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## FLORIDA'S CATTLE-RANCHING FRONTIER: HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY (1860)

by JOHN SOLOMON OTTO

**I**N 1860, the southern edge of settlement— which delimited the “settled” areas with more than two persons per square mile from the “frontier” areas with fewer than two inhabitants per square mile— stood in central Florida. With the exception of a settled enclave about eastern Tampa Bay, the southern half of the Florida peninsula was a true frontier. It was the largest remaining frontier east of the Mississippi River. By 1860, the bulk of the south Florida frontier fell within the boundaries of five counties— Hillsborough, Manatee, Monroe, Brevard, and Dade whose total population was only 7,077.<sup>1</sup>

Hillsborough in 1860 contained the largest population— 2,417 free and 564 slave inhabitants— and the largest number of cattle of any south Florida county. In fact, Hillsborough ranked first in cattle among Florida's thirty-seven counties.<sup>2</sup>

Hillsborough occupied an area approximating 3,000 square miles, incorporating all of modern Hillsborough and Pinellas counties and most of Polk County.<sup>3</sup> Within Hillsborough's

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1. F. J. Marchner, “Land Use and Its Patterns in the United States,” *U. S. Department of Agriculture, Handbook No. 153* (Washington, 1959), Figure 9; Rodney E. Dillon, Jr., “South Florida in 1860,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LX (April 1982), 440-41.
2. U. S. Bureau of Census, *Population of the United States in 1860* (Washington, 1864), 54; U. S. Bureau of Census, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860* (Washington, 1864), 18. The total number of cattle in Hillsborough County (1860) was determined by adding those listed as “milch cows,” “working oxen,” and “other cattle.”
3. In 1855, the southern half of Hillsborough County was detached to form Manatee County. In 1861, the eastern half of Hillsborough was incorporated into Polk County. And in 1911, the Pinellas peninsula was detached from Hillsborough to create Pinellas County. Geo. B. Utley, “Origin of the County Names in Florida,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, I (October 1908), 33; Karl H. Grismer, *History of St. Petersburg* (St. Petersburg, 1924), 93.

boundaries were 6,682 acres (10.4 square miles) of improved land, a category which included cultivated fields, fallow, and cleared pasture. The remainder was unimproved land that served as open-range for cattle and other livestock.<sup>4</sup>

Florida law required planters and farmers to fence only their cultivated fields to protect crops from wandering livestock. All unfenced land was regarded as common grazing land or open-range. After marking and branding their animals, the herders turned them out on the open-range to search for forage.<sup>5</sup>

In Hillsborough County, most of the open-range was pine flatwoods, an ecological community characterized by low relief, sandy soils, an underlying hardpan, and a vegetational cover of scattered pine trees with an understory of saw palmettos, shrubs, and grasses. During the rainy summers, the underlying hardpan hindered drainage and promoted flooding; during the dry winters, the flatwoods became susceptible to fires. The fires burnt back the invading hardwoods, curbed the growth of shrubs, and thus preserved the open pine woods. Due to poor drainage and sandy soils, little flatwoods land was cleared for farming before the Civil War. The seasonal flatwoods grasses, however, provided native forage for cattle, though a single cow needed to roam as much as twenty acres of flatwoods during a year in order to find sufficient forage.<sup>6</sup>

The flatwoods embraced other ecological communities such as the pine-turkey oak hills— sandy ridges which supported little more than longleaf pine trees and scrub oaks. The pine hill soils were well-drained and proved most productive when liberally manured. Grasses and palmettos, nevertheless, were less abundant

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4. U. S. Bureau of Census, *Agriculture, 1860*, 18. Improved and unimproved lands are defined in U. S. Bureau of Census, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, 1853), xxiii.
  5. Leslie A. Thompson, *A Manual or Digest of the Statute Law of the State of Florida* (Boston, 1847), 134, 419-20; William Theodore Meador, Jr., "The Open-Range Ranch in South Florida and Its Contemporary Successors" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 1972), 20-21, 34-38.
  6. Joe Allen Edmisten, "The Ecology of the Florida Pine Flatwoods" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1963), 1-4, 6, 13, 18, 94; John H. Davis, Jr., "The Natural Features of Southern Florida, especially the Vegetation and the Everglades," *Florida Geological Survey, Bulletin No. 25* (Tallahassee, 1943), 160-65; D. Ewart, "Florida," *De Bow's Review*, XXX (May-June 1866), 640; William Theodore Meador, Jr., and Merle C. Prunty, "Open-Range Ranching in Southern Florida," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, LXVI (September 1976), 364.

in pine hills than in flatwoods, so a single cow needed to traverse as much as 100 acres during a year in order to find enough forage.<sup>7</sup>

The flatwoods also contained numerous ponds and rivers which sheltered marshes and swamps. Since periodic floods deposited silt and “vegetable debris,” swamp lands contained the richest and most durable soils. Yet, flooded swamp lands could be cultivated only after expensive clearing and draining.<sup>8</sup> The river swamps were often bordered by strips of lowland hardwood forests, colloquially called “low hammocks.” Since the moist low hammocks escaped the periodic fires that swept the flatwoods, they contained dense hardwood stands, denoting deep, humic soils. After clearing and some ditching to improve drainage, the low hammocks offered ideal soils for cash crops such as sugar cane.<sup>9</sup>

The most versatile hammock lands were the “high hammocks” – slightly elevated areas that escaped seasonal fires and supported mixed pine and hardwood forests. Though difficult to clear, the well-drained high hammocks required no ditching, and the humic soils were suitable for sugar, cotton, corn, and other crops. Hammocks even offered shelter and browse for cattle during the winter months.<sup>10</sup>

Hammocks possessed the greatest agricultural potential and were most highly prized by cash crop planters, but Hillsborough County contained relatively little of such acreage. Tracts of hammock could be found along the Hillsborough, Alafia, and Pease rivers and about Lake Thonotosassa; yet, most of Hillsborough was pine flatwoods and pine-turkey oak hills– lands which antebellum observers regarded as “third-rate.”<sup>11</sup>

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7. Davis, “Natural Features of Southern Florida,” 156-60; Mealor and Prunty, “Open-Range Ranching,” 361.

8. Davis, “Natural Features of Southern Florida,” 175-77, 185-86, 197-98; L. D. Stickney, “Florida Soil, Climate, and Productions,” *Report of the U. S. Department of Agriculture for 1862* (Washington, 1863), 63.

9. Davis, “Natural Features of Southern Florida,” 166-67; Stickney, “Florida Soil,” 63.

10. “Florida, as Compared with Texas,” *De Bow's Review*, XXVIII (May 1860), 603; Stickney, “Florida Soil,” 63-64; Paul D. Camp, “Methods of Managing Range Cattle in Alachua County, Florida” (master's thesis, University of Florida, 1932), 62.

11. John Lee Williams, *The Territory of Florida: or Sketches of the Topography, Civil and Natural History* (New York, 1837; facsimile ed., Gainesville, 1962), 12; Karl H. Grismer, *Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida* (St. Petersburg, 1950), 131; U. S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, “Gen-

Given the limited amount of hammock land, cash crop farming played only a minor role in Hillsborough's agricultural economy. In 1860, Hillsborough County processed only forty-seven hogsheads (47,000 lbs.) of cane sugar, ranking twelfth among Florida's thirty-seven counties, and ginned only eighty-eight bales of long-staple cotton, placing twenty-eighth among Florida's counties. If three hogsheads of sugar was the average yield on hammock land, and if one bale of long-staple cotton was the typical yield per acre, then little more than 100 acres of Hillsborough's cropland was devoted to cash crops.<sup>12</sup>

Hillsborough County also contained few large slaveholders. The mean slaveholding in the county was 4.7 slaves; and only one Hillsborough slaveholder, Edmund Jones, owned more than twenty slaves. In contrast, the mean slaveholding in the state of Florida was twelve; and one-sixth of all Florida slaveholders owned more than twenty slaves— the minimum definition for a planter.<sup>13</sup> By 1860, Jones owned twenty-six slaves and 1,880 acres of land, of which 250 acres were improved. Only a tiny fraction was planted in sugar cane and cotton. His slaves cropped four hogsheads of sugar and five bales of long-staple cotton. Most of Jones's land was cleared pasture for his 300 sheep— he was Hillsborough's largest sheep-owner— or was cropland planted in corn and sweet potatoes.<sup>14</sup>

Of Hillsborough's remaining 119 slaveholders, most owned fewer than five slaves, and of her 276 farm operators, only seventy-four, or twenty-seven per cent, held any slaves at all. Thus, the majority of Hillsborough's farm operators raised crops and live-

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eral Map of Ecological Communities: State of Florida" (Fort Worth, 1981); Stickney, "Florida Soil," 62.

12. U. S. Bureau of Census, *Agriculture, 1860*, 19, 21; "Florida, as Compared with Texas," 604; A Wild Man of the Woods, "The Peninsula of Florida," *Southern Cultivator*, XVIII (August 1860), 234. The long growing season in south Florida permitted the successful cropping of long-staple cotton—a delicate variety that brought higher prices than the short-staple cotton grown over most of the Old South. Jerrell H. Shofner and William W. Rogers, "Sea Island Cotton in Ante-Bellum Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XL (April 1962), 373-80.
13. U. S. Bureau of Census, *Agriculture, 1860*, 225.
14. Manuscript returns of the Eighth U. S. Census, 1860, Schedule I, 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 manuscript returns on microfilm will be cited as Eighth Census, 1860, with appropriate schedule numbers.

stock with the aid of their families and neighbors. Since they owned few if any slaves, Hillsborough's agriculturalists devoted most of their improved acreage to corn and sweet potatoes— crops which required little labor and equipment and which could be consumed by both humans and livestock.<sup>15</sup>

In 1860, Hillsborough County produced 43,501 bushels of corn, ranking fifteenth among Florida's counties, and raised 55,814 bushels of sweet and Irish potatoes, standing eighth among the counties. If the average corn yield in Florida was twelve and one-half bushels per acre, and if the typical potato yield was 400 bushels per acre, then at least 3,480 acres in Hillsborough were devoted to corn and at least 140 acres to potatoes. Corn and potatoes, therefore, claimed over half of the county's 6,682 improved acres.<sup>16</sup>

High hammocks offered the best soils for corn in Hillsborough County, but they were difficult to clear. Trees had to be felled, tangled undergrowth removed, and the roots grubbed up; it could take a month to clear only one acre. Consequently, many of Hillsborough's agriculturalists planted their corn and potatoes in old "cowpens" that were cleared from the pine-turkey oak hills. Cattle-owners cleared a few acres of pineland and built a cowpen or corral of pine poles. Calves remained in the cowpen during the day, while cows foraged on the open-range. When the cows returned to the cowpen, their manure enriched even the sandiest soils. After a few months, herders moved the cowpen to a new location, and they planted the well-manured old cowpen in potatoes, corn, and other crops.<sup>17</sup>

By 1860, Hillsborough farmers were raising enough corn and potatoes to feed all the county's residents as well as the work stock— horses, mules, and oxen.<sup>18</sup> Any additional corn and po-

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15. Eighth Census, 1860, Schedule 2 and 4; Sam Bowers Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake: Food Supply in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Carbondale, Ill., 1972), 151, 174-75.

16. U. S. Bureau of Census, *Agriculture, 1860*, 19; Stickney, "Florida Soil," 61. Hillsborough's remaining improved acreage was planted in minor crops or was cleared pasture.

17. Grismer, *Tampa*, 101; E. I. Wiggins, *A History of the Mt. Enon Association* (Tampa, 1921), 4; M. F. Hetherington, *History of Polk County Florida* (St. Augustine, 1928), 14; interview with Seth Alderman, August 28, 1982. Mr. Alderman is the descendant of James Alderman, a farm operator in antebellum Hillsborough County.

18. The writer used a modification of Hilliard's formula for determining

tatoes could have been used to fatten hogs for home slaughter. Hillsborough contained as many as 7,584 hogs which foraged on the open-range for most of the year, subsisting on acorns, palmetto berries, and sprouts.<sup>19</sup> Despite this sizable hog population, the county failed to meet its pork needs in 1860, and the deficiency was presumably made up by slaughtering range-fed beef cattle.<sup>20</sup> If the average range-fed steer yielded 300 pounds of beef, the county would have needed only 497 range steers to meet its beef requirements in 1860.<sup>21</sup> This would have represented a mere handful of Hillsborough's 37,820 cattle.

Since pine flatwoods dominated Hillsborough's landscape, and since flatwoods offered little more than grazing for cattle, this extensive range supported about thirteen cattle for each person in the county. This was one of the highest cattle-to-people

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$$\text{self-sufficiency in corn, } C = \frac{\text{Corn production in bushels}}{(13 \text{ bu.} \times \text{Number of people}) + (7.5 \text{ bu.} \times \text{Number of horses and mules}) + (1 \text{ bu.} \times \text{Number of oxen})}$$

Self-sufficiency occurred when  $C$  was greater than 1.00. In Hillsborough County in 1860, 43,501 bu.

$$C = \frac{(13 \text{ bu.} \times 2,981 \text{ people}) + (7.5 \text{ bu.} \times 356 \text{ horses and mules}) + (1 \text{ bu.} \times 99 \text{ oxen})}{41,522 \text{ bu.}} = 1.05;$$

and Hillsborough would have achieved bare self-sufficiency in corn. But converting Hillsborough's sweet and Irish potatoes (55,814 bu.) to their corn equivalents (1 bu. of potatoes =  $\frac{1}{4}$  bu. of corn) would have furnished an additional 13,954 bu. of corn equivalents. Adding these,  $C$  would have been  $\frac{57,455 \text{ bu.}}{41,522 \text{ bu.}} = 1.38$ ; and Hillsborough would have produced a surplus of foodstuffs and fodder in 1860. Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 157-58; Raymond C. Battalio and John Kagel, "The Structure of Antebellum Southern Agriculture: South Carolina, a Case Study," *Agricultural History*, XLIV (January 1970), 28; U. S. Bureau of Census, *Agriculture, 1860*, 18-19; U. S. Bureau of Census, *Population, 1860*, 54.

19. U. S. Bureau of Census, *Agriculture, 1860*, 19; "Climate, Soil, and Productions of Florida," *De Bow's Review*, XI (October 1851), 411.
20. 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 in 1860 would have been the number of adults (1,561) plus the number of children under fifteen ( $1,420/2$ ) = 2,271. They would have required the equivalent of  $2,271 \times 2.2$  hogs = 4,996 hogs. If one-half of Hillsborough's 7,584 hogs were slaughtered in that year, and the remainder were spared for breeding, this would have provided only 3,792 hogs, resulting in a deficiency of at least 1,204 hogs. Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 260-61; U. S. Bureau of Census, *Population, 1860*, 50-53.
21. Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoeceke*, 129-30.

ratios of any community in the Old South. In the state of Florida as a whole, there were only three cattle for each person.<sup>22</sup>

Geographers have noted that any antebellum county with at least three cattle per person could have produced a surplus of beef cattle. Thus, a family of six who owned as few as eighteen cattle could have sold several surplus beef steers each year. Eighteen cattle would have furnished a family with a work ox, a bull, two milk cows, six breeding cows, and eight steers for home slaughter or for sale. Using eighteen cattle as the minimum definition of a cattle-rancher— a herder who produced beef cattle for sale— then at least sixty-one per cent of Hillsborough's farm operators in 1860 could be regarded as ranchers.<sup>23</sup>

Hillsborough's cattle-ranchers probably called themselves "cowmen" and not ranchers, but they owned ninety-nine per cent of the county's cattle. If they routinely marketed ten per cent of their 37,289 cattle in 1860, and if the average steer was worth \$15.00, then the estimated value of their marketable beeves was \$55,935.<sup>24</sup> This far surpassed the estimated value of Hillsborough's sugar and cotton crops in 1860. If each hogshead of sugar and each bale of long-staple cotton fetched about \$100, then Hillsborough's forty-seven hogsheads and eighty-eight bales were worth only \$13,500.<sup>25</sup>

By the eve of the Civil War, the cattle industry dominated the economy of Hillsborough County and the south Florida frontier. Tampa's deputy port collector estimated that the counties of the Tampa Bay region exported \$168,540 worth of goods in 1859. Of this total, 7,211 live cattle, each worth about \$15.00, accounted for \$108,165, or sixty-four per cent of the total. Of the cattle exported from the Tampa Bay region, the majority, about 4,800 steers, were driven to the "Atlantic ports." The rest,

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22. *Ibid.*, 113-14; U. S. Bureau of Census, *Agriculture, 1860*, 18; U. S. Bureau of Census, *Population*, 54.

23. 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; Eighth Census, 1860, Schedule 4.

24. Interview with Seth Alderman; Eighth Census, 1860, Schedule 4; Mealor, "Open-Range Ranch," 40; "List of Produce &c. Shipped from the Port of Tampa, during the Past Season," *Tampa Florida Peninsular*, December 3, 1859.

25. "List of Produce"; U. S. Bureau of Census, *Agriculture, 1860*, 19, 21.

an estimated 2,411 head, were shipped by boat to overseas markets such as Havana, Cuba.<sup>26</sup>

South Florida cowmen had traditionally driven their beef cattle to coastal cities like Savannah, or to the railhead at Baldwin, near Jacksonville. This pattern began to change in the late 1850s with the opening of the Cuban cattle trade.<sup>27</sup> James McKay, the Scottish-born Tampa merchant, has been credited with opening this market in 1858 when he chartered a ship to export cattle on a bi-monthly basis. During his first year of operation, McKay shipped a total of only 1,000 beeves to Havana, but by early 1860, he was exporting 400 cattle per month to Cuba.<sup>28</sup>

To facilitate his trade with Cuba, McKay purchased a propeller steamer, *The Salvor*, and a brig, *The Huntress*. In addition, he constructed holding pens for cattle at Tampa and leased lightering vessels to haul animals to ships anchored in Tampa Bay. He also established commercial contracts with south Florida cowmen to supply his burgeoning cattle trade. Jacob Summerlin, a Hillsborough cowman who owned 220 cattle in 1860, played a major role in McKay's trade, touring the backcountry, purchasing steers at cowpens, and driving them to the holding pens at Tampa. McKay also purchased steers from backcountry cowmen such as Joseph Howell and J. P. McMullen. He paid cash on delivery and usually in Spanish gold from Havana.<sup>29</sup>

South Florida's lucrative cattle trade with Cuba rested on the scrawny shoulders of an unassuming animal known as the "Florida scrub cow." The Florida scrub traced its ancestry to *criollo* cattle introduced by the Spanish colonists and to the cattle brought in by the Anglo-American settlers of Florida after 1821. Left to fend for themselves, the scrubs evolved into hardy beasts which could survive on native forage throughout the year. The

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26. "List of Produce."

27. D. B. McKay, "Pioneer Florida: Story of Mrs. Blount Recalls Rugged Days," Tampa *Sunday Tribune*, September 26, 1948; Dillon, "South Florida in 1860" 451.

28. Joe A. Akerman, Jr., *Florida Cowman, A History of Florida Cattle Raising* (Kissimmee, 1976), 100; "A New Era in the History of Tampa," Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, July 28, 1860.

29. "New Era"; Akerman, *Florida Cowman*, 100; James McKay, "MS Receipt Book of Capt. James McKay of Tampa" (1850-1868), Box 3, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, No. 59, Florida Historical Society Library, University of South Florida, Tampa; Eighth Census, 1860, Schedule 4; D. B. McKay, "Pioneer Florida: How McKay Family Came to Tampa and Aided South in War," Tampa *Sunday Tribune*, July 28, 1946.

scrubs also developed a high degree of immunity to endemic stock diseases such as tick-borne fevers. Though remarkably robust, scrubs were rather small in size, gaining weight during the wet, warm months when forage was plentiful and losing weight during the winter months when forage was scarce. When a scrub steer reached market size, it would weigh about 600 pounds, yielding perhaps 300 pounds of beef. The meat from scrub steers may have been tough by today's standards, but range-fed beef possessed a flavor resembling that of venison. In any case, Florida beef was much in demand for use in highly-spiced Cuban cuisine.<sup>30</sup>

Since scrub cattle foraged on the open-range and required no supplementary feed or veterinary care, they received little attention from their owners during most of the year. Cowmen, however, hunted the wolves that preyed on their cattle, and they burned the flatwoods range in late winter to reduce the undergrowth, fertilize a new growth of grass, and curb parasites such as cattle ticks. And during the fall, cowmen collected the scrub cattle, branded and marked the new calves to determine ownership, and selected the beef steers for market. Requiring little labor to raise, scrub cattle proved to be the ideal cash crop for families who owned few if any slave laborers.<sup>31</sup>

James Alderman, for example, was one of Hillsborough's leading cowmen, claiming 1,770 cattle and 240 acres of land in 1860. Yet, he owned no slaves. Alderman's household included his wife, Roxie Ann, several daughters, and two sons, Townsend and William. But in spite of the dearth of laborers within his household, James could call on a wider network for aid in agricultural work. His neighbors included his married sons, Matthew, Mitchell, Timothy, and Michael Alderman, as well as his sons-in-law, M. P. Lyons and William B. Moody. James Alderman, moreover, could call on other members of the Alafia settlement, the dispersed rural neighborhood that had grown up around Alderman's Ford on the Alafia River. James Alderman himself

30. John E. Rouse, *The Criollo: Spanish Cattle in the Americas* (Norman, 1977), 76, 186, 234; Akerman, *Florida Cowman*, 54; interview with Seth Alderman; Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 129; Stetson Kennedy, *Palmetto Country* (New York, 1942), 214.

31. William L. Straub, *History of Pinellas County, Florida* (St. Augustine, 1929), 36; interview with Seth Alderman; Hetherington, *History of Polk County*, 183-84; A Wild Man of the Woods, "The Peninsula of Florida," *Southern Cultivator*, XVIII (September 1860), 270.

had founded the Alafia settlement before 1850, when he and his family had migrated from Thomas County, Georgia, to the Alafia River valley in Hillsborough County.<sup>32</sup>

James Alderman was not an isolated example but was typical of Hillsborough's cowmen, who owned, on the average, fewer than two slaves per household. Cowmen generally relied on their neighbors for casual labor in collecting cattle and driving steers to market.<sup>33</sup> And in many cases, their neighbors were also their kinsmen. Such widely-shared surnames as Alderman, Platt, Dur-rance, Hendry, Raulerson, Summeralls, Hollingsworth, Lanier, Hamilton, Knight, Collins, Underhill, Hancock, Whidden, Blount, and Sloan appear repeatedly in any listing of Hillsborough's cowmen.<sup>34</sup>

Kinship was truly the major organizing force among the south Florida cowmen. They typically migrated to Hillsborough County from the southeastern states, traveling as extended families— parents and their married children and their slaves, if they possessed any. Arriving in Hillsborough, such extended families dispersed across the landscape, obtaining small farmsteads and using the intervening woods as range for their cattle. Though dispersed across several square miles, the scattered farmsteads constituted a rural neighborhood of kinsmen, affines, and friends, who could call on each other for aid in handling cattle, clearing land, building houses, and defending their homesteads against Seminole Indian forays.<sup>35</sup>

Such rural neighborhoods or settlements could be found about Tampa Bay and along the Hillsborough and Alafia rivers, as well as along the west bank of Pease Creek. But as late as

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32. Eighth Census, 1860, Schedules 1, 2, and 4; Kyle S. VanLandingham, "James Alderman 1801-1880," *South Florida Pioneers*, No. 14 (October 1977), 15-16; interview with Seth Alderman.

33. Eighth Census, 1860, Schedules 2 and 4; Mealor and Prunty, "Open-Range Ranching in Southern Florida," 363.

34. For detailed genealogical studies of antebellum Hillsborough families, see Richard M. Livingston, ed., *South Florida Pioneers* (Fort Ogden, 1974-1984).

35. "Old Letter from B. F. Blount Gives Data on Early History of Polk," *Bartow Polk County Record*, January 26, 1940; Hetherington, *History of Polk County*, 14-15; Quintilla Bruton and David E. Bailey, Jr., *Plant City: Its Origin and History* (St. Petersburg, 1977), 35, 38; Louise Frisbie, *Yesterday's Polk County* (Miami, 1976), 16; Wiggins, *Mt. Enon Association*, 4-5; James Dallas Tillis, "An Indian Attack of 1856 on the Home of Willoughby Tillis," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, VIII (April 1930),

1855, there were no settlements east of Pease Creek, for this land ostensibly lay within the Seminole Indian reservation.<sup>36</sup>

At the close of the Second Seminole War in 1842, the surviving Seminoles had been allowed to remain within a reservation that was bounded on the west by Pease Creek, on the north by Lake Istokpoga, and on the east by the Kissimmee River. The United States Army, nevertheless, continued to send armed patrols into the Seminole Indian reservation, and in December 1855, when a patrol under Lieutenant Hartsuff desecrated Chief Billy Bowlegs's garden, a third and final war with the Seminoles (1855-1858) began. But with the surrender and deportation of Billy Bowlegs and most of his followers in 1858, Hillsborough's cowmen were free to expand their settlements into the old Seminole reservation, moving eastward to the Kissimmee River and southward to the Caloosahatchee River by 1860.<sup>37</sup>

Despite their dispersal across hundreds of square miles of sparsely-settled south Florida frontier, the cowmen maintained their commercial links with Tampa— the county seat of Hillsborough County and south Florida's second largest town with 885 inhabitants. South Florida cowmen continued to drive scrub steers to the Tampa merchants for shipment to Cuba.<sup>38</sup> The economic interdependence of the backcountry cowmen and the Tampa merchants is closely reflected in Hillsborough politics, for these two groups dominated the county commission in 1860.<sup>39</sup> Of the four commission seats, the cowmen claimed two and the Tampa merchants claimed two.

By 1860, the cowmen and the members of their households

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36. J. C. Ives, "Military Map of the Peninsula of Florida South of Tampa Bay" (Washington, 1856), on file at the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville.
  37. John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War 1835-1842* (Gainesville, 1967), 315-16; Florence Fritz, *Unknown Florida* (Coral Gables, 1963), 62-66; Kyle S. VanLandingham, *Pioneer Families of the Kissimmee River Valley* (privately printed, 1976), 4-5; Jean Plowden, *History of Hardee County* (Wauchula, 1929), 16; Joe G. Warner, *Biscuits and Taters: A History of Cattle Ranching in Manatee County* (St. Petersburg, 1980), 6-8.
  38. Grismer, *Tampa*, 131; Dillon, "South Florida in 1860," 444; Bruton and Bailey, *Plant City*, 42; G. W. Hendry, "Fort Meade the Ancient: Brief Sketch of the City's Earliest Industrial History," *Fort Meade Leader*, May 1, 1913; Georgiana Kjerulff, *Tales of Old Brevard* (Melbourne, 1972), 29.
  39. For a list of Hillsborough County officers (1860) who were elected in October 1859, see notices in the *Tampa Florida Peninsular*, October 8 and December 31, 1859.

comprised forty-three per cent of Hillsborough's free population. In addition to their numerical importance, Hillsborough's cowmen owned ninety-two per cent of the county's wealth in livestock, seventy-two per cent of the wealth in farmland, and forty-seven per cent of the county's slaves. They also elected two of their members to the county commission— Joseph Mizell and J. P. McMullen. Commissioner Mizell possessed 575 cattle, 342 acres of farmland, and only one slave. Commissioner McMullen, a Georgia native as was Mizell, owned 165 cattle, forty-three acres, and no slaves.<sup>40</sup>

Hillsborough's cowmen may have produced the county's most valuable commodity— scrub steers— but Tampa merchants exported the steers to Cuba and imported the consumer goods which the cowmen purchased. Possessing a spacious harbor, Tampa had become one of Florida's busiest ports. By 1860, three steamers and one brig, including James McKay's *Salvor* and *Huntress*, were engaged in the Cuban cattle trade. In addition, schooners from New York, as well as mail steamers and schooners from New Orleans, regularly called to deliver dry goods and groceries to Tampa's merchants. They in turn furnished goods to the backcountry merchants such as Riley Blount, who operated a small store on Pease Creek. Journeying to the backcountry stores or to Tampa, Hillsborough's cowmen obtained such necessities and luxuries as textiles, brogans, salt, ammunition, coffee, soda, flour, and tobacco. Storekeepers typically offered no credit, exchanging consumer goods only for country produce or cash. Spanish gold, acquired in the Cuban cattle trade, was the most common form of cash circulating in antebellum Hillsborough County.<sup>41</sup>

Given their control of county trade, Tampa merchants were able to place two members on the county commission— John Darling and L. G. Covacevich. Darling, a native of Vermont and the owner of five slaves, was one of Tampa's several northern-born merchants. Covacevich, born in Trieste in the Austrian

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40. Eighth Census, 1860, Schedules 1, 2, and 4.

41. "New Era"; "List of Produce"; Hetherington, *History of Polk County*, 14-15, 20; various advertisements in the *Tampa Florida Peninsular*, 1858-1860; Straub, *History of Pinellas County*, 37; Akerman, *Florida Cowman*, 101.

empire, was a well-to-do merchant who owned nine slaves. Neither commissioner owned cattle or farmland.<sup>42</sup>

Tampans also won the remaining county offices: judge of probate court, Simon Turman, Jr.; clerk of the circuit court, J. M. Hayman; sheriff and tax collector, William S. Spencer; coroner, George W. Edwards; and surveyor, John Jackson. Turman, the son of Hillsborough's judge of probate in 1845, was a native of Indiana, the owner of one slave, and the editor of the local newspaper, the *Florida Peninsular*. The Georgia-born Hayman was a Baptist preacher who owned no slaves. Spencer, another Georgia native, owned one slave and listed his primary occupation as sheriff. The New Hampshire-born Edwards was a painter who owned no slaves. Jackson, a native of Ireland, was a professional surveyor who had acquired one slave. Again, none of the five Tampans owned cattle or farmland.<sup>43</sup>

Although Tampans claimed five offices and two commission seats in Hillsborough's county government, the cowmen of the backcountry represented a sizable voting bloc which became apparent in the 1860 election for Hillsborough's delegate to the state legislature. Joseph Howell, William Turner, and S. B. Todd stood for election. Howell was a South Carolina-born cowman who owned 1,230 cattle, 240 acres, and three slaves. Turner, a Virginia-born farmer, owned 880 acres of land as well as sixteen slaves who cropped nine bales of long-staple cotton. Todd was a New York-born doctor residing in Tampa, who owned no cattle, land, or slaves. In the county-wide election held in October, Howell won with 183 votes, Turner placed second with 152 votes, and Todd finished a distant third with twenty votes. Joseph Howell, a veteran cowman who had lived in Hillsborough since the early 1840s and who had lost his first wife in a Seminole Indian raid, was a most appropriate choice to send to Tallahassee, representing the interests of Hillsborough County— a community located in Florida's cattle-ranching frontier.<sup>44</sup>

42. Eighth Census, 1860, Schedules 1, 2, and 4; Seventh Census, 1850, Schedule 1.

43. Eighth Census, 1860, Schedules 1, 2, and 4.

44. Election returns in Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, October 27, 1860; Eighth Census, 1860, Schedules 1, 2, and 4; D. B. McKay, "Pioneer Florida: Joseph Howell Lost Wife and Baby to Indian Scalpers. . . ." Tampa *Sunday Tribune*, November 28, 1954.