

Search For Yesterday

A History of Levy County, Florida



Chapter Three



Slowpoke

**Published By The
Levy County Archives Committee**

Sponsored by the Levy County Board of Commissioners

Bronson, Florida

A Bicentennial Publication

**Copyright © 1977
Levy County Archives Committee**

SLOWPOKE

by S.E. GUNNELL

Well, not all the time. I do get around faster than that at times, but this chapter needs a title and Slowpoke is my Citizens Band Radio name, so I thought it might be appropriate.

This is to relate some experiences of mine over a period of years during which I gradually became aware to two concepts. One is that a wealth of local history is here and the other is that Levy County is a fine place in which to live. The narrative is somewhat rambling and skips around in time periods and places but that is the way each person actually lives out his or her life in reality as contrasted with characters in fiction. Besides the historical information, this chapter attempts to present a few episodes of contemporary life in Levy County along with descriptive writing purporting to transmit the atmospheric feel of various places around the area.

My own life still is interesting and meaningful; I could live to be two hundred and never get bored. I was born in 1918, saw the automobile while it was still arriving. I remember our substitute rural mail carrier, a man with a long white beard, delivering the mail on a Harley Davidson motorcycle that would be a priceless antique today. So would he if he were still alive. At the time, my childhood perspective saw him as Father Time. Sure, I remember the wagons,

surreys, buggies, the cattle drives, the hard work, the self-contained farm, the hunting and fishing trips, sleeping on the ground, riding a horse to the water-powered gristmill, the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, the dust clouds of the thirties, World War II, and you are thinking that I must be growing old. Not so, life is too infinitely precious to waste by growing old, every moment is to be tasted and treasured in grateful appreciation to Him who gave that life.

We landed in Levy County in 1954 riding a green Studebaker and already that car has gone into history. For sixteen years we were teachers, we loved the children and to each of them who reads this, we still love you. When we retired, we stayed, because these people are our people, we are a part of them and of Levy County.

So this is to share with you a few of the episodes along the way. As I write this and you are reading it, both of us are going down into history. Long after we have gone, people of the future will read writing like this (if it survives) and pause to wonder about us and our world which to them will be a thing of the past. To them I say, we made mistakes, we hope you understand how we were, and we wish you well.

THE NEARSIGHTED CATFISHERMEN

It was a fine afternoon in May, 1957. The Suwannee was low and very clear. Lessie, Frank, Allie Mae and I went downstream from Manatee Springs in two boats, our aluminum boat with the new eighteen horse Johnson and one of the State Park's old wood skiffs powered by Frank's small outboard. We made camp on the Levy side with a small tent, a hammock, and an assortment of old blankets and tarpaulins. Soon our little portable grill was smoking away to cook porkchops with the homemade barbecue sauce we had brought along.

Our camp was primitive, we were young, and this idyllic paradise was deserted except for ourselves, a few bugs, and some happy birds. We sat by the edge of the river and enjoyed the natural beauty and wonder of it all. We had arrived with a scrap of canvas and a tin bucket, but just wait, we said; one great day out there in the future we would do this thing up first class with a fine cabin cruiser and all kinds of elaborate stuff.

We didn't know any better than that. It never occurred to us that the happiness we sought came from within each of us and that we had reached the pinnacle right there as we were. Not one of us even thought that this experience would in later years survive as a treasured memory of those halcyon days when we were young and somewhat shortsighted, sitting by the beautiful Suwannee with the quiet freshness of nature all around us. We just didn't know that material possessions are not even distantly relevant to that great peace and happiness for which we search and all the time the goal of our quest is so close that any one of us can reach out and touch it. But we don't know that, so we keep on chasing things, things at the end of a rainbow with a phantom there instead of what we expected. Some of us never learn, even when the rainbow itself has finally vanished.

We tied catfish hooks and lines to overhead limbs and made several trips in the night to check our lines. Our little campfire on the bank was the focal point of our existence that night, a warmth, a light, a beacon to the buried racial memory of our nomadic ancestors who lived like this back in the dim mists of antiquity. Near midnight I rolled up in an old tarp on the grass along a narrow strip between the edge of the river bank and the base of a huge tree, all settled for the night. Allie Mae, Lessie and Frank returned from the last run of our catfish lines. Then we became aware of a gigantic storm cloud bearing down on us from the west and our little primitive camp was not up to the wind and rain of such a monster. We hurriedly broke camp, loaded the boats and went upstream to Manatee Springs. Just as we had loaded the aluminum boat out and started home, the storm arrived.

The next morning, Frank and I returned to retrieve our catfish gear. One of our hooks had a big catfish on it, he was about ten feet down on a white sand bottom with the line entangled in some roots. I was determined to get that fish, so I put on a diving mask and flippers and started down after him. My approach startled the fish, he made a desperate lunge and broke loose.

We have passed our old campsite by the river many times since then and I remembered the grassy strip where I had slept. Over the years, the flood currents eroded the bank until the grassy strip finally disappeared. But the memory has been ours to keep, the memory of those days of camping close to nature with a tin bucket and a worn piece of canvas. Having a glut of elaborate equipment may not be the way to go after all. We were young, poor, and foolish, but just look at the fun we had.

HAFELE'S DITCH

Some of the old timers told me about the Hafele place. These people were of German origin and settled along the southwest shore of the lake conglomerate known as Chunky Pond (frontier corruption of the Indian name for the lake, Chuckahaha) in the 1800's probably at the end of the Civil War. There was a massive migration into this county at that time. For some years they had citrus groves, then cultivated several acres of grapes from which they fermented wine.

I thought that this would be the place to find some old bottles, which I collected for awhile. After a week of exploring on the trail bike I located the site and found exactly one antique fruit jar, other than some fragments of old bottles that were broken. The original house apparently burned. Two vine-covered mounds of brick from chimneys and some square nails indicated the house's location. I did, however, find the "dug" well with its brick curbing.

One dark night I returned to the scene with a powerful hand lantern thinking that its beam would enable me to see what was in the well. With me was a teenage friend named Billy Harrold on a Yamaha 180 scrambler.

We traveled a rather mean sand road, then carefully rode around and through little marshes, pools, and a morass of mud stretches, and along a woods road. Upon our arrival, I had some difficulty finding the old well in the dark, but finally located it. We were on our hands and knees peering into that

deep, dark hole, aiming the hand lantern's beam into the depths.

We saw water down there, slightly murky so that the bottom was not visible. Just under the surface of the water we saw a hewn timber extending from wall to wall. Billy wondered about that, so I explained that the well diggers stood on that and dug out below it, lowering the timber in successive stages until the last digging position. Then they left it in place, and there it remained for about a hundred years. Possibly, we were the first humans to see this timber in a hundred years. I remarked to Billy that the last feet to stand on that old timber down there were long since dead. Billy thought about that for a moment and then announced rather urgently that we should get out of here.

We did just that on that dark night in 1969. My niece Theresa McKoy now has the old yellow Honda and rides it to high school. Billy grew up and is a Navy career man. A drainage canal known as "Hafele's Ditch" in the 1880 county records still exists; you can see the faint vestiges of the old settlement road that ran past their front gate. The Hafele front yard walk leading to the old road is also visible. I remember standing at the location of their front gate one afternoon trying to visualize the wagons, buggies, and saddlehorses that once traveled past on that road, all the sights and sounds of another time and another culture from the dim and musty depths of the past.

SLOW RIDERS

Clifford set the pace as his motorcycle was the smallest and slowest. Lisa followed on a larger cycle, and I brought up the rear riding a heavy touring machine which muttered along barely able to keep running in fifth gear at this slow speed. They were high school students at P.K. Yonge in Gainesville and had been friends over the years since they were little kids together in nursery school. This was in the spring of 1974. We rolled west from Bronson, crossed the Waccasassa River, paused at U.S. 19-98 to wait for a gap in the stream of frenetic speeders. We decided that most of those people were hurrying to reach nowhere, driven not by the urgency of their destinations but by some vague neurotic pressure to run from some unidentified thing behind them. We left Otter Creek, rolled on through the extinct towns of Wylly, Rosewood, turned out at Sumner into a lane through a forest to stop by the old cemetery named Shiloh.

The silence, the tranquility was quite a contrast. The morning was beautiful, the singing birds thought so. Over the graves there lay spots of bright sun and cool shades. We wondered about the old ones who had lived around here, read their names on the gravestones; Dorsetts, Rowlands, Ishies, Yeartys, Arlines, and one covered with a simple concrete slab with the word Showman imprinted on its surface. That was not the name of the deceased.

Seems that many years ago, when the nearby town of Sumner still existed, a carnival was there and a lightning bolt killed one of the carnival workers during a summer thunderstorm. The carnival people callously departed, the good people of Sumner buried the deceased in their cemetery, constructed a slab, and not knowing his name, they inscribed that word Showman. They did not want another human being to go out into all eternity as a complete nonentity. Being decent souls with an understanding of the precious human values, they did the best they could. Showman came from somewhere, maybe he had relatives back there and they never knew what became of him. He certainly had a name but what it was we will never know. But his grave is there with

the other people who were loved and at their deaths, somebody cared. I like to think that some of that compassion eased the passage of Showman's last journey.

We returned to State Road 24 and headed west again. The surface became very uneven, I could see their wheels patting up and down in the spring suspension of the cycles. At the end of the mainland we emerged onto the stretch of causeway, bridges and islands leading into Cedar Key and we were suddenly in another world of water, seabirds, and the exhilarating lift of the offshore breeze.

This was not such a morbid excursion as it may sound. My objective was historical research and the other two were helping me. We stopped at the Cedar Key Cemetery to look for a grave that I wanted to know about.

During the fifty years following the Civil War, people from faraway places came to this town, they liked the peace and serenity they found here, so they stayed longer, and stayed on, and lived out the rest of their lives at this quiet place. We saw the stones of R.H. McIlvaine, M.D., (1820-1889) who came from Lewes, Delaware; J.R. Wolfe (1846-1876) who was born in Orangeburg County, South Carolina and was the son of Jacob A. and Margarete Wolfe; George Rex Andrews (1874-1933), physician, and his grandson's wife Norene McBride Andrews of Bronson is currently (1977) helping to write this history; George Henry Richards (1840-1882) from Richmond, Virginia; St. Clair Whitman (1868-1959) who collected the shells and whom I knew personally. It would take a whole book. We were overwhelmed by the eloquent history and human drama that permeates the atmosphere of that cemetery.

I found the grave for which I searched, we rode away, parked the motorcycles in front of one of the dock restaurants. When you are ravenously hungry and you fail to appreciate a spicy tossed salad with fat mullet fried to delectable crispness as only those experts at Cedar Key can do the thing, then you have missed one of the basic and most savory elements of the Florida mystique. The two teenagers were native

Floridians, they cleaned the platters. I thought I put up a respectable performance.

We rode back through town on our way to the State Park Museum and met the local constabulary. He wanted to know if we were members of a cycle club somewhere and if so, would we bring the club over to ride in their upcoming festival parade. We explained that we had no club affiliations, advised him of how to contact such a club that we did know about and thanked him for the invitation. I regret that I do not remember his name. There are probably policemen somewhere who are irrationally hostile to motorcycle riders but in all my years of riding I never met one. The ones I have encountered were invariably friendly, helpful and courteous. This Cedar Key officer was all of that.

We spent the afternoon studying the museum exhibits which is a whole story within itself and I will not relate it here. The afternoon was almost gone when we cleared the town and turned on the power. The boy flattened his little machine out and it

screamed valiantly as we rolled eastward. I loafed along on the touring cycle and watched them ride ahead of me. Their childhood was almost gone, they were young adults now, they had graciously shared the last vestiges of that precious childhood with me and no age barrier was there, no generation gap. During the day, their agile minds had grasped and understood the deep currents of the human existence that we had encountered. They had been thoughtful, pensive, and filled with a sense of wonder just as I had been.

And now as I looked at the jacketed backs and helmeted heads of Lisa McKoy and Clifford Vogt ahead of me. I thought about the totality of the time that we spend in this mortal existence and how that a subtotal of that time is of a special nature apart from the sadness, from the humdrum. This day was one in that special level, part of the subtotal I call the good time, definitely the good time. The motorcycles rolled on swiftly to the east.



CCC camp at Otter Creek during the nineteen thirties. This one was originally at Bronson.

DECEMBER DAWN

The probability is remote, but at one particular time you might have gone south of Otter Creek along U.S. 19-98 and noticed a parked motorcycle and a man by the roadside. If so, you might have seen me. I was standing there in contemplation of a tragedy that happened at that place, years ago. Sometime during that cold rainy night a woman lost control of her car. Maybe she was bone-tired and simply went to sleep, we will never know. The car hit a bridge abutment and careened into the rain-swollen water of the stream below. The woman and her small daughter were both killed instantly.

The next morning, a state trooper and a county deputy returned to that scene and waded around in the cold water collecting the scattered personal effects of the two dead people. It was the Christmas season; they picked up a few gaily wrapped presents, the woman's purse, then the deputy slowly picked up another object and held it in his hand. It was the little girl's doll.

For a moment the man looked at the smiling little face, the trooper came up and stood quite still by his side, both men were frozen into that

suspended instant of time that is the prelude to the revelation of a great truth. The awful immensity of the tragedy descended upon them.

The Florida State Trooper and the Levy County Deputy Sheriff stood there in knee-deep water wearing their neat uniforms and holstered guns and cried like two little kids. And in that moment the trooper and the deputy transcended their mundane roles and became two great hearted human beings of much wisdom and infinite compassion. They stood ten feet tall.

Now do you see why I react with hostility when I hear disparaging remarks about law enforcement officers? I might be thinking of those two men standing in the cold water that December morning with their grief stricken faces looking up in anguished supplication to Almighty God.

I fired up the motorcycle and rode away. It is not good to linger there too long amid the echoes of an old sadness. The trooper and the deputy are still living, they will probably read this, and I want them to know that some of understood, we remember.



At the 1977 Cason family reunion: Resha Hudson, Sr., Foster Brookins and Parnie Cason Brookins. She is the daughter of Cull Cason and Laura Hudson Cason. Mr. Hudson is one of the writers of this history.

A LITTLE OF GULF HAMMOCK

In May of 1967, I escorted a group of biology students on an all-day tour of Gulf Hammock, to see the flora and fauna and to hear some resource persons tell of the history and legends. The kids were fascinated. This is what Mr. S.J. Adkins told them.

In 1876, "remittance men" from England were here to work in the orange groves. The original Adkins place included all of the present-day Adkins and Yearty properties. Two years after the Civil War, some Union soldiers came up the river and found an old man with a large group of slaves. He didn't know the war was over (Mr. Adkins does not vouch for the validity of that one).

The old slave quarters on the Yearty place were still visible in 1915. The Adkins place was first planted in pineapples, then oranges, then pears, hundreds of acres of pears. Some of the pear trees, over 100 years old, still survive (in 1967). Mr. Adkins grew up here as a child, moved back in 1930. Several old house places are around his residence, who lived in them is not known. Fragments of dishes from them have been dated by ceramic experts as being 1850, ^{England}

Mr. Adkins' grandfather, Mr. Gunn, came to Otter Creek in 1916, bought this place on Wekiva Run, built a large house. The old barn used to be a hunting lodge (Wingate Hotel), it was later used as a two-story barn by Mr. Gunn, then torn down. The only original building left is the old smokehouse, which was also used as a summer ice house. Mr. Gunn's big house burned in 1942, Mr. Adkins rebuilt in 1952. The Gulf Hammock post office was once here, Mr. Adkins remembers its remains, some of the postal boxes were still in the ruins.

Upstream on Wekiva Run, at Quick Landing, Mr. Quick hit an old subterranean cistern with a tractor plow. It was eighteen feet across, underground pipes still connected. No one seems to know where the pipes go to nor what establishment was ever here to require a cistern that big.

The Wingate Hotel would send a surrey to Otter Creek (in 1870's) to meet the visiting hunters and other patrons. The lumber in the old smokehouse came from the Cedar Key mills over 100 years ago. An iron tank of a swivel mount has been sitting there on the edge of Wekiva for fifty years, Mr. John

Yearty identifies it as having once been part of the Otter Creek mills.

That concludes the information from Mr. Adkins, and while the kids' mouths were still open, we moved on to hear Mr. John Yearty and Mr. Will Yearty. This is what they told us.

The pear trees were successful but the business failed. The pears all matured at once, they had no refrigerated storage, there were transport problems, and this variety did not stand shipping well. The Yearty place has been owned by John since 1937. The Gulf Hammock postoffice was originally here (across the road from John's house), also three stores, a school (Chubby Petteway's mother taught there). In fact, this was the original town of Gulf Hammock. The Presbyterian Church was to the east, a Rev. Camode was the pastor. Mr. David Meeks of Chiefland was born here. His sister, the late Joyce Meeks Bullock, knew the Devoe family (paint and chemical company Devoes) when they lived here and she was a child.

In pioneer times, the main north-south road through this side of Florida came right through the old Gulf Hammock town. It crossed Wekiva at a spot known as Walker Landing (the old name). Evidence of the ford and stumps of the bridge uprights are still visible (in 1967). In the vicinity of that crossing, some frontier blacksmith had his shop. Still lying around are his forge stones, bricks, pig iron ingots (I have one of them), homemade implements, antique plows.

Downstream from the old crossing is Sulfur Springs Landing. The sulfurous water in the spring reacts to tidal cycles in the Gulf five miles away. Another old house place is here, identity unknown. In this area south of Wekiva Run are the vestiges of rockwall fences and drainage ditches of pre-Civil War vintage. Mr. Will remembers the ruins of an old log blockhouse located by the edge of a cypress pond. This was a tall, square-topped structure with slots around the eaves for riflemen and was used as a refuge from hostile attack. He pointed out the location to me.

The first farms in this area of Gulf Hammock were probably established when this was in the Spanish domain. The soil has a clay base, grows anything, and is not as vulnerable to drought as the sandy soil further inland. If I were a prospective Spanish farmer, that's right where I would have stopped and dug in. The children (now adults in their twenties) had a great time that day and learned a lot. So did I, and all of us appreciate to this day the kindness of Mr. S.J. Adkins, Mr. John Yearty and Mr. Will Yearty in taking up time with us and for the contributions they made to the education of that class and their teacher.

MR. ATKINS

Near the shore of Wekiva Run the massive old home had burned forty years ago, leaving the long concrete front steps standing there as a monument to the people who were now gone along with the house. One son had returned to the old home place and built himself a house. One fine morning in April back in the middle 1960's, I arrived with a group of biology students on a field trip. Mr. Red Atkins was to lecture my class on the history of this place. He was all prepared and so were we. You see, I had been thoroughly forewarned that Mr. Atkins had a firmly ingrained speech pattern of colorful and salty language. He couldn't help this, it was just the way he was. So the kids were adequately prepared, they were not to react, not even by the flicker of an eyelash. Not that I think back, that bunch had a lot of poise.

They sat primly in rows on the old stone steps with perfectly bland and expressionless faces, but I noticed a barely concealed impish gleam in each pair of young eyes. One of the boys, Eddie Lee Thompson, lived nearby, worked part time for Mr. Atkins and was familiar with him and the place.

Red assumed his position out front ready to begin his lecture. He was obviously going to enjoy this. Meanwhile, six giant Canadian geese had quietly moved into position right behind him. Now, Canadian geese around a place tend to develop an aggressive watchdog complex, they know one human from another, and these six were trying to decide what to do about this big group of invaders. As soon as Red opened his mouth to speak, they knew what to do. This was their cue; if Red was going to squawk, they would also squawk, which they did with ear-splitting vigor.

Mr. Atkins jumped about a foot high, turned and glared balefully at the geese. He snorted, grunted, wheezed and fought manfully for self-control, then slowly turned to face the kids and in a soft voice and with an air of gentle calmness, he spoke.

"Eddie Lee?"

"Suh?"

"Will you speak to these, ah, geese, please?"

Eddie Lee arose and approached the geese. They knew him. He growled once and they took off. At the same time, another battle for self-control was going on, the kids were struggling to keep from laughing. I saw a shoulder twitch here and there but every one of them looked straight at Red and maintained a poker faced expression.

They listened intently to what he told them, they took notes, and when he finished they thanked him profusely. It was after we had driven a short distance away that the kids exploded into great gales of howling laughter.

Now they have grown up, some with children of their own in school but they never forgot Mr. Atkins. He made a profound and lasting impression on them, he achieved a sort of immortality by becoming a pleasant memory back there in the years of their childhood. They respected him. But they always wondered what he said to the geese after we had gone.

EPISODE AT YANKEETOWN

In October of 1973 we arrived at the primitive camping area west of Yankeetown, a park owned by Levy County. We were in a mini-motorhome and here is what we wrote in our journal of Minnie the Motorhome.

This is a fine Saturday afternoon, we are all parked with a little campfire going and here I sit with a cup of coffee. Helen and Kenneth Watson have just now arrived with their travel trailer. Now we have finished eating the steaks we grilled on charcoal braziers, so we are sitting all relaxed by our fire just at the edge of the Gulf listening to a news broadcast from Radio Canada on the portable's shortwave band. Night has come, the sky is clear and really full of stars out here away from the light pollution of street lights and pole lights. I can spot Mars, Jupiter, and Venus. The offshore breeze is gentle in the night and just chilly enough to make the fire feel sensuously warm. A quiet elderly couple in a fold out camper from Arizona set up just down the way have brought their chairs over and joined us. We are interested to hear them tell about what Arizona is like now, as we have not been out there for almost twenty-five years. I am writing this as it happens in the flickering light of the fire, mostly darkness.

We can see the running lights of very high aircraft streaking across, so high that their sound never gets down to us. Out in the darkness across the sea some kind of vessel is passing by, miles away from this shore.

We sat there a long time savoring the indescribable beauty of this soft enchanted night in never-never land. The portable's FM band picked up a St. Petersburg station playing the old music that had depth and feel, it had something to say. One melody was Harbor Lights and I promptly drifted off into a reverie of nostalgia remembering the way we were back in the thirties when we heard Harbor Lights and the other great songs played by the big bands and of how we would hear them and dream, and the dream was all we had.

The Arizona couple retired, Kenny turned in with one of his headaches, Helen and Allie Mae sat there by the fire with me, they talked and I dozed. The old hauntingly beautiful music still played along

from the FM, the wind grew stronger and colder, rattled the palm fronds, signed through the cedars. I am writing in bed now, inside the Winnebago, lying on this foam mattress and sheltered by a big heavy quilt that my beloved mother-in-law made for us a few years before she died. I stretch luxuriously in this warm roomy bed and remember the nights many years ago when I slept on the ground with a ragged old blanket for cover and I appreciate the contrast between then and now. I can enjoy this to the ultimate only if I remember where I came from. I prop up on one elbow and look out the window at the remains of our campfire, a brave and defiant little flicker of light and glow of embers in all the great cold dark out there. That was the last thing I saw, I must have fallen asleep almost instantly. Somewhere in my mental makeup there must be a deeply buried symbolic thing associate with that last look through the window at the remains of our campfire, not being a shrink I have never analyzed it.

A chilly dawn is breaking as I write this. Looking out the window I see the white ashes of our dead fire from last night and a thin tendril of fragrant smoke is still wisping up from the one remaining stub of oak wood. A motley convention of long necked water birds are stalking around peering into the water on their morning fish patrol. The tide is out and some more shore birds have assembled on an exposed sand bar to hold a raucous discussion. Over at the launching ramp three bird watcher types and one dog are wading across the shallows to an offshore island. It will be interesting to watch them face the problem of returning when the tide starts coming in. A white ibis circles a little cove preparatory to landing and emits a harsh grawk sound, almost a rattle. I suppose that is his song. On second thought, he would not intend to make the morning beautiful with a sound like that; instead, he must be serving notice on all other birds and varmints in the area that he is reserving this area for his exclusive use.

The sun is up now, we have eaten breakfast, and I am sitting out here watching the tide come in. You can't see it come in, you look away for awhile, then remember the tide, look at it again and there it is, noticeably higher. This place is certainly bird

headquarters early in the morning when the tide is low. I see that the dog and three elderly bird watchers have just now finished swimming back to the launching ramp over there. The dog climbs out and shakes himself, waits for the others to land. He appears to be something less than enthusiastic about the whole expedition.

And that was in October of 1973 by the sea west of Yankeetown, a memorable experience, the good time; the time and place will synchronize with you and become a part of you so that a part of your life is left there after you have gone and maybe the vibrations of your life force echo faintly for awhile after you have gone.



On Dec. 26, 1904, this migrant wagon dating from an older time had been restored for use as a recreational vehicle. The Bronson Depot is behind the people. They were: Linwood Wanamaker, S.O. Covington, Claudia Mae Wanamaker, Alma Ellis, C.E. Wanamaker, Daisy Hoffman, A.D. McEachin, Sadie Wanamaker, J.O. McLaurin. The mule driver is unidentified. The four mules were usually big and powerful. J.O. McLaurin's widow Eloise still lives in Archer. The unidentified store on the left was located about where Hunter's Real Estate office now is. The depot was slightly west of the present-day Miller Reality. On the back of this old picture these words are written: "On our way to the Gulf Hammock for a week's hunt & fish & frolic." The name McEachin was pronounced McAnn.

BIRD CREEK REVISITED

When you revisit a place, memories of the time you spent there in the past become sharper and for me the years we have spent in Levy County have been the best years of our lives. The best part is not over but is on-going, that part of mortal time that I call the good time. This is the sixth day of March in the year 1977 that I pause to linger awhile at this place of memories and to share my thoughts with you, this place being the abandoned roadside park on the road from Yankeetown westward to the Gulf. I am not riding a big motorcycle this time, instead we are riding a Winnebago, inside of which we sit with some fragrant coffee, looking out the window at the timeless marshland and water, hearing only the wind. But in my mind I hear the memories.

Bird Creek, just behind us, was once the end of the road, there was no bridge. In the days when Lessie and Frank were very young and we were still almost young, we came there, launched our boat, went around the offshore route and rode up the Withlacoochee River to Yankeetown and Inglis, stopping frequently to look around and admire the beauty of the whole place. We came back to Bird Creek for a cookout, smoked pork chops with homemade barbecue sauce. As we ate we watched a visual panorama that no artificial picture can ever match, the great flaming sunset. That was more of the good time in never-never land.

About fifteen years ago a motion picture company made scenes on location there at Bird Creek. The movie was *Follow That Dream*, starred Elvis Presley, and was based on a very hilarious novel, *Pioneer, Go Home*. The company had Presley under contract, he could sing, so their script writers rearranged the novel into a sort of musical with a corresponding change in title. The novel's basic comedy came through unexpectedly strong in the movie, probably because Presley was no slouch of an actor, in my opinion at least. In building the sets, the color cameramen considered the cabbage palms (cut off and stuck in the ground) to be too pale in color, so they spray-painted the foliage to a darker green. I remember that Joan Yearty, in high school then, spent her summer working as a secretary for the movie company. Vic Spray and Frank Moring came

down from Bronson to gawk and were surprised to see what a big guy Elvis Presley was. Ollie Lynch from Yankeetown played the part of a dealer in a gambling joint scene. While watching the movie, I looked carefully for Ollie and did spot him, only because he is very tall. He was in the rear of the crowd and out of focus but his head stuck up about a foot higher than anyone else.

The movie company came and went, the cabbage palms withered and died, and now there is nothing left to show that any of this ever happened. Looking out through the Winnebago's window, I see a small island covered with a heavy growth of old cedar with one tall palm rearing up out of the cedar. I have seen that island many times before but have never set foot on it. To get there would require crossing some marsh, Bird Creek, then some more marsh. That island is still natural, primitive, still unspoiled as it was a thousand years ago. I like to know that it is there and still survives in its pristine state. It is probably a rare occurrence that mankind sets foot upon it. One could go over there and drop dead with the probability that one's bones might not be found for years, and the highway goes within two hundred yards of it. In some obscure way, that small flight of fantasy is a commentary on the solitude and slow flow of time that you can experience here.

When we rolled into this place, the tide was low and fiddler crabs moved around on the bare strip of exposed mud. Now the tide has come in and covered that zone, so that we have been resting here for sometime in this beautiful place. We did not age at all, we did not grow older while we have been here.

Now we have moved down by the river, near the end of the river. People are all around. We were here about a year ago in this same camper. As we sat drinking coffee, a young couple with two small boys moved into view. They were fishing. The man got all set to cast, brought his rod around in a mighty swing, the handle slipped out of his grasp and the whole thing went sailing far out into the Bay. He stood there without moving, then slowly turned with the most foolish expression on his face. The two little boys were looking up at him with their mouths open in astonishment. Their little faces plainly showed

disbelief that their Daddy, the smartest man in the world, could have done this dumb stunt. He took his wife's rig and cast a few times in a futile attempt to snag his own lost rig and haul it in. Then they moved on, and the whole tableau was enacted in total silence, not a word, not a grunt from any of the four.

About twenty years ago, I came down this river alone in an outboard skiff and paused where the launching ramp is now. There was no road out here then, nothing at all, but it was a wild picturesque place. The road has not really hurt anything, more people have access now. I like to believe that I am not selfish about these things. This is the real Florida and we loners of the old days share it with a lot more people now.

Not long after the road and launching ramp was completed, two fugitives from downstate came out this way with the constabulary in hot pursuit. The night was very dark and rain was falling, the fugitives apparently hoped to elude their pursuers by leaving U.S. 19-98 and taking to the backroads. They were not familiar with this particular backroad. Their car plunged down the boat ramp and into the Gulf. The chase was over.

Early one morning over there in the county park, I watched a group of small birds, sandpipers or something, walking along the water's edge pecking, scratching in the sand, and making little peeping sounds. The head seagull who had the lease on scavenger rights to this stretch of shoreline landed to see what they were pecking at and to cut himself in on some of the action. The little birds froze into immobility as long as he stood in their midst. They pouted and glared at the large intruder. He preened his feathers with studied indifference. When he left, the little birds promptly resumed their foraging.

Another morning, Watson and I parked the big motorcycles down there at the ramp. Perched atop a boulder in the river was a skinny old geezer wearing aloha shorts, fishing. He was all hunkered down like a buzzard in a dead tree. A tugboat pushing a barge eased its way into the river from the channel. It was right on the fisherman but the wind came strong from upstream and carried all the tugboat's sound out to sea, he had no idea the boat was there. At that

moment, the pilot blasted loose with all five airhorns. Our hero shot straight up from his boulder, then did a grotesque hopping dance on first one leg and then the other, flailing his arms around, trying to keep his balance. He succeeded, never even dropped his rod, then he stood on his boulder and told that tugboat pilot off starting with the pilot's remote ancestry and bringing his genealogy up to date. The pilot was convulsed with laughter.

And those are a few of the memories I have of this place and of the events that I know about. It is to wonder about the other events that happened which I never knew about and will never know. At any given place, like the crew that filmed *Follow That Dream*, people come and people go.

GULF HAMMOCK IMPRESSIONS

The Gulf Hammock mystique is a feel of many moods, different seasons and a lot of natural primitive space. You can hear the happy children swimming at Coulter Bridge, walk through the cool of a lush semitropical swamp, stand under a great canopy of ancient liveoaks and breathe the clean air supercharged with oxygen, gaze across the vast expanse of marsh and hear the hard rustle of the sea wind in the palm trees behind you, see the bright pinpoints of sunlight sparkling from the tips of the ripples along the dark waters of the Waccasassa, huddle over a little campfire in the chill of a November night and listen to the timeless silence, a quietness in which you might hear a drowsy lizard scratching behind his ear out in the dark forest. I have stood in reverent awe and humility in the wonder of a majestic forest cathedral at dawn and marveled at the magnificence of God's sunlight beaming powerfully down through the miasma of early morning fog and shadows.

For this is never-never land that you walk through slowly. The essence of Gulf Hammock is a delicate nuance of light and shadows, the murmur of quiet little sounds in the soft twilight, a feeling that here is a place of great age; you subconsciously expect a shaggy monster with big tusks to come walking out of one of those swamps and maybe that, too, is a racial memory.

You can know the healing peace of relaxing under the shelter of a ranshackle hunting camp deep in the tall forest and hearing the first slow rain of autumn on the dry fallen leaves. Yes, you really can go into that place and know the same tranquility that I have known, but only if you leave everything else behind, out of your mind for the nonce. Just go alone, stand quietly there, and the magic will come to you gently.

When Mr. William Watson was a lad in high school he would tell me in all seriousness that Gulf Hammock was the best place in the world. At the time, William had never been anywhere else, but over the years I have come to realize that he knew what he was talking about. Levy County has some interesting and wonderful places, but if I had to designate the Garden Spot, it would be Gulf Hammock.

Well, actually, lizards don't scratch behind their ears, drowsy or otherwise. In the first place their scratchers are too short, in the second place they do not have external ears. I thought I had better explain this as some persons interpret everything literally or else fail to understand the Levy County sense of humor.

LAZY DAY ON THE SUWANNEE

Sometimes the Suwannee water level gets so low that its only current comes from the springs flowing into it. This happens infrequently but when it does get that low the water becomes clearer than usual and you can see the bottom at unexpected depths. On a rare day in late September in the 1950's I was dawdling around the Old Town area in a small outboard.

I read somewhere that Old Town was originally an Indian Village on the banks of the Suwannee and that the Seminole chief Osceola was an eight year old native of that village when General Jackson and his troops burned the place out in 1818. At the time Florida still belonged to Spain and Old Town was headquarters for an assortment of adventurers, fugitives, brigands and other desperate types who would cross the U.S. border into Georgia to loot and pillage, then scurry back across the border into the sanctuary of a foreign country. Seems they had a profitable business going until General Jackson arrived on the scene. I have never succeeded in locating the exact site of the original Old Town.

The railroad bridge is a turn-table type of navigation bridge designed to open for the passage of steamboats. It has been almost seventy years (in 1977) since a steamboat showed up there requiring the bridge to be opened, but there the old bridge sits, all equipped and ready for business in case one does appear. On the downstream side was a sign giving information on how to get the bridge opened if you wished to get your steamboat through. Five days advance notice was demanded and the bridge tender's address was given. He lived in Ocala. On this day in 1958 a red lensed navigation lantern made of brass was still mounted there, it has since been stolen by some scavenger of antiques.

Just below the bridge on the Dixie County side is the wreck of the City of Hawkinsville. I had never before seen so much of its hull showing above the surface, so I tied my boat to one of its ribs and actually walked on the deck of the old wreck. Its stern slants downward as the hull lies on the bottom at an angle to the shoreline.

Back in the boat, I drifted over the submerged part and was impressed with how big the old hulk is.

About where the boiler should have been I saw a great hole with twisted pipes and jagged pieces of metal sticking up. It must have exploded. Further toward the stern, the drive cylinder of one of the twin engines was visible about four feet under the water. I stuck a paddle down and tapped on its surface. I could see the other engine on the lower side down deep. At the stern, so much drifting debris had collected that I was unable to see the big drive wheel. It probably disintegrated long ago. A few days later Mr. Claude Crapps of Bronson told me that he remembered shipping turpentine out on the City of Hawkinsville in 1907. The steamboat was named for Hawkinsville, Georgia.

About two months later when the water was a little higher I was back on the river with Frank McKoy in the area between Fowlers Bluff and Manatee Springs. We paused at a large shallow area in the river known as Jack's Sandbar. Spikes of dead grass showed above the surface. The river had been low enough for Jack's Sanbar to stick out long enough to grow a crop of grass. That was almost twenty years ago and I have never seen that happen again. It is to wonder who Jack was and how he got a sandbar named after him. Destiny can move in devious ways to establish one's very own immortal niche in history, as we may see in the case of this mysterious Jack.

FLORIDA POST 236

This is March 5, 1977 and we have converged upon the American Legion Post in Williston, the occasion being a Saturday night fish fry. The sun is already low. On the way over here, I noticed that in the Wolfe Spring Hill area the scrub oaks are showing the first green buds of spring after the coldest winter here for many years. I could see the first thermal thunderhead sticking up over the horizon in the direction of Ervin, Florida.

Dick Garner, Bobby Williams, and A.D. Courtney are starting to fry the mullet. This is an outside operation, I sit in a camp chair as I write this. Edward Lee Barton arrives and assists with the cooking. L.L. Adamson and A.L. Brooks are here now, I can tell that they are wondering what I am writing. Mrs. Wall of the Auxiliary arrives, she is the widow of Dr. W.C. Wall, a dentist who died in 1965. He was a World War I veteran. She has been a Legion Auxiliary member for fifty years and was a charter member of the Dunnellon Post Auxiliary. Fannie Lewis, president of the Williston Post Auxiliary arrives. Bobby Williams is Legion Post Commander here.

Now the sun is almost down. Bill Craig from Bronson arrives, he was a charter member of the first Legion Post ever organized, and that was in Paris, France, in 1918. With him is his son-in-law, Harry C. Reid, a member of VFW Post 5625 in Chiefland. A staunch member of this Post, T.K. Gardner, is absent, still sick, the others tell me.

The men cook the fish and talk in casual tones of relatives, local happenings, people they know. The voices are subdued in the twilight, the actual words are rather ordinary, but I can sense the undercurrent of a common bond that runs deep, a thing that is not said but rather, felt, and each man knows that the thing exists.

It seems so long ago now. We were children of the Great Depression, we had not quite had time enough to finish growing up and there we were rushing off to World War II. We were so young, some of those dear grayhaired ladies of the Auxiliary inside that building right now arranging the tables were married to some of us then and they were young, trim, vibrant, alive. Some of them stood crying alone

as we rode off to war and left them there. The agony and the trauma left scars within us for all time. Some of us never came back.

And that is the common bond among the people here tonight, the thing that is felt but never expressed in spoken words. But enough of the sad time.

Bobby Williams has just announced that A.D. Courtney is the "king of hushpuppy cookers". Ed Barton is frying the mullet. The sunset is fading and the first shadows of dusk have moved in. County Commissioner Billy Butler arrives, post adjutant Harold Baker greets the rest of us. Barton, Courtney and Garner are still operating the deep fat fryers. It is now the hour that country types call "first dark".

I am now inside talking with Marlene Butler. Bobby Williams calls Mr. Courtney up front and presents him with a lifetime certificate of honorary membership in this Post. Now I am talking with Marion C. Williams. Melvin Courtney is our youngest member and today is the fifty-ninth anniversary of the American Legion. He is a Vietnam veteran. Vernon Griffin is here, a charming lady with a boy's name. She is the widow of Eddie Griffin. The sadness is inescapable for a moment, to see Kathleen Wheeler here for the first time without Orville. He was a good friend.

We are eating the mullet. Sitting across from me is Doris Cox Baker and her husband, Harold. My friend Winston McDonnell has arrived, late as usual. He is the nephew of Herman and Carl Wellman, also the grandson of Conrad Wellman, well known Bronson resident during the late 1800's. I am talking to Margaret Griffin who taught second grade at Williston during the years I taught biology at Bronson. Like me, she is retired. Mrs. Reid and Mrs. Craig from Bronson are here.

The people are slowly milling around in small groups talking softly. Some of us are sitting outside again in the springtime night. Issora Courtney comes by telling me not to write anything about her. Two of the old comrades are re-living their adventures in the wars of long ago, a thing that I never do. Most of the people have gone now, a few of the women are still inside cleaning up with the deftness and skill with

which they go about doing their part of these affairs. Night has come and the place is settling down to the quiet level of its usual state of being deserted until the old comrades come back again, the ones that are left. One by one, they fade away.



The Hotel Dr. Young in Cedar Key, winter of 1894-95. This legend is written on the original picture.
Officers of Orphanage

Dr. W.M. Young, propieter & medical director
Wilson Davis, water carrier
H.H. Kuerland, wood carrier
A.W. Price, steward, born 1872
Ed W. Hurst, first dishwasher
Sol Perkins, second dishwasher
George Washington, mascot
Stonewall Jackson, mascot

SHELL MOUND

When autumn comes, I must return to Shell Mound by the sea, for me it is a pilgrimage. Something is there, different from any other place I have ever experienced. This was in 1967.

An offshore wind moved the marsh grass and stunted mangrove trees. They cling precariously to existence here, this is about as far north as they can survive along the Gulf shore. Two palm trees made a loud dry sound in the wind and behind them was the whistling moan of some pine trees. Little choppy waves splashed on the sand and beat a tattoo of hollow sounds against the hull of an old boat. I sat still in the September sunshine and listened to the song of the wind with its many voices. The late afternoon light danced on the wave tops with hard points of brilliant light. The sky was a vast space as only the sky at the edge of the sea can be.

To the north, two distant thunderhead tops reared above the horizon. The sunlight was bright and the shadows were dark and the shadows were cool, the wind song was all around. I could hear the distant voices of two small children in bursts of happy laughter as they played by the shore. The wind was cool, whispered of faraway places across the water, of great lonely reaches of the vast sea. In September by the sea, the wind sings a sad song with all of its many voices, the people passing by seemed to sense this, they talked in subdued tones and moved slowly.

The sunset came and a star was there. You don't see it appear, you notice at one specific moment that the star is there. Then more stars become visible while the western horizon still flamed

and glowed as the sunset changed and faded. I thought that this sunset has never happened before and now it is forever gone while I have been the silent witness to a unique instant in all of eternity.

As the night came upon us I saw the moon was there in less than its half phase and more than its quarter. And as darkness came and hovered around our tiny fire, the wind still moved, but the wind moved softly now. The two thunderheads remained in place, marking their presence by random flickers of lightning and they were too far away for the thunder to be heard. We slowly went away, leaving never-never land to the fiddler crabs, the night birds, and the gentle wind. Come September, I must go there again.

Now this is a good way to start the first day of November, 1973, sitting here on the Shell Mound causeway in the sunshine. Last night the wind blew and rain beat against our camper but now the front has gone past, the air is washed clear so that the colors are sharp and the shady places are deep shadows. We have just now finished off some eggs, toast, smoked bacon and some of Ida Moring's homemade grape jelly that she gave us.

I am looking at some low bushy trees that hang out over the causeway canal, very heavily loaded with little greenish-white puff balls, either blooms or seedpods, and clinging to them is a convention of monarch butterflies. One of them will become bored with his immediate neighbors, flutter around and select a new place on the bush to cling to. That is all the action I am seeing from them, they just cling. Two men have arrived to launch an airboat, their truck has an Alachua County tag. This wind has developed the cold bite of November so I am pulling my jacket hood over my head, the natural insulation up there grows steadily less. Some local citizen has his mullet boats loaded with nets tied up here in the canal. The airboat engine's drone is growing faint in the distance toward Deer Island.

This is Shell Mound, its human history goes back thousands of years, from the early wild people who were part of nature in the way they lived, to the frontier Caucasians and their houses. The primitive ones buried their dead on an island over there, their bones and pottery fragments do not fit into any classifications of known Florida Indian cultures. The Caucasians who once lived around here buried their dead at Shiloh and Cedar Key. The actual mound of shells is located on a peninsula, covers three to four acres and is about forty feet above the original land surface. Another mound is on a nearby island. It must have taken thousands of Indians thousands of years to eat enough clams and oysters to accumulate something the size of that hill of shells.

Now, no one lives here. The Indian village disappeared something like a thousand years ago, other Indians would have occupied the site at times on a nomadic basis. The Caucasians lived here a

hundred years, more or less; they even had a school here. Today, the place is wild with expanses of needlegrass marsh, stretches of open water, oyster reefs, mud flats, wooded islands, and the great space of open sky of an almost impossible deep blue. The air is clean, pure, the sounds of wild nature are all around. I hear a cricket chirping in a tangle of grass on the canal bank, its ancestors were probably chirping here thousands of years ago in the time of the wild people. A kingfisher with his crazy-shaped head flew through just now.

That great marsh of grass that reaches far inland must have once been an open bay of sparkling water. Yes, this is the optimum place to spend the first day of November. Mankind's rather foolish civilization is happening somewhere else and this place makes more sense in the cosmos than cities do. I hope it stays like it is a long time into the future as it has been a long time into the past.



A twisted old cedar where the Withlacoochee River meets the Gulf. That elderly fisherman wearing aloha shorts perched on one of those rocks.

WILLIAMS LANDING

Mr. Will Yearty told me about the place now known as the Waccasassa Marina in about 1962, I took notes, and this account is largely based on what he told me. The place is about five miles upstream from the mouth of the river which runs into the Waccasassa Bay, a configuration of the west Gulf Coast. The marina is on the north side of the river.

It was first known as Townsend Landing in 1908 when the Tillghman Cypress Company had a mill at Lukens, Florida. Lukens is an extinct town which existed for awhile in the area where State Road 24 leaves the mainland going into Cedar Key. Back at the Townsend Landing, cypress logs were floated to the landing and built into rafts to be towed around to Lukens. Thomas O. Townsend contracted for the rafting and had a work camp there, a collection of sheds and shacks with palmetto thatched roofs. Townsend had a road cut leading into the hammock from the Burns Landing, which is about a mile downstream and also on the north side of the river.

Lonnie Williams later bought eighty acres immediately upstream from Townsend's Landing, then his brother Ed Williams bought eighty acres joining Lonnie's property. Ed later sold out to Oscar Berryhill. Then a Mr. Shannon of Gainesville bought forty acres south and west of Mr. Berryhill and the two of them asked the county to maintain a passable road into their property. By this time the public was camping there for fishing, hunting and just plain camping. Mr. Will Yearty was foreman of the road cutting and building crew. This was one of President F.D. Roosevelt's early depression recovery projects, the Federal Economic Recovery Act, a forerunner of the Works Progress Administration, both referred to at the time as FERA and WPA. This road is the Checking Station Grade which goes north toward Otter Creek. U.S. 19 came through Bronson at the time.

Mr. Berryhill started an attempt to get Mrs. Lonnie Williams (Lonnie had apparently died) to donate one acre to the cause but before he could close out the deal, she sold the land to her son Guy Williams, a railroad conductor living at Archer. He dug the first canal, a much smaller structure than the present canal.

Sometime during the 1960's the county bought three acres from the Patterson-McInnis Lumber Company and this tract includes the original Townsend Landing. The county built a picnic park and launching ramp there and has subsequently turned the property over to the state for use as headquarters for the crew administering to the state property out on the Gulf Coast, the Waccasassa Bay State Preserve.

I lose track of the sequence of fishcamp operators at Williams Landing but a Mr. Burnette ran the place once, then the property was acquired by Ralph White and Associates of Eustis. Ralph's brother Eddie White ran the place for five years, then a friendly and affable couple named Rose and Doug Cosey took it over in 1971. She is a native of east Texas and he grew up around Butler, Georgia.

Today, the Waccasassa Marina is an active recreational center for outdoor types from all over this side of the state. The marina operates an attractive and well equipped campground for RV rigs and tent campers, also has motel units and boats for rent. A few residents live there permanently, like the Turners, and others maintain camps or vacation homes. The place really jumps at the start of hunting season.

This area and the river is of significant importance in the very earliest development of this side of Central Florida. Buck Greene did some SCUBA diving in the river not many years ago. He found some really old artifacts along the bottom which indicates the presence of people and a notable level of activity during frontier times. Farris Goodbread and I turned over a small boulder in the river bottom at Burns Landing many years ago and found fragments of Indian pottery underneath. Another friend was along but I don't remember who he was, it may have been Buck Greene.

When Mr. John Yearty was a county commissioner he was instrumental in getting a paved road built coming into the landing, the Waccasassa Marina. A lot of people visit that place now. I certainly treasure the happy hours that I have spent there.

SUNSET

On March 3, 1977 we landed at Horne's Restaurant in Chiefland for lunch. The day was mild, mostly sunny, and fresh with the March winds of Spring. While we waited for our orders I noticed a preponderance of elderly people among those present, particularly one table of four people, all with the snowwhite hair, pale waxy faces and slow careful movements of those who are very old. I did not find this to be morbid or depressing in the least. Then the waitress brought their food and those four white heads were bowed in prayer. They prayed, and that hit me, I thought about how fortunate I was to witness such an utterly beautiful thing as this, these four old people in simple communion with the great God of the universe to express their gratitude for what they had.

When they raised their heads I saw what they had. From those time-ravaged old faces there glowed the soft light of happiness, an unmistakable great happiness, serenity, and peace. And that must be the Eldorado of this mortal sojourn, the rainbow's end for which we search.

My old friend Morris Moody entered, greeted

us, and thus he, too, got himself recorded here to become a part of this history as it happened.

Then a huge streamlined bus stopped out front with a hiss of its air brakes and from it emerged exactly forty seven more old geezers. On the front of the bus was printed the legend Gray Goose. Their faces showed something of that same happy glow. The cooks and waitresses eyed their arrival with a kind of stoic apprehension, this meant a sudden load of work and scurrying around for them.

On our way out I engaged one of the bus passengers in conversation and learned that they were all Canadians, from Manitoba. The four old ones were gone from their table now, I missed their departure, but I will long remember the four white heads bowed in prayer. With their feeble old bodies so obviously worn out they must have known that the years left for them were very few, that death could not be far ahead for each of them but they were not afraid, not bitter and disillusioned. They had found the Eldorado of happiness, their faces glowed with the inner love and power of it all. They were thankful.

OTTER CREEK HOMECOMING

This was the homecoming in 1976. From Georgia, Okeechobee and diverse places over the land, the pilgrimage began; wheels rolled along the highways and stopped at Otter Creek, Florida. The people came home again, to exchange affectionate greetings, to go back in time to the old days of the good life they had known at this place and the whole thing was a curious mixture of joy and sadness. Two old men looked at each other and assured each other that neither had changed a bit while each was inwardly startled and slightly grieved to see how aged the other had become.

Memories came rushing back to many people. I remember a chubby teenager named Sue Phelps from years ago, and I could see an echo of that child in the face of this incredibly beautiful young lady who looked at me now. Her brothers Grady, Gary, and Joe were there along with their mother Thelma. She was an Ishie. The Phelps buried at Levyville was their grandfather, they had a great uncle named Robert E. Lee Phelps. I met Eddie Tynsdale whose father was Ira J. Tynsdale. John Yearty's sister Willie Mae who married Ralph Schibley was there and they still own a lot on Main Street where her late father had a big store a long time ago.

The mullet, hushpuppies, beans and swamp cabbage was gourmet food and small wonder, these people are experts of long standing and they can do this thing to perfection almost casually. I ate too much. If I had it to do over I would do the same thing again. Another outstanding characteristic of these people is the warmth of their hospitality, the way they make you feel at home although you have never lived in Otter Creek, you know that their welcome is no sham and that they really mean it.

Allie Mae and I sat in the shade in front of our camper with some of our friends. John and Willie Mae told us about the tall old stores that once lined both sides of Main Street and about how Otter Creek was for a few years the center of Levy County's commercial activity. During that time, the business transacted here constituted the largest monetary total in the county. We were sitting at the front of the lot where Thomas J. Yearty had a huge store in the 1800's, the store later purchased by Will Yearty.

After it burned, Mr. Yearty built another store.

I stood there watching the happy people mill around talking to each other and thought about how the little ghost town had erupted into life with all of them, if only for a little while. The empty shells of the few old stores left along Main Street never see so many people along the street anymore, not since the old days. You ever suspect that you might become psychic at times? As I stood among those people in the October sunshine I thought I had a brief impression of tall ghostly stores along there and a shiny new T model chugging along beside the railroad.



At the 1976 Otter Creek homecoming:
Gary Phelps, Bobby F. Hodges, Billy Butler.

SUWANNEE CATHEDRAL

The little band of people drifted in quietly to the west shore of the Suwannee and stood as if they waited for something. I was a short distance upstream sitting on the foredeck of a boat and I never knew whether they saw me or not. This was a hot Sunday afternoon in August, I had landed here to rest, to contemplate the peaceful serenity of the place, the place being Pine Landing back in the time of its original primitive state. Sitting there with my bare feet in the cool water and the white sand was a soothing experience. I could always come here and feel the tensions of the grinding hassle of work flow out and fade away. I sat very still and watched the people downstream.

Then they began to move. A man waded into the water with two little girls, they must have been ten or twelve. The three stood there looking up into the blue sky of August and the other people sang an old church song that I had heard many times before but never really listened to. This time I heard it and the poetic beauty of the old words got through to me:

*"Where bright angel feet have trod...
... with its crystal tide forever..."*

The man softly told the little girls that now they were in the act of becoming part of the others, sisters and brothers in the body of Christ. He baptized them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. I could clearly see the face of one of the little girls as he lifted her from the water. I saw the glow, the radiance, and I suddenly understood why the old artists painted the halos around the heads of holy persons. I think that this is a manifestation visible only to one of the faith; to an atheist it would be quite invisible, he would not believe that it existed.

Then the man stood in the water holding the hands of the children as he prayed. As for me, the unseen watcher, I also bowed my head in reverence. All of them left and I was alone again but I was not alone. And I was there by the river that day and saw Pine Landing transformed into a Holy Place; the sunlight slanted through the trees in straight beams amid the shadows and I knew that no man-made edifice could ever match the majesty of this cathedral of nature. A Great Presence was all around.



Otter Creek homecoming, 1976

THE WILLISTON GUNNELLS

I never knew them. Their graves are in the cemetery of the Wacahoota Methodist Church in the southeast corner of Levy County: Second Lieutenant William M. Gunnell, Co. D, 3 rd. South Carolina Infantry, Confederate States of America; Major George M. Gunnell, Co. D, 3 rd. Battalion, S.C. Inf., CSA; and David Conway Gunnell, 1864-1919. A few others are there in the same line of that family but these are the oldest.

Major George M. Gunnell seems to have moved here from South Carolina at the end of the Civil War. My own branch of the family went to Mississippi in 1810, also from South Carolina. George owned the E½ of NE¼, the SW¼ of NE¼, and the NW¼ of SE¼, all in Section 28, Township 12, Range 19. He was a country doctor. The old county maps show some kind of settlement between Williston and Raleigh apparently named after him but the name has been warped to Gunnals, a result of the Anglo-Saxon determination to change non-Anglo names by dropping one of the terminal double consonants, adding an S, and shifting the accent to the first syllable. My own family stubbornly rejected any attempt by other people to change the name, so our

name stays in its original form.

The earliest references to Dr. Gunnell in the Levy County archives that I find show his name spelled exactly like mine. His people lived around the area for almost a hundred years and the last one left died about a year before I arrived in Levy County during the early fifties. John Yearty came up with Edwin S. Gunnell who enlisted at Gainesville in April, 1862 with Company C, 7th Florida Infantry, CSA. This same Edwin also turns up as postmaster at Newnansville in 1855. I am unable to establish a connection between him and the Williston Gunnells.

That cemetery is interesting, some of the names prominent in early Levy County are there: Col. Cotton Rawls (1806-1882), Jacob Smith (1809-1874), Bascom B. Lowman (1854-1936), James Darlington Mixson (1848-1928), Job C. Smith (1854-1922). There is some indication that the Dr. G.M. Gunnell was a first cousin to my great grandfather, Nicholas Gunnell. I sometimes go there to look at their gravestones and wonder.

ISHIE DAY, 1977

The river's massive current slides by silently, the May sun is glaring down, a few puffy clouds are floating over. Most of the men are elderly, they greet each other in subdued tones. Mr. Ishie is grey-haired now, spends most of the time sitting under a picnic shed.

Almost twenty years ago, a small group of men went ashore at Fletcher Landing to fry the fish they had caught. That was the first Ishie Day, although the name came later. I happened along and remember seeing Alvin Mikell, Frank Moring, Bud Smith, Ernest Stephens, Basil May, John Yearty, and Bob Meeker. The outing became an annual event. They met on Bear Island, at David Meeks' place, at the county launching ramp at Fowlers Bluff, and in recent years at Ottis Beauchamp's place. A fishing contest was organized. On one occasion Ernest Stephens was fishing with Willie Beauchamp at the mouth of Sandfly Creek and caught the biggest bluegill Willie had ever seen. The County Commission solemnly passed a resolution officially establishing the event. In the beginning they cooked only the fish they caught but after the affair increased in size the men resorted to frying mullet.

Mr. Ishie was the courthouse custodian and county purchasing agent for many years. He was also the clown, philosopher, and advisor to many rural people who came to the courthouse with their problems. They knew Ishie, could identify with him, he spoke their language, they trusted him. He helped countless numbers of them in many ways over the years. I know Norwood F. Ishie very well, he is my neighbor. His grandfather came to Levy County about the time of the Civil War from Mississippi. I think his name was Fed Ishie. Ishie's father was named Frank. His mother was Lilla Ann Snowball, her name was pronounced Lillie. His parents were married Christmas Night, 1900, at Atsena Otie by the Rev. Joseph Boothby.

Ishie descended from a German family named Snaefelle. Through the usual process of name mutilation by immigration employees, the name came out Snowball. Ishie's great grandfather was Joseph Snowball, born in Maine, 1796. Joseph married Cynthia Woodruff, also born in Maine, 1798. Their

son Edwin, born in Maine in 1833, was Ishie's grandfather who married Charlotte Whittemore in 1866. She was born near Dahoma, Florida in 1849. This last couple's daughter, Lilla, was Ishie's mother. He married Annie Lee Cobb, granddaughter of Nicholas Cobb who was the first postmaster at Bronson, in 1859.

Back to the here and now, the fish cooking operation is underway with Dwight Bell, Robert Wallace, and Pete Watson frying the mullet, Bud Smith preparing hushpuppy mix, Pete Asbell tending the swamp cabbage. Kenny Mack from Gainesville is cleaning some bass he caught in the vicinity of Turkey Island. Min Ayers, publisher of the Gilchrist County Journal for the last forty one years, is talking to Circuit Judge Theron Yawn and Otis Bell. Ed Wasson is lighting his pipe. The men drift around in little groups in the sunlight and shade, their conversations drift across the springtime air like the slow murmur of lazy rapids in a flowing stream.

Now I see Fred Shaw approaching wearing a cowboy hat. Judge John J. Crews is talking with Luther Beauchamp. I am now greeted by Joey Johnson, president of the Bronson First Federal.

To sit in the shade by this ancient river is a cool and pleasant experience. At the edge of the swamp forest across the river are little strips of sandy beach and pockets of deep cool shadows under the trees. Along the water's edge are a few bonnet lilies and the stumps of three pilings from some dock long since gone. A clump of tightly packed little bushes grows from the rotten top of each stump.

There was once a railroad bridge across the river here. Legend has it that at some bridge on this river a steam locomotive went overboard and was not retrieved, maybe this bridge was the place. If the legend is true, the day may come when some SCUBA diver will find it. Come to think about that, there is no telling what else has gone overboard into this old river over the years and is still lying under there. Going further back, another legend places pirates here at Fowler's Bluff. Seems that somewhere upstream another river was diverted into the Suwannee about eighty years ago, and before that, the water level in the Suwannee stood much lower. At Fowler's Bluff

there were long sloping beaches where these marine brigands would tilt their ships over and do a bottom-scrape job. They are supposed to have buried some loot here. That people have done some vigorous digging in search of the loot is no legend. Just behind Norma and Toby Strickland's store are two big holes with iron beams for curbing. They are visible at low water, and at the head of Turkey Island is the hull of a barge on which the treasure hunters had a dredge. Back to the railroad bridge, it was moved to Fannin Springs to become the first highway bridge there.

Ishie starts talking now and thanks various persons for having contributed to the occasion. I think I heard him say that Eddie Richburg furnished the mullet, or some of it. Ishie is holding his traditional mock court in which he levies fines for

such offenses as wearing a tie or not wearing a tie. Now the food line has started. As usual, the hungries push their way to the front while timid types like Rex Ward and me hang back and come through last.

Now everyone has finished eating, the sun has moved into the first quadrant of afternoon, the crowd is growing smaller as the men leave. A few of them are here for the last time. An offshore wind is moving up the river, little waves are splashing and lapping on the boat hulls.

Now, in midafternoon, the crowd has gone except for Fred Shaw, Frank LaPorta, Ottis Beauchamp, and me. Billie Ray Sharp is moving out in his houseboat with Steve Barnhill aboard. And that was Ishie Day, 1977, a much needed relaxation for some of the men who came, and one of the last bastions of male chauvinism.



In Otter Creek, about the beginning of this century. Back row: Sam Townsend, --Robinson, Drew Dennison, Will Yearty. Front: Jim Maxwell, Dr. Jim Turner, --Hinton, Bonnie Page.

PINE LANDING

Pine Landing is on the Suwannee, Dixie County side, upstream from New Clay Landing about a mile. On some of the old charts it shows as Janney Landing. Bud Janney and I made a superficial attempt to research this but were unable to establish a connection with his people. Bud's grandfather had a store, postoffice, etc., back in the 1800's several miles inland from the river in Levy County. A voting precinct by the name of Janney was there until recently.

There are residence and roads all over the Pine Landing area now. We were over there March 10, 1977 on a dull rainy day, met a pleasant young couple whose name I am unable to remember at the moment. They operate a ceramics and pottery plant, told me about the Indian pottery fragments around there which I had never noticed before. We also talked with Mr. Cauley Copeland, retired Dixie County Clerk who lives part time at Pine Landing. We also encountered Zack and Edna L. Robinson; her memories of Port Inglis are appearing else where in this history.

Pine Landing was once used as a steamboat landing. I heard the legend that a ferry service was somewhere around there in the old days but have not been able to confirm that.

Back in the time when no one lived around the Landing, we camped in two boats there one night. I slept in an outboard skiff with a kind of covered wagon top over it, the others were in a larger cruiser. While they slept soundly enough, some hogs kept me awake. One of them was trying to get his nose into an empty bean can to lick out the bottom. When the can rolled down the sloping bank toward the water's edge, he chased it grunting and fussing at it. Each time he outran the can at the last moment and rooted it back up the slope, then he went through the whole cycle again. Since he kept me from going to sleep I just propped up on one elbow and watched him in the bright moonlight. Finally, he decided to just stay at the water's edge and try the licking project. He got the can jammed over his snout. There he stood waving his snout wildly in the air emitting a series of muffled wuff wuff sounds while the other hogs stood at the top of the bank loudly grunting sympathetic

advice down to the hog with the problem.

I decided to do that hog a favor and shoot the can off his nose with a handgun. The only gun I had with me was a 357 Magnum, a somewhat overpowered weapon for shooting a tin can off a hog's nose. I took careful aim and when he stood still for an instant I let go. The gun roared, the tin can disappeared, and there stood a very surprised hog with his snout still up in the air. Now a startled hog is capable of some impressive acceleration and this one shot up the bank, became momentarily airborne at the top, then he and the other hogs headed west at high speed.

I thought I would get some sleep now but I had forgotten about Allie Mae, Lessie, Frank, and our nephew Jimmy Britt in the other boat. When the gun went off, all of them jumped up and some of them banged their heads against the boat cabin top. Needless to say, I was not the camp hero around there for awhile.



The Cedar Key Docks about eighty years ago as seen from First Street. The railroad on the left went across the middle of what is now the marina basin; the stumps of its trestle were visible until the basin was dredged out.

CLYDE

Over the years I have known a number of interesting personalities around Levy County. One such person is Mr. Clyde Coulter of Cedar Key, no known relation to the pioneer Coulters of Bronson. Once upon a time (late thirties) Clyde owned a large Harley Davidson motorcycle and many are the tales of his adventures with that machine. He went roaring around with happy abandon. Just think of all the farm chickens he must have alarmed. Also during the late thirties, he drove a scheduled bus route from Cedar Key to Gainesville. Until 1974, Clyde's old bus sat atop the Diamond Salvage Company's building in Leesburg as an advertising eyecatcher. Knowing him, he probably alarmed a few chickens with the bus, too.

At another time, Clyde worked as captain of a yacht which belonged to a corporation. During the winter season he would bring the yacht around to Cedar Key and stay there when the corporation executives were not using the craft. Clyde would load some of his friends aboard for deep sea fishing expeditions. Upon returning, he would heel the yacht around in a turn and steer it toward a slip, or space between two elongated docks (finger piers). Clyde

would surreptitiously cut the engines to idle, then shift them into reverse. The heavy yacht would keep coming in fast by its own momentum, throwing up an impressive bow wave, headed straight for the concrete seawall.

On that seawall, an assortment of relaxed people suddenly realized that they were about to witness the biggest crash in Cedar Key's history; not only that, they were standing right in the middle of it. Some fast footwork would promptly take place. Meanwhile, in the wheel house, Clyde is telling jokes, waving his hands around, apparently looking everywhere except where the yacht is headed. Just before the impending crash, he would let in the clutches, yank both throttles, the diesels would roar, the yacht's bow would come down, and there sat the big craft, stopped, with the nose gently bobbing up and down within four feet of the seawall. At this point, Clyde's face would be stuck out an open window, gaping in astonishment at all the scurrying tourists. I like to imagine the stories they told back home about almost being run over by a yacht piloted by this character in Cedar Key, Florida.

GULF HAMMOCK, FALL OF 1976

Early in the morning, I am stretched out on the dewy grass at the canal entrance off the Waccasassa River; I am watching the snout and knobby eyes of an alligator gliding silently upstream leaving ripples in his wake. The brown-clear water of the river is a glassy mirror reflecting the trees and shadows. An exuberant mullet jumps out of the canal water three times, and for a few seconds he is flying with his tail fins buzzing. It is to wonder if a mullet has an urge to fly and that's why he jumps into the air. After all, he does have a gizzard in common with birds. Years ago, my friend the late Al Arrington and I were underwater at the mouth of Manatee Run watching a school of mullet feeding on the bottom much like a herd of cows. One of them would suddenly detach himself from the herd and go jump out of the water; nothing was chasing him, he was just a happy mullet. Back to the Waccasassa, the tide is coming in so that the river current is at a standstill, and so is the flow of time at this quiet place. You can see the reflections in the water and the reflections in your own soul if you linger here.

The trailbike mutters slowly along the deserted highway from the Waccasassa Marina through this September afternoon. I cross the Wekiva Run and a pocket of cool air hovers there. At the big highway, some wondering little kids are climbing over the old locomotive in the roadside park. I head north at fifty and the little engine screams, that's the best it can do. Off the highway at the Waccasassa Bridge heading west on the Buck Island grade and it's a slow, quiet world again. I pause at the crossroads and look at the shuttered old checking station with a nostalgic recall of the days when this was a center of activity during hunting season. I turn left down the Williams Landing grade to what we used to call MacMillan Bridge where a slow creek comes out of the swamp. Among the ferns growing out of the mud, a bright red spike of flowers is a vivid splash of color. The feeding small fish in the reeds make little popping sounds, a yearling bass strikes heavily. Rolling on to the Marina, I encounter two pickup trucks and they swing wide to give the trailbike passing room, their refreshing courtesy is the best experience of the whole ride.

Back at the Marina, the weekend sportsmen are

loading out their boats, going home to the old Monday morning grind, going reluctantly. One man gazes thoughtfully at Doug's collection of river bottom relics, he takes a last wistful look at the canal and the river and walks with a somber expression to his car where his wife has been watching him, and in her eyes I can see the sympathy she feels. She knows what he is thinking and so do I, for I have been there where he is many times, regretting that this glorious escape into never-never land has ended and that is a sad thing; tomorrow I will be in another world, so I take one last look at the water, that piling with the frayed rope around it, and I will carry the memory of that last look with me like an oyster trapping seawater inside itself during ebttide. And I drive away slowly with the hopeless wish that I could just stay here in never-never land forever. That's what the man thought about.



MUSEUM AT CEDAR KEY

In 1975 I spent an afternoon looking carefully at the exhibits in the State Park Muesum there. If you go slowly and think about what you are seeing, there really is a lot of material. That was also the last time I ever saw my friend Nolan Cannon, he worked there and has since passed on.

Cedar Keys (the island group) is known to have been charted by a Dutch engineer named Bernard Romans in 1773, he did the survey for the British government. Judge Augustus Steele established a summer residence on Atsena Otie in 1843, a matter of record. What is not recorded but what I believe is that the area was settled some years before that, probably dating back into Spanish times, although this settlement may have been of a tenuous nature at times. To put it another way, people were probably living around there more than fifty years before Judge Steele built his house. Until someone can document a different approach I will continue to think so. Incidentally, Judge Steele owned a spread of land along the road from Levyville to Number Four, so that was probably the location of his main residence.

Seahorse lighthouse was built in 1855 by Lieutenant George C. Meade, the same man who was destined to lead the army of the Potomac at the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863. By then he was a general. Colonel William J. North issued a proclamation from Atsena Otie August 14, 1842 declaring the second Seminole War to be at an end. Cedar Keys was selected by the Surgeon General as a military hospital in 1855.

One exhibit states that the railroad was incorporated January 8, 1853, construction began in 1855 and was completed in 1861, this being the railroad from Fernandino Beach across the state to Cedar Key. That does not jibe with some other sources which indicate the right-of-way survey starting in 1848 and the trains rolling in 1858. I get the overall impression that the first train reached Cedar Key in late 1859. The original dock was constructed so that the freight cars could get close enough to the sailing ships and steamers for loading and unloading. The tracks looped out through the dock. There was no roadway for other vehicles. The

museum has a neatly built diorama of the railroad dock as it would have been in the cotton shipping days. The diorama does not show all of the warehouses and fishhouses that actually were along the dock but enough is there so that you can get the feel of it.

During the Civil War, the USS Hatteras raided the area, captured the town (which was not defended), destroyed the depot, telegraph office and a turpentine warehouse on Way Key. No Confederate military forces were there. One Federal ship used in the blockade of Cedar Key was the Santiago De Cuba, a side-wheel steamer. In October of 1862 a landing party from the USS Somerset destroyed 50 to 60 boilers at Number Four (sometimes called Station Four). Each boiler could produce 150 bushels of salt per day. Salt sold for \$1.00 a pound.

On February 8, 1865, four hundred Federal troops went inland looting and burning as they went. On February 13, Captain John J. Dickinson's Calvary Unit engaged the invaders in a short skirmish and chased them back into Cedar Key. If I may interrupt myself for a short commentary here, do you see where any of these activities had even a remote relevance to doing away with the institution of slavery?

In 1855, Eberhard Faber began to acquire land to furnish the cedar timber to supply his projected pencil factories. The cedar industry reached its peak from 1885 to 1888 and was practically gone by 1900. From the Cedar Key Telegraph of April 7, 1860 one can read some famous last words,

"The Suwannee River is inexhaustible in its timber resources and timber from up the river can be brought to the mills with very little trouble."

Now we know differently. The developers moved in to exploit the natural resources to depletion, took their loot and departed, leaving nothing but devastation behind them. The irony is that their arrival was welcomed with open arms. None of the pencil manufacturing fortunes were left behind in Cedar Key.

From 1870 to 1895, 28 registered vessels, 28 to 82 feet, were built in Cedar Keys. The Annie, a 45

foot sloop, was built here in 1892. The Florida State Journal, "largest paper in the state, J. Ira Gore, proprietor," was published in Cedar Key and carried an ad for the Suwannee House, season of 1883-84. R.H. McIlvaine was that hotel's proprietor and M.H. Beane was manager. C.B. Rogers and Company were advertising their general merchandise store at the corner of Second and C Streets. Incidentally, these Cedar Key streets have had their present names since 1855; the recorded plat of the town dated that year is still on file at the courthouse in Bronson. How it survived the Civil War is anyone's guess. Back to the old newspaper, T.L. Carter was proprietor of the Magnolia House; I doubt that he was one of the Levyville Carters. There was an ad by D. Graham, "practical watch and chronometer maker and wholesale jeweler". The D. stood for David and his son was the "D. Graham, Jeweler" in Bronson about the same time period. The Bronson Graham's son was the late Malcome Graham, onetime Levy County Tax Collector. An ad is also displayed for N. Wooldridge, druggist and apothecary.

J.O. Andrews and Company advertised "furnishing goods", an old term referring to the basic necessities of life sold on credit until the customer could harvest a crop of something, cut enough timber, or catch enough mullet to pay up his account. F.S. Gore was a book and stationery dealer, Parsons and Hale sold dry goods and hardware. During these years, lawsuits were occasionally filed wherein one of the merchants sought to foreclose on some old fellow's steamboat for nonpayment of his "furnished" account. A few of these old records are still in the archives. The oldest church in Cedar Key was the Christ Episcopal, dating from 1868. Public School No. 2 provided elementary education in 1883.

While I do not know who did the research for the Museum's displays, and while I do view a few of the details with skepticism as to validity, still there is much to see and learn there, much more than has been presented in this once-over-lightly view. If you go there and take your time, the feel of the old days will get through to you and you will have a deeper understanding of Cedar Key.



Mr. St. Clair Whitman (1868-1959) of Cedar Key. The car is a Chevrolet of about 1926 vintage, the picture was made about 1950.

DUST

When we were very young we were blissfully ignorant of the transitory nature of life, the culture, all of the things we knew at any given moment of existence. We did not realize that it would all change, grow dim, fade and vanish into history. Maybe it was for the best that we did not know.

The little kid rides a school bus, knows the other children, the driver, his teacher; that is the whole horizon of his daytime world. For him time passes slowly and this has been his horizon for something like an eternity. One day out in the future, he will try to remember the other little faces, the happy treble voices, the bright laughter and songs of his childhood, he will wonder where his beloved teacher is buried. Deep in his soul he will be bewildered and grieved because then he will know how precious was that world of his childhood, now so elusive and far away. If the spirit of the little boy still exists submerged in the consciousness of the man, then the man has depth of character, he is a human being of completeness. If the little boy faded when his world passed into history, then the man will be

shallow, pathetic; he will be what I call a cardboard person. For we must touch and taste the life trail we follow, savor every moment of it and this is an urgent thing.

A hundred years ago, a settlement road ran south of Chunky Pond near Bronson and along this road many people lived. They fought, loved, despised, helped each other, indulged in the foibles and frailties characteristic of the people of that time and place. Most of them cultivated citrus groves, some had commercial grape vineyards, they dug ditches to drain isolated ponds and plant the rich muck bottoms. They passed and repassed, sat up all night with a sick neighbor, played the violins and danced, knew who was pregnant and who was "running around". This was a whole culture that existed for a time along that road. When I came to Levy County twenty three years ago, not one person lived along that road; it was silent and deserted. And some of the people who once lived along that road have so completely vanished that not one person alive today in Levy County knows that they ever lived there or who they were. Nothing was left but the dust of the road.

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA



3 1262 09770 9884