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Mayor Forrest Lake of Sanford

by DANIEL O. GILMARTIN

THE *Sanford Herald* of January 25, 1939 declared in a matter-of-fact obituary that "Forrest Lake, for many years mayor of Sanford and former member of the Florida Legislature, died in the Fernald-Laughton Memorial Hospital shortly before midnight last night following an illness of little more than two weeks." It was the first time the newspaper had mentioned Forrest Lake since his return from prison five years earlier. Although most of the town's citizens had joined the newspaper in ostracizing the former mayor, local businesses closed their doors for the funeral and some of the communities' most prominent citizens served as pall-bearers. But the service was sparsely attended. Thus ended an unpleasant chapter in the history of Sanford.¹

After more than half a century, the memory of Forrest Lake still causes discomfort and uneasiness among local residents who are familiar with the story of the flamboyant mayor. Several of the self-described friends of the mayor or his family feel that it is best forgotten. Others simply recall him as a "crook" who got what he deserved. There are still others, however, who regard Mayor Lake as a great benefactor of the city. According to the latter, had it not been for some very bad luck, Orlando would have become a satellite of Sanford.

However they viewed the mayor, few observers were indifferent about him. During his 1928 trial, the *Sanford Herald* described him as a jaunty, confident hustler and reprobate who sneered at justice. Well-dressed and affluent, with a fashionable handlebar mustache and ever-present cheroot, he was the picture of an unrepentant criminal as he sat next to his attorney whom he fully expected would clear him of all charges.² On the other hand, Sam Byrd, a Sanford native who enjoyed some success on the New York stage, characterized Mayor Lake quite differently. In his not-so-fictional

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1. *Sanford Herald*, January 25, 1939.
2. *Sanford Herald*, March 15, 1928.

novel, *A Small Town South*, Byrd showed "Mayor Rivers" as a broken, friendless ex-convict ten years after his trial. Byrd had his main character avert his eyes in shame when he observed Mayor Rivers getting his breakfast from the garbage pail of a former constituent.³

For the Sanford Chamber of Commerce, the memory of Forrest Lake presented no problem at all. In its official 1976 bicentennial history of the city, Forrest Lake was simply the name of a large hotel which failed in 1927. It made no mention of the man who was elected mayor eleven times, who played a central role in the creation of Seminole County, and who built the hotel which bore his name and is currently the headquarters of the New Tribes Mission.⁴

However he may be viewed in retrospect, Forrest Lake was unquestionably the most conspicuous political and business leader in Sanford and Seminole County in the first quarter of the 20th century. A native of South Carolina, Lake came to Sanford in 1886 when he was 17 years old. Seven years later he was elected to the first of his eleven terms as mayor of the "Celery City."⁵

Having determined to make Sanford the leading community of Central Florida, the ambitious mayor decided the town's political subservience to Orlando would have to be ended. Mayor Lake and his allies then set to work to create a new Seminole County from the northern portion of Orange County and make Sanford its county seat. Toward this end Lake won a seat in the state legislature in 1910 and was reelected in 1912.⁶

Having obtained the office with one purpose in mind, Lake spent his first term in securing the chairmanship of the city and town's organization committee, the panel which would ultimately recommend approval of the creation of Seminole County. He was also careful to cultivate the friendship and support of Senator Arthur E. Donegan, who represented the Orange-Osceola senate district and who chaired the corresponding committee in the upper house.⁷

During Lake's freshman term, word spread through Orlando that he was intent on splitting Orange County. The *Orlando Sentinel* repeatedly editorialized on the subject. On several occasions, *Senti-*

3. Sam Byrd, *Small Town South*, (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1942), 164.

4. *Sanford Evening Herald*, Sanford Centennial Issue, August 7, 1977.

5. *Sanford Chronicle*, "Celery City" Industrial Edition, 1908.

6. *Orlando Sentinel*, April 12, April 13, 1913.

7. *Sanford Herald*, April 15, 1913.



Mayor Forrest Lake. Born in Newberry, SC, Mayor Lake came to Sanford at age 17 in 1886. First elected mayor at age 24, he served four terms in the 1890s. After an absence of several years during which he engaged in the manufacture of ice in Santiago, Cuba, he returned to Sanford in 1907. During that same year he was once more elected mayor of the city. *Photograph courtesy of Sanford Historical Museum.*

nel reporters queried both Lake and Donegan about whether or not they favored division of the county. Both men emphatically declared their opposition to such a move.⁸ But, despite such assurances, the two were preparing to rush just such a measure through the 1913 legislative session.

When the legislature convened, Representative Lake was accompanied by a group of Sanford businessmen. Prominent among them was Robert "Bob" Holly, editor and publisher of the *Sanford Herald*, who had edited newspapers in Orlando for several years before moving to the port city on Lake Monroe. While Lake worked in the lower house, Holly and his entourage conducted a quiet but persistent campaign outside the legislative halls. Their goal was to move the county division bill through the legislature as quickly and quietly as possible. Not a word about the possibility of a new county appeared in the *Sanford Herald* until Lake introduced the bill in committee. Holly's significant role was then demonstrated when he wrote that "our committee . . . censored all wires and newspaper articles and a quiet and orderly campaign has been conducted. This will account for the lack of news [about county division] appearing in the *Herald*."⁹

Most members of the Orange County delegation were caught by surprise. With the single exception of Senator Donegan, the entire delegation opposed the division measure. The protests of these legislators and hurried indignation meetings in Maitland, Apopka, and other affected communities were sufficient to force a slight change in the proposed boundary of the new county, but the measure sped through the legislative process in less than two weeks. A few days later, Governor Park Trammell routinely signed the bill.¹⁰

During the outburst of opposition to county division, Nathan Fogg, longtime proponent of Central Florida and resident of tiny Altamonte Springs, expostulated, "no county division for us." It was an outrage, he wrote, "to please a few ambitious men, who desire to hold lucrative positions in the new county . . . they will be sorry when they are sober." But when it was over, even though his community was included in the new county, he called on everyone to "get to work and make the deed a success."¹¹

8. *Orlando Sentinel*, April 12, 13, 1913.

9. *Sanford Herald*, April 15, 1913.

10. *Sanford Herald*, April 29, 1913.

11. *Sanford Herald*, March 14, May 3, 1913.

The *Orlando Sentinel* was not so forgiving. Stunned by news of the division bill, its editor fumed:

So far as the *Sentinel* is concerned it has no patience with the sugar plum method of dealing with such men as Forrest Lake. He is a cheap politician to whom personal honor means little. . . . Of course Mr. Lake tries to have only vague recollections of anything having been said on the subject of division before election. In this again he shows his dishonesty and trickery. The question was put to him by a score of men and he unreservedly told them he would oppose county division at this time. Do the members of the house of representatives like a liar? If they do, here is a man who fulfills the requirements. . . . There are no two ways about this. Every honest man knows that Forrest Lake has double crossed his people. . . .¹²

While Lake was vilified as a traitor in Orlando and what remained of Orange County, he was a hero in Sanford and the new Seminole County. In a celebratory issue marking the birth of the new county, the *Sanford Herald* showed state representative and Sanford mayor Forrest Lake standing beside a manger labeled "Florida," taking a bundle labeled "Sem. Cty." from a stork. That same day, a triumphant parade in downtown Sanford ended with the firing of an old Civil War cannon on the shore of Lake Monroe. Although the mishap may have held some symbolism for the future, spirits were not dampened when the old field piece exploded.¹³

Having achieved the goal for which he had gone to the legislature, Lake chose not to run for another term. But he did not leave Tallahassee before requesting and receiving a charter for the Seminole County Bank. Returning to Sanford, he continued as mayor while also becoming president of the new bank, a position he held for the next 14 years. A promoter by nature, he used his authority as bank president to foster business in Sanford and Seminole County. According to historian Peter Schaal, whose first job was as a teller in Lake's bank and who subsequently testified against his

12. *Orlando Sentinel*, April 12, 1913.

13. *Sanford Herald*, April 25, 1913.

employer in court, Lake made funds easily available to numerous realtors and other businessmen.

His easy credit policies were in keeping with those of others throughout Florida at the time. As the state's economy accelerated toward the runaway boom of the mid-1920s, Lake and countless others expected the state's economy to expand exponentially. Money loaned out for business ventures would not only be repaid, but would create additional business for the bank and the community. As probably the most important promoter in Seminole County, Lake used both his governmental and banking positions to make Sanford the hub of Central Florida.¹⁵

It might have worked. Long before the inflationary boom of the 1920s, Sanford had begun building a solid economic base. After the destructive freezes of 1894 and 1895, Seminole County farmers had shifted their emphasis from citrus to a hardy strain of celery. Until the late-1920s Sanford was the center of the largest celery producing region in the world. It was known far and wide as the "Celery City." To build on that base and make Sanford more attractive to businessmen and tourists, Lake and others embarked on a vigorous public works program. A new city hall was erected along with a police station. A seawall and bandshell were completed on the shore of Lake Monroe. Many of the city streets were paved.¹⁶

It was only a short step from the public improvements aimed at promoting growth to the provision of easy credit to potential developers and new businesses. As a banker, Lake assisted many real estate ventures by providing easy loans, frequently with little or no collateral. It was only another short step from loaning money to other individuals to making loans to himself. Just as he was doing for others, Lake permitted himself great financial flexibility at his own bank. At the time of his subsequent trial, Forrest Lake was one of the largest landowners in Seminole County. He had also extended his interests beyond the county to become heavily invested in farm land at Moore Haven in the Lake Okeechobee area. Testimony by bank officials at Lake's subsequent trials showed quite

14. Peter Schaal, *Sanford as I Knew It, 1912-1935* (Sanford, 1970), 28-30.

15. Interview with William Vincent, Sr., Sanford, Florida, October 25, 1982; Interview with A. Edwin Shinholser, Sanford, Florida, November 23, 1982.

16. *Sanford Chronicle*, "Celery City" Industrial Edition, 1908.

clearly that Sanford's "first citizen" had freely used bank deposits for his own personal financial ventures.¹⁷

Forrest Lake was not just a real estate speculator, nor was he a passive land owner. Fully expecting a large population increase in Central Florida, Lake used city money to pave streets in several subdivisions which he intended to build. That improvements preceded people and houses was to him simply a matter of timing. That he was using public money for private gain would be overlooked once people came.¹⁸

Not only would new residents settle in Sanford, there would also be tourists. No other project epitomizes Lake's vision of Sanford's future better than the Hotel Forrest Lake. Built on the shores of Lake Monroe by the Forrest Lake Construction Company, the mammoth structure cost a half-million dollars in 1925. Its 158 guest rooms— each with a private bath— were in two wings, joined by a 3,500 square foot ballroom. Each wing had a dining room of 2,500 square feet.¹⁹

It was a magnificent edifice, but almost no one came. Like so many optimistic developers in Florida in the mid-1920s Lake's timing was bad. The 1926 season was a disaster. Like so many of his counterparts throughout the state, Lake was certain that business would improve. They were all wrong. Some of Lake's opponents were already expressing pessimism. There had been a number of bank failures in Florida during the past months. It was apparent to some of them that the boom of the 1920s was ending. Wary of Lake's expansive policies and his patriarchal administrative style, a number of local businessmen were stimulated to action by the mayor's opponent, D. L. Thrasher.

Thrasher had already tried unsuccessfully to open the city's financial records. The reluctance of city officials to comply with his request fueled suspicion and led to the formation of a Taxpayer's League. Through this organization, Thrasher and other local businessmen uncovered information which unraveled Lake's regime. Within just six short weeks, Lake had resigned as mayor and closed the Seminole County Bank. Other forces dealt a devastating blow

17. *State v. Lake*, Case #155, 1928, Seminole County Courthouse, Sanford, FL; Charles Bartlett Pinney, "The Effects of the Real Estate Boom on Florida's State Banks," (M.A. thesis, University of Florida, 1933), 1.

18. *State v. Lake*, Case #155; *Sanford Herald*, July 30, 1927.

19. *Sanford Evening Herald*, Sanford Centennial Issue, August 7, 1977.

to the embattled mayor. His wife of 32 years died of cancer just as his financial and political worlds were collapsing.²⁰

At the first meeting of the Taxpayer's League, Thrasher reported that city officials had refused to allow him to see the public financial records. After two weeks of daily requests, he discovered only that the files were kept, not in city hall, but in the Seminole County Bank.²¹

It was ironic that Thrasher's initial curiosity about city funds had been stimulated by a positive article on Lake's leadership which appeared in the *Sanford Herald*. The front-page piece praised Mayor Lake for traveling to New York and selling previously unsalable city bonds at a price of more than 95 percent of their face value. Lake deserved accolades, the paper averred, because he personally guaranteed \$274,000 worth of the obligations with his signature as a private citizen.²²

Not everyone agreed with the *Herald*. Attorney George Herring, one of the founder's of the Taxpayer's League, challenged the newspaper's version of the story. Herring declared that he had information that the bonds had in fact been sold for less than 90 percent of their face value. Far from making the mayor the hero, Herring suggested, the sale had actually cost the people of Sanford thousands of dollars.²³

Reliable information concerning the bond sale was not made public until Lake was indicted that fall on a multitude of charges. But at the Taxpayer's League meeting in July, other charges were made by private citizens against Lake and city commissioners S. O. Chase, Sr. and E. F. Householder. Much of the time at the July meeting was consumed by a discussion of the relationship between city officials and the Hutton Construction Company. The company, which had done virtually all of the paving of the city's streets, was owned by Lake's son-in-law, Monroe B. "Money" Hutton. Thrasher charged that a recent bid by Hutton for street paving was accepted by the city commission even though his bid was \$12,000 higher than that of a competitor. Thrasher suggested that Lake and others pressured the low bidder to withdraw his offer. He added that the

20. *Sanford Herald*, July 30, 1927.

21. *Sanford Herald*, July 30, 1927.

22. *Sanford Herald*, July 8, 1927.

23. *Sanford Herald*, July 30, 1927.

low bidder had done so, but had gone on to complain that Hutton received all of the city's business.

There had been charges of irregularity regarding Hutton's dealings with the city three years earlier. At that time, rumors had circulated in Sanford that Hutton, while discussing his Sanford dealings with an Orlando businessman, had complained about the cost of doing business. Admitting that it was true that he had a good situation in Sanford in the street paving business, he said that it was also true he had to pay a 20 percent "kickback" for the privilege. The origin of the story was traced to Sanford justice of the peace L. G. Stringfellow.²⁴

At a special meeting of the city commission to investigate the possibility of slander charges, Stringfellow informed the commissioners that they had acted illegally in issuing a subpoena, bid them a good evening, and left the room.²⁵ Without Stringfellow's presence, the commissioners who had been implicated each stated that they were unaware of any "kickbacks." Pursuant to their statement, Mayor Forrest Lake, as chairman of the commission, declared that there were no problems regarding the administration of the city and the meeting was adjourned.²⁶ There the matter rested until the July 1927 meeting of the Taxpayer's League.

Another agenda item at the 1927 meeting concerned the paving of streets in areas where no homes yet existed. The streets of the Dreamworld development, one of Mayor Lake's projects, were paved by the Hutton Construction Company at public expense. Thrasher and Herring both suggested that use of city money for that purpose was illegal. Thrasher reminded those present that the funds had been specifically earmarked for construction of a hospital and a public swimming pool. Neither had been built and he alleged that the money had been spent. Records subsequently confirmed his allegations.²⁷

The charges continued. Despite Mayor Lake's denials, records confirmed that Hutton used city water in his paving operations without paying for it. Other revelations of abuse included \$2,200 worth of gas and water which the Hotel Forrest Lake billed to the

24. Peter Schaal, *Sanford As I Knew It*, 46-47; *Sanford Herald*, July 30, 1927.

25. Schaal, *Sanford As I Knew It*, 46-47.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *State v. Lake*, Case #155; Interview with A. Edwin Shinholser; *Sanford Herald*, July 30, 1927.

city. Additional items seemed to confirm that Lake had commingled his public and private activities to his distinct personal benefit.²⁸

Attorney George Herring summed up the allegations against the mayor in three charges of violations of the city charter. They included: misappropriation of \$200,000, sale of bonds for less than 90 percent of their face value, and issuance of bonds in excess of 15 percent of assessed valuation. Within a week of the Taxpayer's League meeting, Mayor Lake resigned. Evidence produced at his subsequent trial showed that he had not only misappropriated funds of the city, but had also used the city's tax notes in his dual positions of bank president and mayor to secure loans amounting to more than \$353,000 for his personal use.²⁹

The next move in the sordid process came from Lake's son-in-law "Money" Hutton. Shortly after the Seminole County Bank closed, he demanded payment from the city for \$220,000 in street paving work. The *Sanford Herald*, formerly so supportive of Mayor Lake, carried a strongly worded editorial on September 29, 1927, suggesting a conspiracy between Hutton and the mayor. The *Herald* went on to criticize commissioners S. O. Chase, Sr., and E. F. Householder for tacitly consenting to Lake's errant management of the city and recommended that they refuse payment of the claim. Such a course, the paper declared, would force Hutton to seek payment through the court. The ensuing trial would bring to light many pertinent facts, including details of the Lake-Hutton conspiracy.³⁰

While that matter simmered, the city was left in dire financial circumstances. The Hutton claim was especially disagreeable for the Sanford taxpayers. Shortly after Lake was indicted in October 1927, it was revealed that the city owed more than \$1,000,000. That indebtedness necessitated a property tax increase of nearly 150 percent.³¹ And, there was more. In addition to the tax increase, there was a corresponding reduction in city services. The police force was reduced from 17 members to 14, and all city salaries were reduced by more than 16 percent.³²

28. *Sanford Herald*, July 30, 1927.

29. *State v. Lake*, Case #155; *Sanford Herald*, April 13, 1928.

30. *Sanford Herald*, December 29, 1927.

31. *Sanford Herald*, October 1, 1927.

32. *Sanford Herald*, August 13, 1927.

In early November, five members of the Taxpayer's League followed up on the Hutton matter and filed suit to prevent the city commission from authorizing payment of his \$220,000 claim. The suit charged a conspiracy between Lake and Hutton to defraud the city. The plaintiffs further charged the two with gross negligence. Hutton was additionally charged with failing to exercise due diligence in collecting the money before the Seminole County Bank closed on August 6, 1927.

The case did not go far. Hutton was represented by Sanford attorney George DeCottes who chose to intimidate the plaintiffs rather than pursue the case on its merits. He warned that he was an expensive attorney, that a protracted legal fight was likely, and that the Taxpayer's League might lose and be left with huge expenses. The strategy worked. Faced with the possibility of prohibitive costs should they lose, the plaintiffs withdrew their suit. The Hutton Construction Company was eventually paid.³³

While both Hutton and DeCottes fared well in the financial realm, ex-Mayor Lake was wholly occupied with defending himself against an extensive array of charges. On September 19, both he and A. R. "Ray" Key, vice-president of the failed Seminole County Bank, were indicted by a grand jury on 19 charges which included embezzlement, misapplication of funds, and making false entries. Lake was additionally charged with making illegal loans to himself. The two were scheduled to be tried together in the spring of 1928.³⁴

Because of illness, Key was unavailable for the spring trial and the state proceeded against Lake alone. The first of his five trials ended with a conviction for misapplication of funds. He was ruled not guilty in the second one. The reason for the latter verdict was the testimony of W. W. Lewis, a black man who was employed as cashier at the Sanford Elks Club. In a deposition he had said that Lake had flamboyantly displayed and cashed a number of \$50 bills during a high stakes poker game at the club. The significance of that denomination of money was its relation to \$5,700 missing from the bank and which Lake was alleged to have taken. Two prominent medical doctors had testified that Lake had displayed the bills at a poker party shortly after the bank closed. Once on the stand, however, Lewis changed his story, testifying that he knew nothing of the \$50 bills. A flabbergasted state attorney Millard B.

33. *Sanford Herald*, November 26, December 5, 1927.

34. *State v. Lake*, Cases #147-161.

Smith then asked Lewis had he not said in a deposition only the day before that he changed numerous bills for Lake. The cashier unhesitatingly replied, "No Sir, I did not."³⁵

The change of testimony probably resulted from social relations extant in Sanford in the 1920s. White supremacy was unchallenged and the high-rolling mayor was well-connected to the groups which kept it that way. The position of cashier at an exclusive club for white community leaders was a very desirable one for a black man at the time. The gambling which had raised the question in the first place was itself illegal. Prohibition laws were also being ignored. Given the overall situation, the cashier's change of mind was at least understandable.³⁶

In the long run, the acquittal in the second trial mattered little. Having survived a serious illness, the former bank vice-president, A. R. Key, had decided it was time to make amends for his past mistakes. The embattled former mayor must have been surprised and dismayed when Key, not only pleaded guilty to all charges, but did so in great detail in an interview which appeared in the *Sanford Herald*. In the process, he unequivocally declared that Lake was equally guilty. That was the end for the ex-mayor. Key appeared on the stand as the state's star witness in three successive trials.³⁷

In May, 1928, Forrest Lake stood guilty of charges which could have resulted in sentences of up to 45 years in prison. He was ultimately sentenced on five charges for a total of 16 years— three years for embezzlement, three and four each for two convictions for misapplication of funds, and three more for making false entries. An additional three years were meted out for the illegal loans Lake had made to himself. One of the three year sentences was to run concurrently with the others.³⁸

Lake managed to elude prison for three years by numerous appeals to the Florida Supreme Court. All of his challenges were procedural, addressing the method by which the grand jury was chosen. None of the evidence on which he was originally convicted was questioned in the appeals process. In the end, the high court over-turned all except one of Lake's convictions on the ground that the grand jury had been incorrectly selected. The technical error

35. *Sanford Herald*, March 21, 1928.

36. Interview with William Vincent, Sr.

37. *State v. Lake*, Cases #147-161; *Sanford Herald*, September 27, 1927, April 11, 1928.

38. *Sanford Herald*, May 4, 1928.

resulted when 270 potential jurors, who had not been called during the previous term, were added to a new pool of 500 names, making a total of 770 prospective jurors. The court ruled that this was fatal to the convictions— that only by selecting from the list of 500 new names could the grand jury have been legally constituted.

After several delays, including a last-ditch plea of insanity, the remaining three-year sentence was upheld and Forrest Lake was ordered to Raiford Prison. At 62 years of age, he began serving his sentence on June 1, 1931.³⁹ The Sanford community was already removing him from its collective memory when the Hotel Forrest Lake was renamed the Mayfair Inn. No public notice was made of his return from Raiford in 1934. While Sanford struggled through the depression years still dealing with the indebtedness the ex-mayor had left behind, he lived in obscurity for five more years. When he died, local businesses were closed for his funeral.⁴⁰

Lake was unquestionably guilty of the crimes with which he was charged. That he ultimately answered to only one charge was due to legal technicalities. He had embezzled \$353,000 from the depositors of the Seminole County Bank. He had fraudulently issued \$1.3 million in city bonds and then personally borrowed large sums using them for collateral. Perhaps worst of all, he used the illegally obtained funds to shore up his investment in Lake Okeechobee area land, where he anticipated a truck farming boom. The disastrous hurricanes which struck that area, and the corresponding collapse of the runaway real estate boom in the mid-1920s ruined his plans. Lake was left overextended and vulnerable like numerous investors in Florida real estate at the time. Unlike many of them, however, Lake had invested money which was not his own. He not only ruined himself, but also left the city of Sanford deeply in debt, a debt which was not fully liquidated until 1971.⁴¹

While Sanford, like hundreds of other municipalities, counties, and special taxing districts, struggled with the debts with which its flamboyant mayor had left it, the Taxpayer's League stepped in. Lake's career was ended. A successful businessman who had

39. *State v. Lake*, Cases #147-161; *Sanford Herald*, November 6, 1929, June 1, 1931, May 31, 1934, November 19, 1935.

40. *Sanford Herald*, January, 25, 1939.

41. Pinney, "The Real Estate Boom on Florida's Banks," 11-13; Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890*, (Berkeley, 1969), 235. For more on the Florida banking crisis in the aftermath of the collapse of the real estate boom, see Raymond B. Vickers, *Panic in Paradise: Florida Banking Crash of 1926*, (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1994).

amassed considerable wealth of his own, a public figure who enjoyed enormous popularity while creating a new county and governing its county seat, Lake had mistaken his success for invincibility. The weather, the collapse of the 1920s real estate boom, and the local Taxpayer's League proved him wrong.

While it is impossible to defend the ex-mayor's actions, he was different from some high rollers who fled the state rather than face their accusers. He remained and defended himself in court. Using shrewd legal maneuvers, he won some battles, but ultimately lost one. In doing so, he paid a considerable price for his crimes. Entering Raiford Prison in 1931 was a serious matter for a 62-year-old man. Today's "country club" prisons for white-collar criminals were still in the future. He spent three years at hard labor. Returning to Sanford almost in poverty and ostracized by those who had once held him in high esteem, must have been at least as difficult. Although the former mayor was apparently not compelled to beg for his sustenance as he was portrayed in Sam Byrd's novel, he unquestionably lived out his last several years in ruin and obscurity. Although Forrest Lake travelled far in his first 60 years, he descended even farther in the last decade of his life. Having played a significant role in the creation of Seminole County and its new county seat, he is, and will probably remain, Sanford's forgotten mayor.