from 1835 to 1842. By war's end, only a remnant of the Seminole Nation remained

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6. Joe Allen Edmisten, "The Ecology of the Florida Pine Flatwoods" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1963), 1-2; John H. Davis, Jr., "The Natural Features of Southern Florida," *Florida Geological Survey, Bulletin* No. 25 (Tallahassee, 1943), 44-47, 156-57, 166-67, 175-81, 197-98.
  7. Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, 2 vols. (Gloucester, Mass., 1958), II, 901-02; Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth in Antebellum Florida 1821-1860* (Gainesville, 1973), 10-17; Joe A. Akerman, Jr., *Florida Cowman, A History of Florida Cattle Raising* (Kissimmee, 1976), 35-36.
  8. John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* (Gainesville 1976), 29-68; Akerman, *Florida Cowman*, 73-79.

in Florida, living within a truncated reservation that was bounded by Pease Creek on the west and the Kissimmee River on the east.<sup>9</sup>

To encourage the settlement of unoccupied lands in south Florida and to mitigate future conflicts with the remaining Seminoles, Congress passed the Armed Occupation Act (1842), which offered 160 acres to any man fit to bear arms who would live on the tract for five years and cultivate at least five acres. Over 200,000 acres south of Gainesville in Alachua County were thrown open to settlement under the act. Although the Armed Occupation Act was in effect for only a year, over 1,000 applicants claimed homesteads in central and south Florida. Included among the claimants were 119 men who chose tracts in Hillsborough County, which lay within the south Florida flatwoods.<sup>10</sup>

Created in 1834, Hillsborough County contained only 452 inhabitants by 1840, the year of the sixth federal census. Most of the county's residents were actually officers and enlisted men stationed at Fort Brooke, an army post on Tampa Bay that was established in 1823. Only ninety-six of Hillsborough's inhabitants were civilians. They included storekeepers, workers, and slaves living in Tampa, the county seat village which adjoined Fort Brooke, as well as Hispanic fishermen living on Tampa Bay.<sup>11</sup> The remainder of Hillsborough County, which included thousands of acres of flatwoods, hammocks, and swamps, was virtually unoccupied.

The Armed Occupation Act, nevertheless, brought a sudden influx of free whites and black slaves to Hillsborough County. Over forty claimants selected lands along the navigable Manatee River, where "low hammock" lands bordered the river swamps. The periodically-flooded hardwood hammocks were especially prized by Florida planters. After laborious clearing and drain-

9. Mahon, *Second Seminole War*, 69-113, 315-16.

10. James W. Covington, "The Armed Occupation Act of 1842," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XL (July 1961), 42-45; Karl H. Grismer, *Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida* (St. Petersburg, 1950), 95-99.

11. Ernest L. Robinson, *History of Hillsborough County Florida* (St. Augustine, 1928), 16, 21; James W. Covington, *The Story of Southwestern Florida*, 2 vols. (New York, 1957), I, 81-82, 85; Grismer, *Tampa*, 67-68; E. A. Hammond, "The Spanish Fisheries of Charlotte Harbor," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LI (April 1973), 379; Anthony P. Pizzo, *Tampa Town 1824-1886* (Miami, 1968), 10, 20.

ing, low hammocks offered fertile soils for sugar cultivation. Most of Hillsborough's Armed Occupation Act claimants, however, chose tracts in the hinterland that lay between the Fort Brooke military reservation and Pease Creek. Although much of the hinterland was infertile pine flatwoods, there were hammocks along the Alafia and Hillsborough rivers as well as scattered "high hammocks"—slightly elevated hardwood copses—among the flats. Not surprisingly, numbers of claimants included hammock land within their 160-acre homesteads.<sup>12</sup> In this fashion, they could farm the more fertile hammocks, while their livestock could range on the unfenced pine flatwoods.

Although the Armed Occupation Act expired in 1843, Florida continued to attract Anglo-American settlers from the southern states. In 1841, Congress had passed the Preemption Act, which allowed small agriculturalists to settle on the public domain and purchase as much as 160 acres of land at only \$1.25 an acre. Six years later, Congress passed a military bounty act, permitting veterans of America's wars, including the Seminole War, to claim homesteads on the public domain. Livestock herders from coastal Georgia and the Carolinas, in particular, took advantage of the preemption and military bounty acts to acquire homesteads in the Florida flatwoods. Herders could claim a small homestead, cultivate a few acres of crops, and range their livestock on the seemingly limitless unclaimed flatwoods. Open-range herding required an abundance of unfenced pasture, since a single cow needed to roam as much as twenty acres of flatwoods during the year in order to find enough seasonal forage. Therefore, a herd of only 100 cattle could need as much as 2,000 acres of flatwoods range. As herders moved into Florida in search of homesteads and range lands, they contributed to the growing population. By 1845, the territory's population surpassed 60,000, fulfilling the requirements for statehood.<sup>13</sup>

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12. Covington, *Southwestern Florida*, I, 106; E. [G.] R. Fairbanks, "Florida," *De Bow's Review*, V (January 1848), 11-12; John Lee Williams, *The Territory of Florida: or Sketches of the Topography, Civil, and Natural History* (New York, 1837; facsimile ed., Gainesville, 1962), 12, 23-24, 136; Covington, "Armed Occupation Act," 47.
  13. John T. Schlebecker, *Whereby We Thrive: A History of American Farming, 1607-1972* (Ames, Iowa, 1975), 61-63; Stephen Miller, "United States Public Lands," *De Bow's Review*, VI (August 1848), 98-99; W. Theodore Meador, Jr., and Merle Prunty, "Open-Range Ranching in Southern Florida," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, LXVI

In 1850, the seventh federal census enumerated almost 90,000 inhabitants in the new state of Florida. Hillsborough County, however, contained only 2,377 residents, including 1,706 free whites, eleven free blacks, and 660 black slaves. Hillsborough was a true frontier community with fewer than two inhabitants per square mile. The frontier character of the county is also revealed by the disparity between males and females. In frontier communities, males typically outnumbered females. Among Hillsborough's free whites, there were 1.9 males for each female: among the slaves, there were 1.3 males for each female.<sup>14</sup> The frontier nature of the community is further demonstrated by the presence of a sizable military population that was responsible for the protection of the county's civilians. The garrisons at Fort Brooke and other military posts included at least 364 officers, enlisted men, workers, and dependents. Although the military population in 1850 approximated the 356 military inhabitants of Hillsborough County in 1840, military personnel composed only one-sixth of the county's total population by 1850.<sup>15</sup> The arrival of Anglo-American planters, farmers, and herders during the 1840s had increased Hillsborough's civilian population by twentyfold.

Despite the influx of southern agriculturalists and their slaves during the preceding decade, Hillsborough County in 1850 was unable to meet its basic subsistence needs. If each inhabitant required an average of thirteen bushels of corn a year for subsistence— or the equivalent in potatoes and legumes— then Hillsborough's agriculturalists could not produce enough of these commodities to meet local needs.<sup>16</sup> Also, Hillsborough's livestock-

(September 1976), 362-64; Dorothy Dodd, "Florida in 1845," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXIV (July 1945), 3.

14. Roland M. Harper, "Ante-Bellum Census Enumerations in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, VI (July 1927), 47; James E. Davis, *Frontier America: A Comparative Demographic Analysis of the Settlement Process* (Glendale, Calif., 1977), 21, 111; U. S. Census Office, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D. C., 1853), 400; manuscript returns of the Seventh U. S. Census, 1850, Schedule 1, Free Inhabitants, Schedule 2, Slave Inhabitants, and Schedule 4, Agriculture, Hillsborough County, Florida, on microfilm at the National Archives, Washington, D. C., and the Robert Manning Strozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee. Hereafter, these manuscripts returns on microfilm will be cited as Seventh Census, 1850, with appropriate schedule numbers.
15. Seventh Census, 1850, Schedule 1.
16. The writer used a modification of Hilliard's formula for determining self-

herders failed to raise enough pork to feed the county's inhabitants.<sup>17</sup> The county apparently had to import foodstuffs to make up the deficiency.

Hillsborough's agriculturalists may have failed to provide surpluses of corn and pork, but they produced an impressive surplus of beef. If the average Hillsborough resident consumed as much as fifty pounds of beef a year (a very generous estimate), and if the average range-fed steer yielded 300 pounds of beef, the county would have needed only 396 range steers to satisfy its beef requirements in 1850. This would have represented a tiny fraction of the estimated 19,710 cattle in Hillsborough County.<sup>18</sup>

By 1850, Hillsborough ranked fourth among Florida's twenty-eight counties in numbers of cattle. Only Columbia, Marion, and Madison counties contained larger herds than Hillsborough. In contrast to its prominence as a cattle producer, Hillsborough ranked fourteenth among Florida's counties in numbers of hogs, tenth in potatoes, and eighteenth in corn. Hillsborough County

sufficiency in corn,  $C = \frac{\text{corn production in bushels}}{\text{Self-sufficiency (13 bu. x number of people)}}$

occurred when  $C$  was greater than 1.00. In Hillsborough County in 1850,  $C = \frac{16,263 \text{ bu.}}{(13 \text{ bu.} \times 2,377 \text{ people})} = \frac{16,263 \text{ bu.}}{30,901 \text{ bu.}} = .53$ ; and the county would

have failed to achieve self-sufficiency in corn. Even converting Hillsborough's potatoes (26,746 bu.) and the peas and beans (2,235 bu.) to their corn equivalents (4 bu. of potatoes = 1 bu. of corn; 1 bu. of legumes = 1 bu. of corn) would have furnished only an additional 6,687 bu. and 2,235 bu. of corn equivalents. Adding these,  $C$  would be  $\frac{25,185 \text{ bu.}}{30,901 \text{ bu.}} = .82$ ; and the county would have failed to achieve self-

sufficiency in foodstuffs in 1850. See Sam Bowers Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake: Food Supply in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Carbondale, Ill., 1972), 157-59; Raymond Battalio and John Kagel, "The Structure of Antebellum Southern Agriculture: South Carolina, a Case Study," *Agricultural History*, XLIV (January 1970), 28; U. S. Census Office, Seventh Census, 1850, 407-08.

17. Assuming that each adult consumed the equivalent of 2.2 hogs a year, and children consumed half that amount, the number of Hillsborough's human pork consumers would have been the number of adults (1,563) in 1850 plus the number of children under fifteen ( $814/2$ ) = 1,970 pork consumers. This figure is reached by counting each child under fifteen as equal to one-half an adult. They would have required the equivalent of  $1,970 \times 2.2$  hogs = 4,334 hogs. If one-half of Hillsborough's 5,141 hogs were slaughtered in that year, and the remainder were spared for breeding, this would have provided only 2,571 hogs, producing a deficit of 1,763 swine. See Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 260-61; U. S. Census Office, Seventh Census, 1850, 396-400, 407.
18. See Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 129-30; U.S. Census Office, Seventh Census, 1350, 407. The total number of cattle in Hillsborough County (1850) was determined by adding those listed as "milch cows," "working oxen," and "other cattle."

only raised a paltry eighteen bales of cotton, placing it twentieth among Florida's counties.<sup>19</sup> The manuscript returns of the 1850 Hillsborough census, nevertheless, recorded a total of 536 hogsheads of cane sugar, each weighing about 1,000 pounds, thus placing Hillsborough first among Florida's counties. At 1850 prices, Hillsborough's sugar output would have been valued at \$32,160.<sup>20</sup>

Hillsborough's agriculturalists produced significant surpluses of only two agricultural commodities in 1850—cattle and sugar. Most of the county's cattle grazed in the pine flatwoods between the coast and Pease Creek. All but one hogshead of sugar, however, was grown in the Manatee River settlement, where low hammocks offered the best soils for sugar-planting. Along the Manatee River in 1850, Robert Gamble, Jr., produced 230 hogsheads of cane sugar, William Craig processed 140, Dr. Joseph Braden provided 100, and G. H. Wyatt and Josiah Gates offered forty and twenty-five hogsheads respectively.<sup>21</sup>

Although Josiah Gates stood last among the sugar-planters in terms of output, he was the pioneer of the Manatee settlement. Gates, a North Carolina native, was operating a hotel in Tampa when the Armed Occupation Act passed. Traveling to the Manatee River, Gates selected his 160-acre tract where an abandoned Seminole field indicated the soil was exceptionally fertile. After claiming his homestead, Gates brought down his family and eight slaves. On the banks of the Manatee, he constructed a new hotel, purchased additional lands from the government, cleared fields for sugar cane, and ranged his cattle on the public domain. By 1850, Gates owned 260 acres of land, nine slaves, and 143 cattle.<sup>22</sup>

19. U. S. Census Office, *Seventh Census, 1850*, 407-08.

20. The published compilation of the 1850 census listed Hillsborough's sugar production as only six hogsheads. See U. S. Census Office, *Seventh Census, 1850*, 409. This is an obvious misprint, for Robert Gamble alone is known to have produced 230 hogsheads in 1850. See Michael G. Schene, "Sugar Along the Manatee: Major Robert Gamble, Jr., and the Development of Gamble Plantation," *Tequesta*, XLI (1981), 76. The manuscript returns of the agricultural schedule for Hillsborough County listed a total of 536 hogsheads of sugar. See *Seventh Census, 1850*, Schedule 4. Each of Hillsborough's hogsheads of cane sugar would have fetched about \$60.00 on the New Orleans market during the year 1850-1851. See Gray, *History of Agriculture*, II, 1033.

21. *Seventh Census, 1850*, Schedule 4; Quintilla Bruton and David E. Bailey, Jr., *Plant City: Its Origin and History* (St. Petersburg, 1977), 35, 42; Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 130-31.

22. Lillie B. McDuffee, *Lures of Manatee* (Nashville, 1933; reprint ed.,

In contrast to Gates who combined cattle-herding with planting, Robert Gamble, William Craig, Joseph Braden, and G. H. Wyatt devoted their energies to sugar-planting. These men hailed from Leon County, where their families had pursued cotton-planting. Following the financial panic of 1837 and the collapse of cotton prices, they took advantage of the Armed Occupation Act to begin sugar-planting in south Florida. In the Manatee settlement, they purchased additional lands, enlarged their slaveholdings, and constructed mills to process sugar cane. By 1850, Robert Gamble had acquired 1,280 acres of land, valued at \$23,500, as well as eighty-eight slaves, worth more than \$100,000. Craig, in turn, possessed 1,560 acres and sixty-eight slaves. Braden had accumulated 900 acres and ninety-five slaves, and Wyatt owned 360 acres of land and fifteen slaves.<sup>23</sup>

Though they produced the bulk of the county's cash crops in 1850, the Manatee sugar-planters raised surprisingly few foodstuffs. In 1850, Gamble and the others produced a total of only 887 bushels of corn, 1,524 bushels of potatoes, fifty bushels of legumes, fifty-seven hogs, and 214 cattle, excluding work oxen. Since these five planters owned a combined slave force of some 275 bondsmen, this meager output of foodstuffs would have offered only a few months of rations for their slaves. The Manatee planters apparently devoted their slave labor to raising sugar, and they preferred to purchase extra foodstuffs from their New Orleans factors or commission merchants. Such a policy was obviously successful only if the market prices for sugar surpassed the costs of production, including the cost of purchased foodstuffs. Since it cost about five cents to produce a pound of sugar, planters could operate profitably when the price of sugar topped five cents a pound, as it did from 1844 to 1847. But when sugar prices tumbled to less than five cents a pound from 1848 to 1849, they operated at a loss. By 1850, sugar prices recovered to five and one-quarter cents per pound at the New Orleans market.<sup>24</sup>

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Bradenton, Fla., 1961), 21-27; Karl H. Grismer, *The Story of Sarasota* (Sarasota, 1946), 27-29; Seventh Census, 1850, Schedules 1, 2, and 4.

23. McDuffee, *Lures of Manatee*, 31-35; Schene, "Sugar Along the Manatee," 70, 77 footnote 5; Seventh Census, 1850, Schedules 1, 2, and 4.
24. Seventh Census, 1850, Schedules 2 and 4; Schene, "Sugar Along the Manatee," 76; McDuffee, *Lures of Manatee*, 45; Gray, *History of Agriculture*, II, 1034.

The Manatee sugar-planters represented a mere handful of Hillsborough's 120 farm operators in 1850. Yet, they owned forty per cent of the county's \$201,000 worth of farm land; and they held forty-two per cent of the county's 660 slaves. The Manatee planters, nevertheless, owned only seven per cent of the county's \$118,220 worth of livestock, and they claimed little more than one per cent of Hillsborough's 19,710 cattle.<sup>25</sup> The major share of Hillsborough's livestock was owned by dozens of ranchers who grazed their cattle on the pine flatwoods west of Pease Creek.

Virtually all of Hillsborough's agriculturalists owned some cattle, but only those who held eighteen or more head may be regarded as cattle-ranchers-herders producing a marketable surplus of beef cattle. Geographers have argued that eighteen head of cattle would have provided a typical antebellum family with a work ox, a bull, two milch cows, six breeding cows, and eight beef steers for home slaughter or for sale. Using eighteen cattle as the minimum definition for a cattle-rancher, then at least ninety-six of Hillsborough's 120 farm operators, or eighty per cent of the total, could be defined as ranchers, producing eight or more beef cattle. By 1850, Hillsborough's ranchers owned 19,306 cattle or ninety-eight per cent of the total in the county. And if they routinely marketed a tenth of their cattle herds each year, and if each steer was worth about \$5.00 a head, the estimated value of their 1,931 marketable steers was at least \$9,655.<sup>26</sup> This would have been \$20,000 less than the estimated value of Hillsborough's sugar crop in 1850.

None of Hillsborough's cattle-ranchers could match the wealth of the richest Manatee sugar-planters such as Robert Gamble or William Craig. But among their numbers, the ranchers counted one of Hillsborough's wealthiest men, William B. Hooker. Born in 1800, Hooker grew up in Tattnall County, Georgia, a community located on the edge of the coastal pine flatwoods. In 1830, he moved with his parents to Hamilton County in northern

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25. Seventh Census, 1850, Schedules 1, 2, and 4; U. S. Census Office, Seventh Census, 1850, 400, 407.

26. See Seventh Census, 1850, Schedule 4; Kenneth D. Israel, "A Geographical Analysis of the Cattle Industry in Southeastern Mississippi from Its Beginnings to 1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern Mississippi, 1970), 78; W. Theodore Meador, Jr., "The Open Range Ranch in South Florida and Its Contemporary Successors" (Ph.D., dissertation, University of Georgia, 1972), 40; Fairbanks, "Florida," 12.

Florida, where he married and acquired a plantation on the Suwanee River. After serving as a militia captain in the Seminole War, Hooker took advantage of the Armed Occupation Act to move his family to Hillsborough County in 1843, settling at Simmons Hammock near present-day Seffner. By 1850, Hooker had acquired 1,480 acres of land, valued at \$7,500, but only a fraction of his holding, about 250 acres, was improved pasture or cultivated land. Hooker may have listed his occupation as "planter" in the 1850 census, but his nine slaves grew no sugar cane or cotton. They produced only foodstuffs, harvesting 400 bushels of corn and 200 bushels of sweet potatoes. Hooker, nonetheless, was Hillsborough's largest stockholder, claiming six horses, one mule, thirty-five sheep, 150 hogs, and 2,504 cattle. The estimated value of his livestock exceeded \$13,000.<sup>27</sup>

Numbers of other ranchers emulated Hooker by listing their occupation as "planter" or "farmer" in the 1850 census. But on the whole, Hillsborough's ranchers owned few if any slaves and grew few if any cash crops. The average rancher owned less than two slaves and grew only foodstuffs such as corn, potatoes, and legumes. A cattle-rancher typically owned a homestead of about 152 acres, but only a fraction of the land, usually about twenty-two acres, was cleared or "improved." The average cattleman may have owned only \$672 worth of land, but he possessed over \$1,000 worth of livestock. In addition to horses, hogs, and occasional sheep, the typical rancher owned about 200 cattle.<sup>28</sup>

Although the federal census schedules may provide a statistical portrait of the average Hillsborough cattle-rancher, census data record the quantitative results of past behavior, not the behavior itself. Few cattle-ranchers had the time or the inclination to describe their behavior and thoughts in antebellum documents such as letters, diaries, and daybooks. But after the Civil War, several ranchers managed to publish reminiscences of their antebellum lives. More ranchers, however, left spoken accounts of their antebellum lives, describing their lifeways to children and grandchildren. And in the twentieth century, the descendants

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27. Kyle S. VanLandingham, "William Brinton Hooker 1800-1871," *South Florida Pioneers*, No. 5 (July 1975), 6; Seventh Census, 1850, Schedules 1, 2, and 4.

28. Arithmetic means of the cattle ranchers' agricultural wealth was computed from data in Seventh Census, 1850, Schedules 1, 2, and 4.

of antebellum ranchers transmitted these oral traditions to journalists, historians, and oral historians.

The reminiscences and traditions left by the cattle-ranchers depicted a lifestyle that originated in the coastal flatwoods of the Carolinas and Georgia. The inhabitants of the coastal pinewoods farmed small tracts of land and herded their livestock on the public domain. As their families and herds increased in size, they required new homesteads and grazing lands. After 1842, dozens of such families began migrating to south Florida, settling in the pine flatwoods and hammocks. Typically, the families located in dispersed rural neighborhoods or "settlements," where many of their neighbors were also kinsmen. Since each cow needed almost two dozen acres of unfenced range, their homesteads were located several miles apart, so cattle could forage in the intervening pinewoods. After constructing pine-log houses and outbuildings on their homesteads, ranchers cleared small corn fields from the hammocks, felling trees and grubbing up the undergrowth. They also cleared tracts for the "cowpens" – split rail corrals that protected calves and milk cows from predators. During the day, cows ventured forth to graze in the woods, but at night, they returned to the safety of the pens to feed their calves. Since the manure from the cows fertilized even the poorest soils, old cowpens served admirably as gardens for potatoes and other vegetables. Ranchers supplemented food crops with wild game from the woods as well as pork from their range hogs and beef from their scrub steers. Most of their livestock ranged over the unfenced woodlands in search of seasonal forage, requiring little or no attention. During the late winter, ranchers burned the pinewoods to reduce the underbrush, curb cattle ticks, and foster the growth of spring grasses. And once or twice a year, ranching families formed communal work groups to round up the cattle, brand the calves, and select steers for sale. Cattle proved to be the ideal "cash crop," since they cost so little to raise, and since they could be driven on the hoof to market.<sup>29</sup> The problem was locating a market.

Presumably, Hillsborough's cattle-ranchers sold some of their stock in Tampa. One eyewitness account from 1845 noted that the "scattered settlers of the neighbourhood . . . bring in their

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29. See F. C. M. Boggess, *A Veteran of Four Wars: The Autobiography of F. C. M. Boggess* (Arcadia, 1900), 66, 74; E. I. Wiggins, *A History of the*

surplus produce and exchange it here [in Tampa] for goods and money." In addition, ranchers drove herds of cattle to coastal cities such as Jacksonville and Savannah. The daughter of one antebellum rancher recalled that her father and brothers were often gone for months on cattle drives to Savannah, a market located over 300 miles away.<sup>30</sup>

Since cattle-ranching played such an important role in Hillsborough's agricultural economy, it is not surprising that ranchers became involved in local politics. In 1845, when Hillsborough County elected its first full slate of county commissioners, the list of names included four cattle-ranchers: commissioner Benjamin Moody, commissioner William Hancock, tax assessor Simeon Sparkman, and tax collector John Parker. By 1850, Moody possessed no slaves but owned 160 acres of land and ninety-one cattle; William Hancock owned five slaves, 240 acres, and an estimated 1,780 cattle; Sparkman held seven slaves, 320 acres, and 600 cattle. John Parker claimed no slaves, but held 160 acres and 320 cattle.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast, the Manatee sugar-planters placed no members on the first county commission. Their economic and social concerns presumably lay outside Hillsborough County, for they traded with New Orleans merchants and maintained social ties with their Leon County kinsmen. Only one man from the Manatee settlement, E. A. Ware, served on the commission as county clerk. The remaining four commission posts were filled by Tampans. The president of the county commission and judge of the probate court was Simon Turman, a native Ohioan, who had promoted the migration of midwesterners to the Tampa Bay area in 1843. Settling first at Manatee, Turman moved to Tampa in 1845. Commissioner Micajah Brown, a native of New Hamp-

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*Mt. Enon Association* (Tampa, 1921), 35; D. B. McKay, "Pioneer Florida," *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, June 29, 1947, September 26, 1948, December 7, 1952, November 28, 1954, December 11, 1955, July 7, 1957; David E. Bailey, "A Study of Hillsborough County's History, Legend, and Folklore" (master's thesis, University of Florida, 1949), 117-25; M. F. Hetherington, *History of Polk County Florida* (St. Augustine, 1928), 13-15; W. L. Straub, *History of Pinellas County Florida* (St. Augustine, 1929), 36-37.

30. [George Ballentine], *Autobiography of an English Soldier in the United States Army* (New York, 1853), 101; Akerman, *Florida Cowman*, 40; McKay, "Pioneer Florida," *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, September 26, 1948.
31. Grismer, *Tampa*, 105-06; Richard Livingston, ed., "Benjamin Moody 1811-1896," *South Florida Pioneers*, No. 8 (April 1976), 9-11; Seventh Census, 1850, Schedules 1, 2, and 4.

shire, had settled in Tampa in 1845, opening a clothing store. Virginia-born commissioner James Goff simply listed his occupation as "politician" in the 1850 census. And finally, treasurer Thomas P. Kennedy was a Pennsylvania-born merchant who had opened a store in Tampa.<sup>32</sup>

Although Tampa was Hillsborough's county seat, it was little more than a hamlet with tenuous commercial links to the outside world. Schooners from New Orleans and New York occasionally called at the port to deliver groceries and dry goods. One visitor in 1851 described Tampa as "a little village of about two hundred inhabitants, exclusive of the soldiers in the [Fort Brooke] garrison." In spite of its size, Tampa's population was surprisingly cosmopolitan, ranging from Yankee merchants to Cuban fishermen to Irish laborers to African slaves.<sup>33</sup>

Tampans may have claimed as many posts on the first Hillsborough County Commission as the cattle-ranchers, but the ranching families were becoming the county's major socioeconomic group. By 1850, cattle-ranchers and the members of their households comprised a third of Hillsborough's 1,717 free people. Equally important, the ranchers claimed ninety per cent of the county's \$118,220 worth of livestock, thirty-two per cent of the county's \$201,000 worth of land, and twenty-one per cent of the county's 660 slaves.<sup>34</sup>

Ten years later, cattle-ranching would dominate Hillsborough County's agricultural economy. By 1860, the census would enumerate almost 38,000 cattle within Hillsborough County, more than any other Florida county. In addition, many Hillsborough ranchers, seeking new flatwoods range for their cattle, would drive their herds into Manatee County, a community created from the southern half of Hillsborough in 1855. And by 1860, Manatee would contain 32,000 cattle, ranking second only to Hillsborough County in numbers of cattle.<sup>35</sup>

32. Grismer, *Tampa*, 105-106; Seventh Census, 1850, Schedule 1.

33. Olin Norwood, ed., "Letters from Florida in 1851," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXIX (April 1951) 268; Robinson, *History of Hillsborough County*, 34; Seventh Census, 1850, Schedules 1 and 2.

34. Seventh Census, 1850, Schedules 1 and 4; U.S. Census Office, *Seventh Census, 1850*, 400, 407.

35. [Editorial], "A New Era in the History of Tampa," *Tampa Florida Peninsular*, July 28, 1860; U. S. Census Office, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860* (Washington, D. C., 1864), 18; Joe G. Warner, *Biscuits and Taters: A History of Cattle Ranching in Manatee County* (St. Petersburg, 1980), 6-8.