



# Al Burt Papers

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Florida's Roving Reporter and *Miami Herald* Columnist

"Tribute to Archie Carr"

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After 75 years on this earth, the last 25 of them spent travelling this state and writing about it, I have a simple wish, that Florida remain Florida, a real place, not some chintzy imitation of itself. I don't want it to become a dishonest sideshow that mimics the real Florida, or a facade for huckstering, or a carnival that has no meaning and purpose other than to finagle tourists out of their money.

I'd like enough of natural Florida to survive that we always will be able to see, feel, and taste the real thing.

Obviously, I am not a politician.

My folks moved to Florida in 1925, two years before I was born, and except for a few years when work took me away, I have been here ever since, most of that time was spent in the cities, but what I saw happening to Florida while travelling the state as a newspaper columnist changed me.

I began to develop a fear that Florida, a great state with a great history, was developing a disturbing downside. One in which our progress was bringing with it a toxic culture that carries more penalties than it should, giving a negative tilt to what should be creative change. I fear that the conveniences in our lives have begun to outstrip the qualities and that we need a better balance.

This concern is not any sort of complicated intuition or philosophy. It's based on that reflex of self defense, the desire to save the things in both our built and natural environments that influence our lives with something more than the daily appetites.

The late Archie Carr, Florida's great poet-scientist, once spoke of natural Florida and what has happened to it as beautifully as anyone could. He used to complain that the "world (was) all broken out with man" — describing it as though he thought the world had a fatal case of measles. Carr especially

loved one piece of natural Florida, Paynes Prairie just south of Gainesville. When someone questioned that, he explained, "There is peace out there and quiet enough to hear rails call and cranes bugle...."

He understood what was happening. This is what he said of Florida:

"Under the mindless din of welcome to industry coming in .... You can hear the voices of the old ones .... grieving over the passing of the wilderness. (But) they no longer watch landscapes wasting away. That happened long ago. What is going on now is just a lot of little cleanup operations ... of small tag-ends and patches of the past (that were) overlooked in the first waves of ruin .... It is sad in Florida these days."

Carr said that in 1964. Since then, we have had nearly four more decades of that kind of progress, the kind that Carr described as "the partly aimless, partly avaricious ruin of unequalled natural riches."

He celebrated places like Waccahoota, Tuscawillia, Micanopy, Lochloosa, and Melrose too because he understood what they represented.

You can see for yourself. Look around you in Florida at all the self-inflicted injuries and take stock. It is not just a matter for the laments of poets and old timers now. All Floridians have a reason to mourn.