

Search For Yesterday

A History of Levy County, Florida



Chapter Nine



The High Sheriff

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Shirley Hiers, Evelyn Drummond, Sheriff J. W. Turner viewing a moonshine still at Raleigh, Fla., 1957.

Introduction

By S. E. Gunnell

That title, the High Sheriff, comes across hundreds of years from medieval England, the time of Chaucer. I remember hearing it in the conversations of elderly persons around the rural area of my own childhood. Even now, if you find the right people, the right time and place, and if you listen carefully and unobtrusively, you might still hear a reference to "the High Sheriff, himself". You will have heard a semantical fossil still surviving in the spoken language.

We present here a collection of experiences and memories assembled by the present sheriff of Levy County and three ex-sheriffs. This is their chapter, they wrote it, and they have earned this place in the County's history. They have written not so much of themselves as they have of the people whom they served. They have witnessed the human comedy, tragedy, the ludicrous events, the seamy and disgusting aspects of human behavior. They also met a few heroes, some honest people, some kind souls, and these were at times necessary to bolster their own concept of humanity.

The county sheriff has something in common with school teachers and ministers in that he gives of himself to the people. He also faces the same irrational guff and flak. Of all the elected county officials, the sheriff is invariably the first target of criticism, deserved or not, after he takes his oath of office. He soon finds that he is in the position of being a martyr sacrificed upon the altar of public service.

The following list of Levy County Sheriffs is complete from the county's origin in 1845. It was assembled mostly by J. W. Turner, completed by Pat Hartley, and made available by Horace Moody. As to the writers of this chapter, even though they have their own faults and failures as do the rest of us, I sincerely believe that each man did his best as sheriff.

J. J. Mixson	1883-85	W. D. Andrews	1845-47
W. H. Bigham	1885-95	Robert Waterson	1847
E. H. Lambert	1895-97	E. A. Weeks	1848-49
H. S. Sutton	1897-03	R. W. Randall	1852-53
E. Walker	1903-25	Robert Waterson	1854-55
L. L. Johns	1925-29	J. F. Prevatt	1855-63
W. B. Whiddon	1929-44	L. J. Hogans	1866-67
J. W. Turner, Jr.	1944-45	G. W. Hodge	1873-75
George T. Robbins	1945-55	F. B. Faintuno	1875-77
Fred Moring	1955-56	H. Porter Jackson	1877-80
J. W. Turner, Jr.	1956-64	W. D. Finlayson	1880
Pat Hartley	1965-77	J. S. Parker	1881-83
Horace Moody	1977		

Dedication



J. Min Ayers

Mr. J. Min Ayers was born in Rosewood and grew up in Bronson. He started his journalism career at about the age of twelve, working for Mr. R. B. Child of the Levy County Journal. After a few years with the Journal, he took over the Gilchrist County Journal at Trenton and has published that paper over a period of forty-three years. He was Levy County's state senator about thirty years ago.

Mr. Ayers' printing company prints and binds these chapters of Search For Yesterday and he is an enthusiastic supporter and effective promoter of the publication. This Chapter Nine is dedicated to him. The Levy County Archives Committee acknowledges with grateful appreciation the efforts exerted in behalf of this history by Mr. Ayers and his staff.

Norma Hutson
Norene Andrews

Resha Hudson
Lindon Lindsey

Jean Cooper
Kathryn Harris

S. E. Gunnell
Iris Garner



**G. T. Robbins of Bronson when he was Sheriff of Levy County.
Mr. Robbins is one of the writers of this chapter.**

SOME HIGHLIGHTS

From Ten Years As The High Sheriff Of Levy County

By G. T. Robbins

I came to Levy County as a member of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp that was in Bronson on the old county fairgrounds in 1933. After getting out of there I courted a beautiful school teacher and finally, on June 4, 1938, we joined hands in wedlock and remained so ever since. I got into the poultry business, producing eggs, baby chicks, and fryers. During that time I became interested in law enforcement. I gained some experience working as night policeman in Williston substituting for Chief P. L. Wiggins when he was out on sick leave or vacation, or when anything special was happening in Williston. The Chief's policy was to treat others as he would like to be treated.

During my poultry venture, Walter B. Whiddon, the High Sheriff, offered to hire me as a deputy for \$60 a month. During the 1944 campaign I worked in behalf of Millard F. Caldwell for governor. He was elected. During that campaign I heard Sheriff Whiddon make his last political speech. This was his speech.

"Hello, folks. This is your sheriff, Walter B. Whiddon. All these other fellows running for sheriff have been yelling about what all they would do if they get elected. Now, you folks here in Levy County don't actually need no sheriff and that's the reason you are going to reelect me. Thank you."

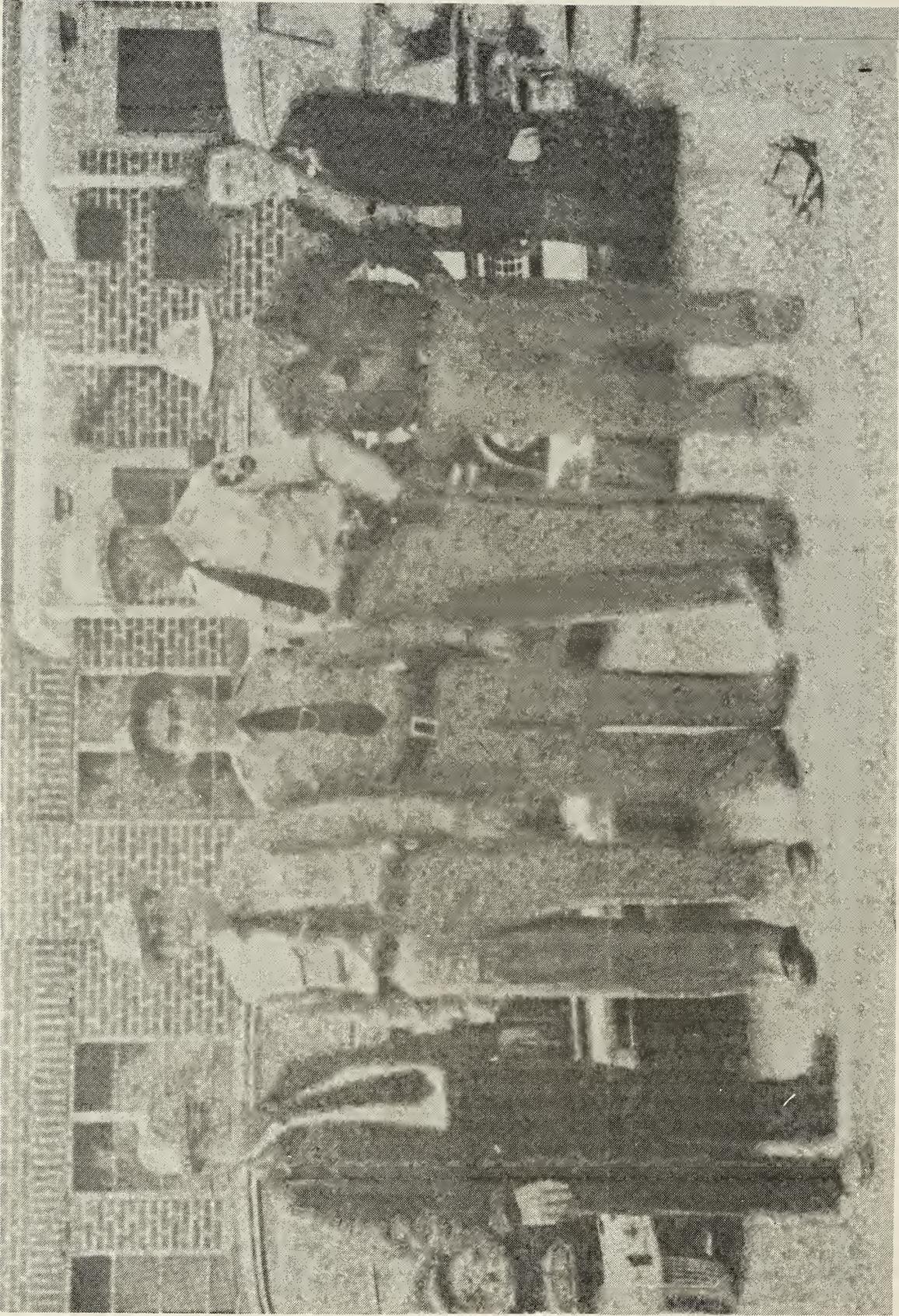
And he sat down. The crowd roared, applauded, and reelected him. He beat all eight opponents.

During July of 1942 two men escaped from Chattahoochee and got to Bronson where they were given a ride by a salesman named K. D. Shores. Before they got to Williston one of the men killed Mr. Shores. They dumped his body between Williston and Montbrook near the little Bob Brooks house on a side road. The two men and a woman with them took the dead man's car, money, and identification cards and headed for Lakeland. After the body was discovered, a state detective named W. D. Bush entered the case. He knew the

reputation of one of the men and where he was from. Perry Acree had been sent to Chattahoochee for killing a policeman in Lakeland. Bush captured the fugitives and returned them to Levy County. W. F. Anderson was appointed to defend Acree. The other man turned state's evidence. Acree decided to feign insanity. During his insanity hearing, he jumped upon the big table around which the hearing was convened and lowered his pants as if he were going to the bathroom. The circuit judge ordered him to be handcuffed. Then Acree beat his face and head with the cuffs until his face was all bloody. The judge ordered additional restraints. Perry Acree became angry. He called the judge a "squint-eyed SOB", then turned on the state's attorney, T. E. Duncan, and called him a "cooter-faced SOB". Duncan later said that when he got home he studied himself in the mirror and the longer he looked the more he became convinced that he did indeed resemble a turtle.

The trial lasted several days. Acree dismissed his lawyer and defended himself except for motions and appeals. The jury found him guilty of murder in the first degree and the judge sentenced him to be executed. His lawyer appealed all the way to the State Supreme Court. On November 22, 1943 at 9:22 AM, Perry Acree was electrocuted for cold-bloodedly murdering the man who had tried to help him by giving him a ride along the highway. I was invited to witness this electrocution but I was too busy with my chicken business.

During my poultry years I had the privilege of knowing Mr. Bob Walker who had been sheriff for a long time, about twenty-two years, I think. The Walkers lived in the B. O. Smith house now owned by Mrs. Rilla White. After being defeated as sheriff, Mr. Walker got a job as Quarters Boss at Gulf Hammock and she ran a boarding house. Then they moved back to Bronson. Mr. Walker would stroll over to the old Seaboard Depot and sit on the freight platform in the sun. I stopped by to talk with him whenever I had a chance. He was a



Fred Moring (left) was appointed sheriff in 1956. His department staff was Willard Hardee, Ray Burnett, H. A. Perkins, Jim Wilkerson, and Evelyn Drummond.

very interesting person.

His most famous case was while he was a deputy under Cap Sutton. Two men went to the Britt Lewis home and shot Mr. Lewis while he was sitting in a rocking chair in the hall of his house. Mrs. Lewis ran out to see what was going on and they shot her too. Both were killed. This was on August 29, 1902. The two men then took the Lewis safe out to the smokehouse and broke it open. They got the whole amount of one twenty dollar gold coin. Deputy Walker knew about where the two would go to hide out. He brought them in singlehandedly. Their trial was conducted rather hurriedly as the sheriff and court were apprehensive of a lynch mob being formed. They were executed by hanging on Sept. 29, 1902.

Not long after this, Cap Sutton resigned and Bob Walker was appointed to fill the unexpired term as sheriff. He served as sheriff for twenty-two years. From the accounts given by the old timers who knew him, Sheriff Bob Walker was a fine and honorable officer of the law. L. L. Johns ran against him and was elected. When Mr. Walker found out that he had lost, he promptly resigned. He said that the people had indicated that they no longer wanted him so he would get out of the way right then. I knew Sheriff L. L. Johns quite well. He was a sporty dude given to wearing cowboy boots and tremendous western hats along with two guns in fast-draw holsters. After he was defeated for reelection he and his wife Zelma ran a store in a wooden building where White's Grocery is now. When the Whites moved to Bronson they bought out the Johns Store. The Johns couple moved to Zephyrhills. Each hunting season, L. L. DeBuck Johns would drive a horse-drawn Hoover wagon back to Bronson. He and Percy L. Fender would load supplies and go to the hunting woods where they would spend long periods of time. Both of them enjoyed these temporary returns to the frontier life of the old days. Mr. Johns really loved Levy County and its people. He did not want to leave here.

On November 19, 1944, the night before hunting season was to open the next day, Sheriff Whiddon was planning on a big hunting expedition the next day. He died that night. Governor Spessard Holland appointed J. W. Turner as sheriff to finish the unexpired term. When Millard F. Caldwell went into office as governor he appointed me, G. T. Robbins of Bronson, also known locally as the Chicken Man, to take office as sheriff as of Thursday, February 1, 1945. On the Saturday night before that date, Deputy Hagood

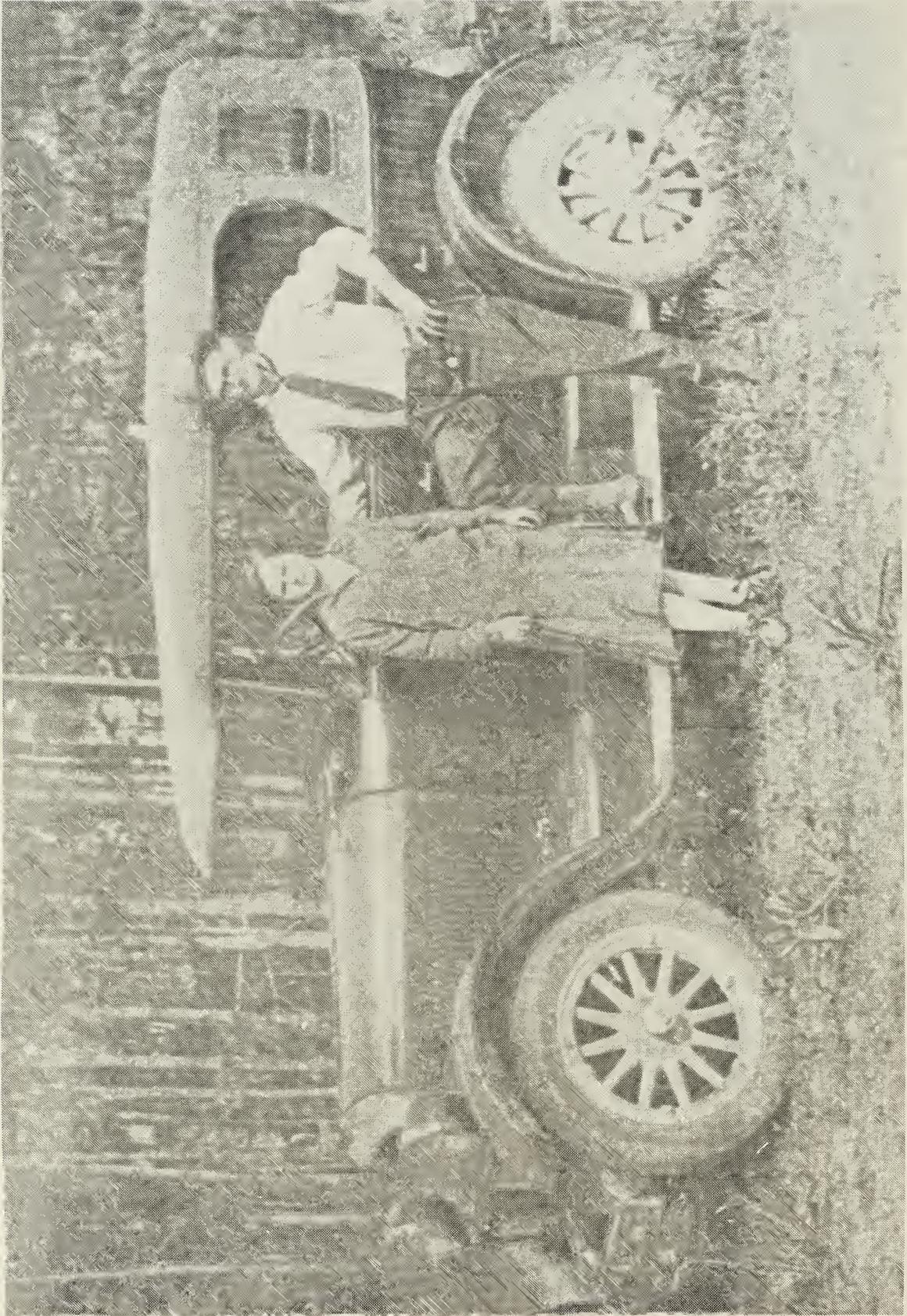
Ellzey of Otter Creek had chased two white men away from the colored juke in that area. Later, that same night, Deputy Ellzey returned to the juke and was killed by gunfire from a palmetto thicket. I will designate the gunman as John Doe. The other man was not seen at the crime scene. Both were convicted of second degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The next constable at Otter Creek was Willis Crews. One night he was called to a liquor store disturbance. Upon arrival, he found John Doe's father drunk and raising Cain. Constable Crews tried to get the man to go home; instead, he attempted to attack Crews with a knife. Crews shot the man, John Doe's father. The coroner's jury returned a verdict of justifiable homicide. All during my ten years as sheriff it was rough going for a greenhorn sheriff. I got permission from the state to escort John Doe from prison to his father's funeral at Rocky Hammock Church. Later, two younger brothers of John Doe were caught for breaking and entering, shooting at an officer, and carrying a gun illegally. One was sent to the state prison.

I had a very good deputy named Henry Cannon in the Inglis-Crackertown-Yankeetown area, another one named Johnny Rowland at Cedar Key. I tried to work the whole county, depending on deputies and constables to keep me informed. Things usually went along smoothly until the full moon and then everything would break loose. The deputies and constables were on the old fee system; if they did not make any cases during the month they got no pay. For my first eleven months after expenses were paid I netted \$3200, a Big Job, that was. And we had to furnish our own vehicles.

One night Mr. S. E. Gunnell and I were sitting on the Intellectual Exchange Bench (gossip) at the corner liquor store in Bronson. A car stopped outside and two young men entered. I knew one of them, he shook hands with me. The other greeted me cordially enough, he knew who I was. Then he asked me if I knew who he was. I said not exactly but that he looked like one of the Blank boys. He said that was right, he was. I asked him which one of the Blanks his father was. He hesitated, then stuck his head out the door.

"Hey, Ma! Just exactly who was my Pa?" You could have heard him shouting two blocks away. The old lady stuck her head out the car window and shouted back that she didn't know and that he had better not forget to buy her snuff. I found out later that she had been married to three of the Blanks at different times and I concluded that she actually



Edith and Leroy Foster at Otter Creek, 1926. Her parents were Elmira (Lane) Surls (1874-1968) and James M. Surls (1876-1919). She lives at Rosewood.

did not know exactly which one was the boy's father. Anyway, I never asked anyone else who his father was. Mr. Gunnell probably never has either. We both learned something there.

Levy County had its quota of bad men. Two had been killed before I took office and two more were killed during my tenure by different officers and citizens. The one I dreaded most was a certain exconvict. Several years back he had shot his own first cousin in the back and killed him. For that he went to Raiford. After getting out of there, he returned and somehow was awarded a permit to carry a gun. When his permit expired, I appeared before the County Commission and objected to his permit being renewed due to complaints from various citizens of the county. The Board declined to issue him another permit. During the next two years I arrested him three times for carrying firearms illegally. The last time was in a small cafe in Bronson. The proprietor slipped to a phone and whispered that this man was inside twirling two guns around his fingers. When I arrived at the scene he was sitting at a table with his back to the door. Sitting at the opposite side of the table was a highway patrolman with his face white as a sheet. This bad man was very carried away with his ability to juggle the guns and at the same time intimidate an officer of the law. I poked my finger, not a gun, into his back and told him that he was under arrest and ordered him to place the guns on the table and to raise his hands slowly. He did so. I then asked the patrolman, O. C. Belott, to secure the guns, which he did. Then I put the cuffs on the bad man with his hands behind his back. When he turned around it was his turn to go white as a sheet when he saw that I did not even have a gun. I got the guns from the other officer and carried the bad man to jail.

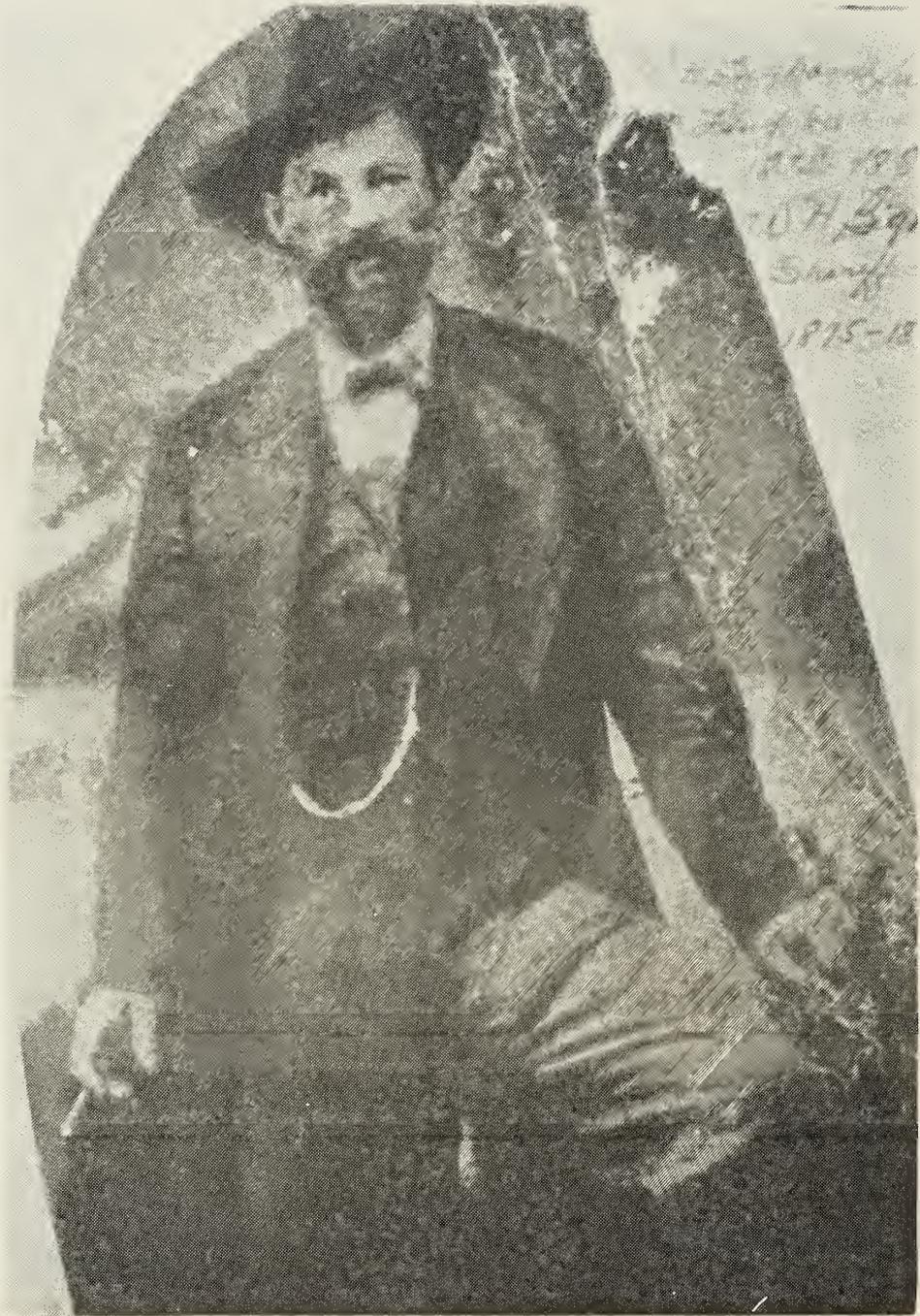
That night he told the jailor (Mr. J. W. Wilkerson was a fine and conscientious deputy) that he intended to kill me the first chance he got. Mr. Wilkerson called me and told me what the man had said. After he bonded out, I met him in the courthouse hallway the next morning. I told him that I knew about his threat and that I had one request, and that was that he meet me face to face and not try to shoot me in the back as he had done his other victims.

A few weeks later Chief P. L. Wiggins of the Williston Police Department called to inform me that the bad man had been killed by one Webby Joe on or near the Chesser Flats west of the tung oil farm. I advised the Chief to assemble a coroner's jury and meet me at the Top of the Hill,

an all night service station. I joined the group and we proceeded to the crime scene where we found Webby Joe waiting for us. The two guns involved were there. After all the usual swearing in, we heard Webby Joe's account. His testimony was that he and the bad man were working together making moonshine and had agreed to split the proceeds. After delivering a five gallon jug to a nearby customer, they were returning to the moonshine shack when they got into a dispute over the money. The bad man pulled a Spanish-made semi-automatic pistol and fired one shot at Webby Joe's head, whereupon the latter reached over his shoulder for an automatic shotgun and hit the bad man in the head with a load of buckshot. At the time they were riding in what was known then as a Model A stripdown. The dead man had been driving, his feet became entangled in the pedals and his body hung over the side until Webby Joe got the vehicle stopped. The jury decided on justifiable homicide, self defense.

The fact that Webby Joe had killed a bad actor gave him the big head, he started acting tough. Several weeks later he came back to Levy County and started across Elmar Richardson's freshly plowed field. Elmar intercepted him and told him he did not want a path established across his field. Webby Joe pulled a new 38 pistol and made Elmar Richardson dance for about thirty minutes. Whenever Elmar slowed down Webby would shoot near Elmar's feet. Finally he ran out of ammunition and left, catching a ride towards Dunnellon. Constable P. L. Wiggins called me, we interviewed Richardson and picked up the spent cartridges. We went to Dunnellon and talked to the bus depot manager, Henry Betts. From our description he advised that such a person had bought a bus ticket to Dade City. I returned to Bronson and got a warrant out for Webby Joe, then called the Pasco County sheriff and advised him of the situation, that Webby Joe was carrying a concealed weapon and fancied himself as being tough. The other sheriff said he would be ready, he had a good friend who was a professional wrestler to help him out in such a case. Well, they met the bus and the wrestler had Webby Joe tied up like a pretzel so fast that Webby didn't know what hit him. I escorted him back to Levy County. After the county judge got through with him, he went back to Dade City and straightened himself out. The combination of the wrestler and the county judge made a model citizen out of Webby Joe.

One day two strangers appeared in the county carrying a mattress up the road in broad daylight.



W. H. Bigam, sheriff, 1875-1885.

Some citizens living along the road saw them and contacted Constable Wiggins. He intercepted the two boys and inquired about the mattress. They said they had found it in the road. Mr. Wiggins knew of two nearby houses that were vacant but still containing furniture. He loaded the boys into his car and went to one of the houses. They still insisted that they had found the mattress lying in the road. Mr. Wiggins went to the other house. Its door was open. They confessed that they had stolen the mattress from that house, which was three miles from where they lived. They said they needed it as they had been sleeping on the floor. After further questioning, they said they came from West Florida and had to leave there, that their father could not get a job because he had shot a man "in self advance". I called the West Florida county to check out their story. Seems that their father had been engaged in the manufacture of moonshine and a neighbor reported him. After serving six months in prison, the father determined to get revenge on the neighbor. Early one morning he spied the neighbor squatting in the bushes behind his barn, whereupon the father shot the neighbor in the rear end with a load of birdshot. That was the shooting in "self advance".

Early in 1945 there were several liquor store burglaries around the county. We found most of the evidence, caught the suspects, got them convicted and sent to prison. We were two years late on one of the men who had robbed a liquor store in Bronson. At the Williston bus station I spotted the man sitting inside a bus. I arrested him and brought him to Bronson. The same operator was still running the liquor store. He was asked to identify the suspect. He came out to the car and said, "That certainly is the same SOB that held me up two years ago!" The suspect plead guilty to armed robbery and was sent to Raiford.

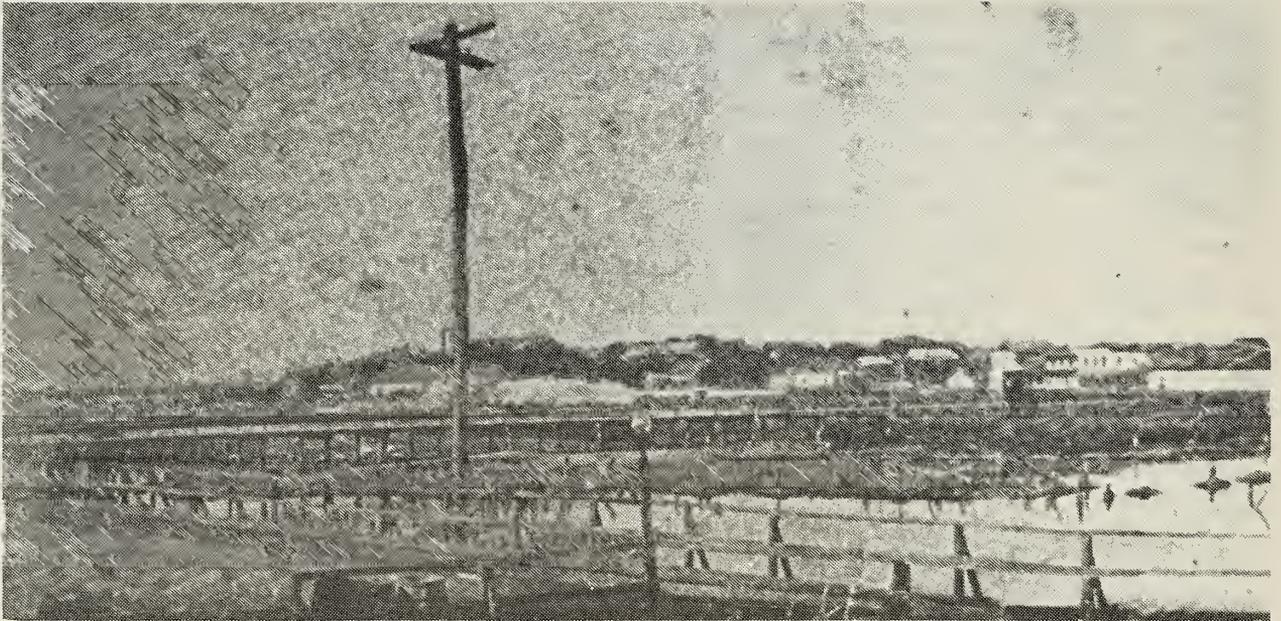
In 1947 two men from Macclenny broke into the Cedar Key State Bank and attempted to cut a hole in the vault door. Mrs. Day lived upstairs across the street. She saw the sparks from their cutting torch and called George Delaino. He contacted Police Chief Warren and the two of them approached the bank. The lookout man ran around a corner, Warren and Delaino went in on the inside man who attempted to pull a gun but the Chief already had him covered. Paul Day called me, and when I got there, most of the Cedar Key population were out looking for that other fugitive. They found him hiding under a house near the Number One Bridge, which I thought was aptly named. Both of the suspects were tried and convicted in federal

court.

My most enjoyable accomplishment was to help start what turned out to be the Suwannee Valley Semipro Baseball League. There were several teams in and around Levy County. Most of the players on the Bronson team are still living in the county or nearby counties. The teams were Bronson, Williston, Cedar Key, Gulf Hammock, Otter Creek, Chiefland, Trenton, Archer, Cross City, and Romeo. Trenton had nine Parish boys on their team at one time. Williston's was mostly Smiths. I can still remember the Bronson team: G. T. Robbins, Dogan Cobb, Luther White, B. E. Brice, Epperson Marshburn, Elton Cobb, Haskell Hardee, Gordon Drummond, S. C. Clyatt, Pussell Watson, Dave Shewey, Wayne Shewey, Dizzy Dean (a pitcher), Franklin McKoy, Clinton McKoy, Doyle McCall, and Frank McCall. Norwood F. Ishie was concessions operator and would pass the hat around for donations to help defray expenses. Mr. Ishie was always ready to help. We simply loved to play baseball, whether we won or not. Playing baseball on Sunday afternoons might have helped keep some of the boys out of mischief.

In 1950 I appointed two young deputies, J. C. Corbin of Chiefland and Freddy Hale of Murrinston. Both were good reliable men, always ready to work. In Chiefland, the night of Dec. 28, 1954, a soldier was courting a young widow. He saw her coming home from a party, went to her house and shot the girl twice with buckshot loads, a really hideous and cold-blooded murder. He then returned to his car and attempted to kill himself but blew his chin off along with part of his tongue and nose. Deputy Corbin found him lying on the ground and sent him to a Gainesville hospital. His family had him transferred to the Lake City VA Hospital. The state's attorney declined to prosecute the man because of his condition. I have never seen him again but others have seen him around Chiefland at times. Where ever he is, he still has no chin, tongue, or nose. In a way, he is paying dearly for his crime, he can spend the rest of his life regretting it. At the same time, the girl had not committed a crime at all. She died.

During my ten years as sheriff I used to ride with the deputies and constables in their districts to get an overall idea of what was going on. Constable Dave Hudson was a good officer and lots of fun to be around. One day an out of state car came flying through Chiefland and Dave took after him in hot pursuit. The other man simply outran Dave and left him behind. Dave stopped at the city limits and said, "Oh well, let the SOB go. We'll



From a wide-angle picture of Cedar Key, about 1890. This is the left side. Goose Cove is at the extreme left.



Central part of wide-angle picture of Cedar Key, 1890. First street was open then.



Right side of the wide-angle picture of Cedar Key. This type of picture was known as a Bird's-eye view. The 1890 date is not definite.

get him when he comes through again." Another time, Dave and I were sitting in a patrol car when a driver sailed through a red light right in front of us. Dave took off and got him stopped.

"May I see your driver's license, please?"

"Sure, here you are."

"Where are you from?"

"Chicago."

"Now, come on, don't hand me that stuff. I already seen that Illinois tag!"

One time, Deputy Henry Cannon and I approached Mr. Will Long's dance hall in Inglis. The scene appeared to be tranquil enough, then two young men shot out the door in a rolling tangle of fists and skulls. We separated them and asked what all the hostilities were about. The one I was holding said that SOB is over here from Citrus County stepping out with my wife. The one Henry had said that other SOB is my brother and he is over here stepping out with MY wife. I handcuffed them together and asked what their names were. Driggers, they said. I inquired as to the whereabouts of the wives. They were still inside fighting, the men said. Henry went in to look for them, no problem to spot them, they were still pulling hair. He brought the wives out, learned that they were sisters. So I offered them a proposition. They could put up a \$50 bond and go home and stay out of Levy County. They could keep it all in the family as long as they kept the whole family over in Citrus County. Years later, I read about Billy and Torley Driggers in the book, IF NOTHING DON'T HAPPEN by David M. Newell of Leesburg and I think I understand the situation a little better. I wonder if my bunch named Driggers was any kin to his bunch of the same name.

A man here in Levy County ran for tax collector against M. D. Graham, the incumbent. Mr. Graham beat all his opponents in the first primary. This one fellow went home late that night after all the votes were counted. He told his wife that if she wouldn't tell anyone that he had run for the office, then no one would ever know but the two of them.

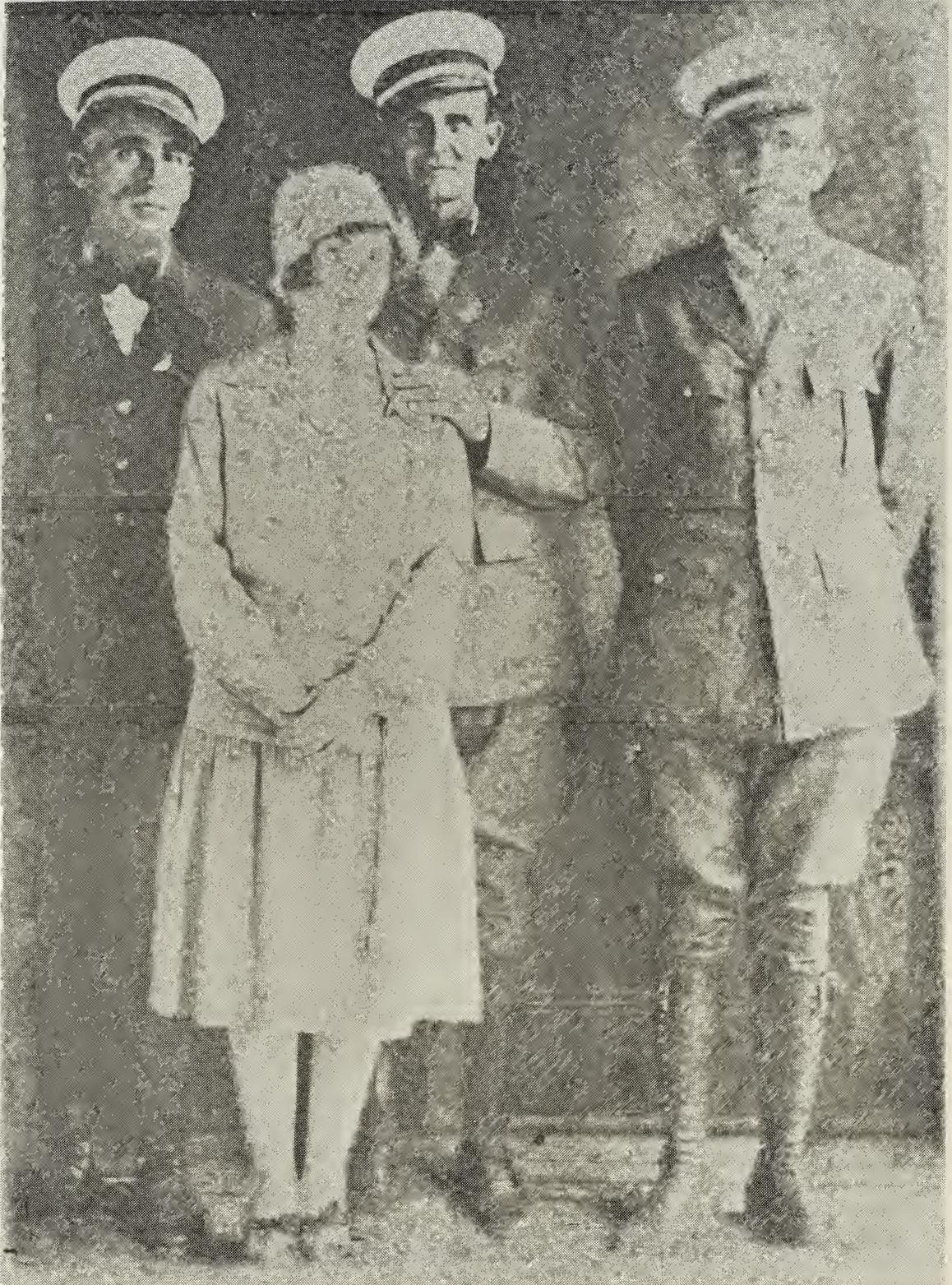
Otter Creek was still sort of a boom town during my tenure in office. The West Brothers Turpentine Company and the Cummer Cypress Company must have employed three hundred men. There was a character in the area known as Moonshine Mary. She operated a one-horse wagon equipped with two ice cream freezers and a fish box under which she concealed half-pints of whiskey for sale along with the ice cream and fish. One Saturday, business was slow and she become bored. She

began drinking the moonshine, Deputy J. J. Coleman noticed her glugging along from the bottle and started over to arrest her. She saw him coming and started beating the horse. The horse took off at high speed. Coleman finally overtook her in his car and got her stopped only when she got home. He confiscated several bottles of whiskey, waited while she put away the horse and freezers, then took her to Bronson where he charged her with possession of contraband whiskey, drunk driving and reckless driving of a one-horse wagon. The judge dismissed the driving charges.

Another time, I got a search warrant for Moonshine Mary's house and went to the front door while Deputy Perry Osteen went to the back. I knocked and Mary asked who was out there. I said I was the sheriff. She said she would be out in just a minute. She ran into her kitchen and poured out one gallon of whiskey but forgot another one on the floor under a table. Then she opened the door, invited me in, all sweetness and light, so glad I had come, etc. I handed her the warrant and suggested that she could be reading that while I searched the house. I came back from the kitchen with the gallon and said she had overlooked this one. Mary got so mad she swarmed all over me. It took both Deputy Osteen and Highway Patrolman Doyle to pull her off me.

Most of the moonshine stills we tore up were one and two barrel outfits. But the granddaddy of them all was a 102 barrel outfit operated by a man from another county. When we went in on it we caught one colored man working it. The boss never showed up. We confiscated a truck, some copper, some barrels, all we could load onto the truck.

In 1945 George Hemingway came to Levy County to manage the IPC acreage in the area. With him he brought a collection of characters with names such as Boose, Pulpwood Slim, Willie, Horace, and others to cut, load, and haul the pulpwood. One named Boe was a top-notch worker but when he was off from work his hobby was stealing. On his first outing he walked miles to steal the magnetos from two chainsaws belonging to his boss. Then he stole a farm tractor, drove it into Bronson and hid it in the old Coulter barn. Several people remembered seeing him walking out to where the saws and tractor were. The next Monday morning, Lint Moring and I followed the tractor tracks through the woods to the barn where it was hidden. Mr. Hemmingway brought Boe to the jail. He admitted the thefts and signed a confession. On plea day, Mr. J. W. Wilkerson had



Sheriff L. L. Johns designed uniforms for his deputies, a first for Levy County. From left, Leroy Foster, _____ Simpson, and Jim Arline. The lady was Helen Busby. She lived in the Inglis area, 1925.

handcuffed Boe and was escorting him to the judge's office when Boe decided to take off. Mr. Wilkerson fired over his head several times but Boe merely got faster. We trailed him with bloodhounds most of the night but he got away. Someone cut the handcuffs off of him that night.

Several months later, a rash of burglaries and auto thefts developed in the area. One night the Gainesville PD got after Boe. He ditched the car he was driving, stole a large Oldsmobile from Brasington and headed for Jacksonville. The Jacksonville PD spotted him and caught him. He plead guilty again and got several three to ten year concurrent sentences. After he was released from prison he went into the big time stuff such as bank robberies. The last time the Perkins State Bank was robbed an automatic machine took the robber's picture which was circulated on the television news. One of Boe's old pulpwood buddies named Boose recognized Boe, reported this to the FBI and collected a thousand dollar reward.

In 1946 two young men broke into a service station at Cedar Key and stole a Chrysler coupe loaded with mechanic's tools. The car belonged to a Greek mechanic from Tarpon Springs who was in Cedar Key to work on a sponge boat's engine. The next thing we heard from those boys was that they had been apprehended attempting to cross the border into Mexico at Del Rio, Texas. The sheriff of that county called me. I told him about the B and E and grand larceny warrants and requested him to try for extradition. That sheriff worked fast. In less than an hour he called back saying they had signed the extradition papers. The next day State's Attorney T. E. Duncan and I headed for Del Rio, Texas, and that took two days of hard driving going and two more returning. The two boys plead guilty to all charges and each got five years. Hobo Joe made parole, Charlie Rae had to make his full five years in prison.

Charlie Rae came back to Williston soured on the world. His aunt was a friend of Miss Gertrude Baxley of Williston. Charlie Rae tried to borrow some money from Miss Baxley but she declined. He got mad, went to his aunt's house, got a .22 rifle, slipped around to the house where he could see his aunt and Miss Baxley in the kitchen cooking supper. He killed Miss Baxley, ran from the house, went to the telephone exchange, kidnapped the operator and raped her. Mr. Pete Smith, a mechanic in Williston, flushed Charlie Rae out of his hiding place during the following manhunt, shot him down at close range with bird

shot, and disarmed him. When I got to the scene, a half dozen men were pointing guns at Charlie Rae's head. I took the man by the hospital. Dr. Vinson said he was not hurt so I carried him on to jail. At the time we used the Gainesville jail while a new one was being built at Bronson.

One afternoon I was hauling a Negro man who had gotten life for murder and this Charlie Rae who was in the front seat with me. When I stopped at a traffic light, Charlie Rae jumped out and ran. I chased him shouting to everyone in sight to catch him. He jumped over a hedgerow and fell down and I landed on top of him. I got the handcuffs on him with his hands behind his back. Meanwhile, some good man saw what was happening, walked over and turned my ignition switch off. I thanked him for his help. During all this, the other prisoner had sat quietly in the back seat, and him with a life sentence. I carried him on to Raiford the next week and filed a strong recommendation for his parole. Charlie Rae got a life sentence. The rape charge still holds against him, living or dead.

During those years the usual complement of drunks adorned Levy County, if that is the word. One of them whom I will call Herschell Joe started from Bronson to Chiefland one night and ran his car into the Little Waccasassa River. I got there and asked him what happened. He said he had been driving straight enough, the road went crooked, it was the road's fault. I said I would call for a wrecker.

He said, "Sheriff, now that is mighty good of you. I'll tell you what, I'll do my part. I'll go haffence with you on that."

The most cunning crooks that I have ever tried to catch were safe crackers and bank robbers. Within a relatively short period of time there were three different safe jobs taking place in Levy County. Two of them were done by amateurs. The one at the Dixie Lily was a professional operation. They drilled the door, blew the door open, got the money, left their tools and two mattresses used to muffle the explosion, and wiped everything clean of fingerprints. In the case of the Chiefland Postoffice safe, the thieves knocked the handle and dial off and failed to gain entry to the safe; again, no fingerprints. The next safe job was that of the Pat-Mac Commissary at Gulf Hammock. One afternoon, two prisoners escaped from a road gang at Lebannon Station. They were trailed with bloodhounds for several hours, almost to Otter Creek. Deputy Perry Osteen was on a stakeout at the commissary until about 2:00 AM. The two fugitives broke into the store, demolished three



The third, fourth, and fifth grades at the Gulf Hammock School, 1929. Back row: unidentified, Theda Patterson, unidentified, Eleanor Bean (teacher). Second: Agatha Howell, Evelyn Black, Billie Pearl McElveen, Dale Jones, three unidentified, L. H. Howell. Front: Charles May, unidentified, Perry Sauls, Kendall Jones, C. D. Tummond, unidentified. They were destined to become teenagers of the Great Depression. Miss Bean married G. T. Robbins and still lives in Bronson.

axes, two crow bars, and the three safes, without getting any of the safes open. Again, no fingerprints. We believed this to be the work of the two fugitives although they never admitted it after they were caught.

One day about 2:00 PM two men held up the Perkins State Bank in Williston and made off with about ten thousand dollars. A citizen observed them stopping along the road and discarding a Pennsylvania tag from the rear of their car. He retrieved the tag. Then one of the bank robbers contacted the owner of the car from which the tag had originally come and advised him to remove the other tag from the front of his car as they had used his old rear tag while robbing a bank that very afternoon. The owner of the car was scared half to death. He went to a highway patrolman he knew stationed in Gainesville, Doc Townsend, and told him the story. Townsend set up a conference of representatives from local sheriffs' departments, police departments, and the FBI and reported the man's story. The Alachua County sheriff did not believe the story, so he went straight to the alleged bank robber and asked him about it. That suspect was never seen nor heard of again anywhere. It is possible that he was killed and dumped into a pond. Two months later, part of the same gang robbed the Bushnell bank but were caught that night in Gainesville while in the act of dividing up the money. But the case of the Perkins State Bank robbery was never solved.

At one time, Gulf Hammock was a thriving sawmill town owned by the Patterson-McInnis Lumber Company. It was a big operation, about six hundred people worked there. Besides the Company's commissary, Peek's Store, Spell's Store, and Gaven's Store were there. There was never an unusual amount of violence around the place. The usual "juke" was in operation. One Sunday morning the juke operator, Sandy Moore, was killed in the gambling room by pointblank gunfire. I interviewed about two dozen people who were in the place, not a one of them heard or saw a thing. The case was never solved. I always believed that Moore was killed by some white criminal and the witnesses were too scared of him to talk.

I used to talk with Uncle Joe Curry. He told me the story of the buried treasure at Fowler's Bluff. He was born in 1861 in Columbia County. In 1888 when he and his wife Lou were living at the Tuck Hudson place near Fowler's Bluff an old man with a mule appeared on the scene to dig for the treasure. No one knew who he was or where he

came from. After two months of digging his partner got sick with swamp fever. The old man showed up at the livery stable in Hardeetown with the sick man, turned in his rented wagon and mules, and disappeared. Nine years later he showed up at Gracy, Florida (Alachua County) where the Biard brothers ran a sawmill. Their foreman was Oril Freeman. He saw that the old man was sick, so he put him in a makeshift bed in a shack and tried to care for him. He died the next day, but before he did, he gave a vellum paper map of Fowler's Bluff to Oril Freeman and Emmett Baird. The map purportedly showed the locations of three treasure caches near a bend of the river. Emmett Baird, Oril Freeman, and a colored man showed up at Fowler's Bluff in 1897. They rented a room from Joe Curry, hired Joe and George Higginbotham, and swore both to absolute secrecy. After locating the three large oak trees, they began to dig. After a few weeks they had a hole about twelve feet deep. At this point they struck quicksand which would slide into the hole as fast as they could dig it out. When they probed into the quicksand with a pole they struck some solid object underneath. Baird went to the Barker Blacksmith Shop in Hardeetown (where the Townsend Truckstop is now) and had a large set of tongs made.

They erected a scaffold over the hole and attached the tongs to a hoist rope. After getting a hold on the buried object with the tongs, they were able to raise the object which cleared the surface with a loud sucking noise. At this point the object was revealed to be a large chest. Joe Curry, in the excitement, hopped down to the top of the chest shouting to the others to hoist away. His added weight broke the rope and down went the chest again.

Then they built a coffer dam of vertical timbers around the hole and started moving the quicksand out, lowering the timbers as they went deeper. One night, Baird, Freeman, and the colored man worked in the hole alone until well past midnight. Then they appeared at the Curry house and indicated that they were giving up the search. The three of them left before dawn, leaving all their equipment behind. Curry went to the dig site and in the nearby scrub he found parts of an old lock, thin sheets of a concrete-like material with hinge and strap marks on them. No one seems to know what ever became of Freeman and the colored man, but the Biards soon opened various businesses in Gainesville.

Uncle Joe Curry moved to Cedar Key where he



Mr. and Mrs. Oscar W. Berryhill. He came to Cedar Key from Quitman, Georgia in 1881. She was Mattie Amanda Tindale.

ran a store. Three of his grandchildren were born there. Joe's son, Ben Curry was a teacher in Cedar Key from 1914 to about 1920. Uncle Joe was running a store at Rosewood in 1923 at the time of the Rosewood Riot. In 1926 he moved to Curryville, built a store and dwelling, and lived there the rest of his life.

Other attempts have been made to recover the treasure at Fowler's Bluff. In 1910 one group unearthed a bunch of skeletons, apparently those of swamp fever victims dating back to the time when a lumber camp was at the site many years before. That group of treasure hunters quit. In 1923 Nelson and Mahone let one of the chests get away from them. Nelson appealed to the Army Corps of Engineers for assistance. Then the river went on a rampage and flooded the whole site. Nelson was back again in 1926 only to have a hurricane wreck all his equipment. He quit for good. Not long after that, a group of twenty one persons arrived to dig. This group broke up into fights, killings, poisonings, gunfights, burnouts, suicides. The last of the treasure hunters was a Sanford realtor, Walter Cooper. He detected the presence of one of the chests but was unable to retrieve it. In his report to state officials he stated that the two remaining treasure chests could be recovered with modern equipment.

On the morning of July 24, 1949, a charter boat, the Hozee, left Yankeetown with six couples aboard for a fishing excursion. The captain was L. R. Burnett, owner of the boat; his crewman was Buck Gilley. During the morning a fire broke out in the engine room, Burnett gave each person a life jacket, and gave orders to abandon ship. All of them made it to a nearby birdroost. Gilley, a strong swimmer, struck out for Lighthouse Key to get help. He was never seen again. A few people in Cedar Key sighted the smoke of the burning vessel. Monday, an attendant of Lighthouse Key, Dad Collier, was fishing on the flats when he sighted two persons in the water. Collier carried this couple to the Lighthouse Key and gave them some food. They had been in the water twenty four hours. That afternoon he carried them into Cedar Key. The Cedar Key fishermen mounted a massive search of the area where the Hozee went down. A few bodies were found, very mutilated, still floating in the life jackets. The only survivors were the couple Collier rescued. They were from Ocala. They eventually got married. I guess they thought that fate had certainly thrown them together. If the whole group had stayed with the bird rack, all of them would have probably survived. Instead, we

had a real tragedy. That big water out there in the Gulf is no place to be taken lightly.

In the fall of 1946, William F. Marschek, a World War I veteran, headed south from Wisconsin. Just south of Columbus, Georgia he picked up a hitchhiking World War II veteran by the name of Jackson Cornelius Jenniby. That night, November 25, Mrs. Hilda Jones registered the two into a motel at Perry, Florida. Marschek paid for the room. The next day, after passing through Chiefland and approaching Bronson, the two got into an argument. Jenniby stated that old WWI vets were a sorry bunch, good for nothing, etc. He produced a gun and ordered Marschek to stop the car. That was just south of the Little Waccasassa bridge. He marched Marschek out into a dry pond and shot him in the back. Marschek fell on his face, dead. Jenniby then took Marschek's money, identification, clothes, and car and headed to Daytona Beach. There he traded Marschek's car for another one, spent most of the money, and went to LaGrange, Georgia. Near that town, he ran over and killed a deaf mute who was walking along the highway. During the following investigation, LaGrange PD Chief R. E. Matthews detected that Jenniby was not Marschek as he purported to be. Further interrogation confirmed this and then the suspect confessed to killing the man he was posing as and described the spot where the victim's body had been left. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation sent representatives down here, I went out there with them. Jenniby got a ten year sentence in Georgia for running over the mute person. This was early in 1947. Some of us made an unsuccessful trip to Atlanta to bring Jenniby back to stand trial for murder. The governor of Georgia had died and two men were claiming to be governor. While there we saw the gory residue on the streets where people had jumped when the big hotel burned. After the governor squabble was settled, we went back to Atlanta and brought Jenniby back to Bronson for trial. He was charged with first degree murder and plead not guilty by reason of insanity. A sanity hearing board declared him fit to stand trial. He was found guilty of first degree murder and got life. John A. H. Murphee was the judge.

Oscar W. Berryhill was an interesting person and I enjoyed talking with him whenever I got the chance. He was born at Quitman, Georgia in 1868. At the age of thirteen he came down the Suwannee River with an older brother and three older sisters and landed at Cedar Key. He went to work for the Eagle Pencil Company, mostly in the cedar woods.



L. L. Johns was living at Rosewood when he ran for sheriff.

Sometime during the early 1890's he married Mattie Amanda Tindale. She was a sister of Ira Tindale of Otter Creek. Mr. Berryhill was working in the Dry Creek cedar woods when the 1896 hurricane hit; the whole woods crew almost lost their lives. He was foreman of the Kamode plantation on Wekiva Run for awhile. Mr. Kamode was an Englishman. Mr. Berryhill would load his boat, the *Ida*, with vegetables and go over to Cedar Key where the Greek sponge boats would buy the whole load. As many as fifty of these sponge boats would be in the Cedar Key harbor at one time. This was from 1915 to 1920. In 1936 Mr. Berryhill settled in Gulf Hammock where his son Willie Berryhill still lives. He never shaved during the last fifty six years of his life because of a bad scar from jaw surgery at the age of thirty six. When I knew Oscar Berryhill he was past the age of ninety. He could tell of some violent happenings he had seen. There was no law at all in the logging camps. For awhile, the only law in Cedar Key was one colored man, the town marshall, and he rarely ever arrested anyone. The Berryhills had twelve children and numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren, many of whom still live in Levy County.

Another person whom I will always remember is Annie Higgenbotham Sheffield. She had a great heart, she was very concerned about the problems of anyone who was down, sick, or burned out. She would hit the road taking up a collection for the benefit of those unfortunate ones. Annie grew up in Cedar Key during the rough and tumble days. She reared a family there, the only two I can think of at the moment are Cecil and Maude. Annie was a unique personality during her younger days. One time, she overheard a man making some remark about her in a crowd, so she threw him to the ground and sat on his face until he stopped moving, then she got up. Someone threw a bucket of water on the man to revive him. He did not make any more critical remarks about Annie.

During the early fifties the people were still recovering from the World War Two economic disruptions by farming, pulpwooding, or whatever they could find to do. We had the Hotrod Age upon us, as it was called then. The highways were two-laned and during a holiday the traffic would be bumper to bumper. There were no Interstates, all the traffic of a holiday rush would be crammed onto these two-laners. The Florida Highway Patrol had unmarked cars making traffic cases right and left, so I put my deputies out there, too. Freddie Hale chased a Georgia driver from Lebanon

Station to Chiefland and back around to Bronson doing around a hundred miles per hour. That was the type of traffic violators we were after. The Georgia driver put up a \$150 bond and forfeited it. All the speeding cases we made were for speeds in excess of seventy five miles per hour. The next thing I knew, the acting governor hauled me into Tallahassee. Out of one side of his mouth he would hold a big hearing and threaten to suspend me while out of the other side he would say Sheriff, you and the Senator be sure to come to see me. I had known this man a long time. He was part of the old Pork Chop Gang which finally got their feathers clipped when Florida went to one man, one vote.

Now that I am about to end my reminiscences of my ten years as sheriff of Levy County, I hope that my services as sheriff were satisfactory. I enjoyed the work most of the time, it was always interesting. I know that I made some enemies along with lots of friends. To all the county officials who also served while I was sheriff and especially to my faithful staff, you were a congenial group whom I enjoyed knowing and working with, and may the best be for you during your remaining years. I realize that there were many instances of cattle rustling, non-support, assaults, etc. that I have not mentioned, but as I said at the beginning, these are just some highlights. I would like to quote here the Indian Prayer by Chief Red Mouth.

Oh, Great Spirit, grant that I may not
criticize my neighbor or friend until
I have walked a mile in his moccasins
while he walks barefooted.

If there is anything further to be said or added to this manuscript, let it be said by others.

Respectfully,

G. T. Robbins, former sheriff



Former Levy County Sheriff J. W. Turner was given special recognition for outstanding services rendered as president of the Florida Sheriffs Association in 1961. In this 1978 picture he was presented with a past-president's plaque by Horace A. Moody, the present (1979) sheriff of Levy County.

A FEW THINGS REMEMBERED

By James W. Turner, Jr.

Lonnie Williams, one-time depot agent at Ellzey, invented a 4-wheel drive vehicle in 1913. He built this machine from the first car ever owned in Levy County. This first car was purchased by my father from the Gainesville agency that was later to become Shaw and Keeter. He bought the car in 1907, kept it a few years, then sold it to Lonnie Williams. Mr. Williams built a second 4-wheel drive vehicle in 1914. His design was stolen and patented by the representative of a corporation while the company man was negotiating with Lonnie to buy the design. Then the company stored the patent away and no significant commercial development of the 4-wheel drive vehicle took place until World War II. Lonnie was the father of Dutch Williams and Guy Williams. Today, when a hunter drives his Jeep through Ellzey, Florida, he should pause to think about his 4-wheel drive design being invented and built right there in that place, sixty six years ago.

A lot of things happened while I was sheriff. For instance, two men were executed by electrocution. John Hall was sheriff of Clay County for thirty six years without a single execution from his county. It happened that I caught both of the men here. One of them was next to the last execution in Florida until this time (1979). The other man shot and killed Mark Read, the sheriff of Gilchrist County. I went over there and caught him and kept him in the jail at Bronson.

Certainly, one of the highlights of my career as sheriff, to me at least, was the conspiracy wherein this bunch planted a moonshine still on my farm not long after I started my first elected term. Their objective was to get me suspended from office and one of their number appointed. The investigation and research that brought that case to a head was long and complicated. I had a lot of help from the State Sheriffs' Bureau.

Wesley Booth from Cedar Key was one of my deputies. He stopped a car that was weaving around all over the road and charged the driver with driving under the influence. The jury returned a verdict of not guilty. Immediately following this, Wesley came into the office, got a writing pad, and

went out to his car. A few minutes later he came back in and tendered his resignation. He said that if the people of Levy County thought that I had a deputy of such little integrity working in the department, well, then, he wished to have no part of such an office. The outcome of that trial was mostly the prosecuting attorney's fault. When Wesley was on the witness stand, the attorney asked if he had smelled alcoholic fumes on the accused driver's breath. Wesley replied that he had no sense of smell. The prosecuting attorney said, "Do you mean, Mr. Booth, you don't smell good, is that right?" Naturally that broke the jury up into howls of laughter and the case was lost right there.

My father was Dr. James Turner. My great uncle Jim Turner sent my father through Stetson University for pre-med, then my father went over to Tulane for two years. He ran out of money, came back and worked at Tom Yearty's cedar mill at Vista for eighteen months. During that time he bought two outfits of overalls and jumpers, the rest of his earnings he saved to return to Tulane and complete his medical degree. He graduated in 1904 and began his medical practice in Bronson. Then he moved to Otter Creek and that is where I was born. My father's full name was James Wilcox Turner. The Wilcox name came in on my grandmother's side and the community of Wilcox in Gilchrist County was named for her people. My father is buried at Bronson.

When I was sheriff we had a jailer, a couple of deputies, and a bookkeeper, which is quite a contrast with all the staff they have now. I wouldn't be surprised if some of the deputies don't even know each other.

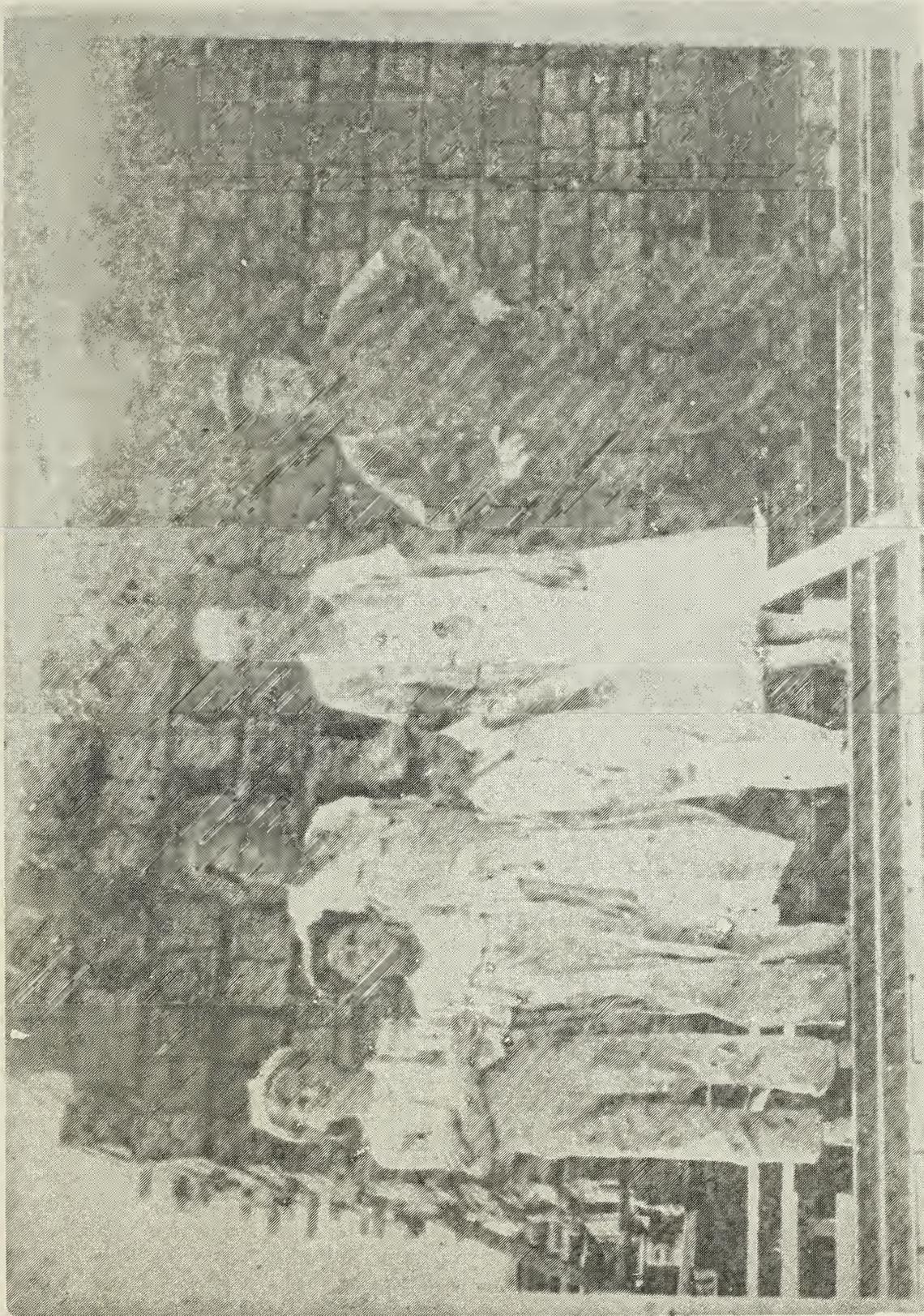
One night a woman called in to report a peeping Tom and said she had been threatened with rape. We went tearing out there. The dog picked up the fugitive's trail right where he jumped off the porch. It was drizzling rain but the dog never lost the trail. He followed it about a mile to a house, sniffed his way up onto the porch and rared up on the door. This dog was a famous old hound named Charlie. I told the dog-handler to

secure the dog, then I knocked on the door. A man opened the door and stood there, I knew him well. Meanwhile, the woman complaintant had followed us in a car and was parked out front. She started screaming that this was not the right man, this was definitely the wrong man, furthermore, she was going to kill me and the dog both. I looked inside, his wet shoes were parked neatly on the floor where he had placed them, he still wore his wet pants, plus the dog had said that he was the culprit. The evidence was plain enough. Further investigation disclosed that she had been shackled up with her boyfriend when her husband arrived on the scene. He detected the hasty exit of the boyfriend, so she contrived the peeping Tom story to save face. Then he would wonder why she did not report the incident, so she called us. Now, she was doing all the hollering out in the front yard to keep her boyfriend from being arrested. Ole Charlie had blown the lid off.

I remember when Stacey Hardee and Al Arrington went down the Suwannee River in an airboat and never came back. That was one of the sad things. I was president of the State Sheriffs' Association in 1964, it was before that, so it must have been '61 or '62. They were friends of mine. We found Al at the fork where the river divides

into the East Pass and West Pass. The airboat was nearby, on the bottom. We snared it with a grapple hook. Two days later we found Stacey a short distance down the West Pass. The wind was blowing hard the day they went down. A witness at Vista saw them go by there with only a couple of feet near the boat's stern touching the water. They must have hit some big waves at the fork and flipped.

I was elected for two terms, starting in 1956. Before that I was appointed twice. In 1956 I attended a training school in Tallahassee for newly-elected sheriffs along with Ed Blackburn from Hillsborough County. Ed had seen the Father Flannigan Ranch in Texas and wanted something like that started in Florida. He mentioned this to five of us during a casual conversation and from that the Florida Sheriffs' Boys Ranch began. We met in Suwannee County to start the organization. Cecil Webb donated \$1000 at the start and later donated as much as \$20,000 a year. The movement later grew into three centers: the Boys Ranch, the Girls Ranch, and the Youth Villa. Whatever my accomplishments as sheriff were, the one that means the most to me in my memory is my participation in the founding and growth of those youth centers.



The boy with his arms folded was Mr. Norwood F. Ishie of Bronson when he was 14, in 1925. The others were his brother Cecil, his mother, brother Joe, sister Flossie, and a neighbor, Curtis Lane. This was at Sumner.

AND THEN CAME THE SIXTIES

By Pat Hartley

I was elected in 1964, the primaries were held in the month of May back then. I took office January 5, 1965, and served twelve years. If I remember correctly, Mr. Gunnell was operating the public address systems for our political rallies during those years. Mr. Turner was the incumbent; J. W. Markham, Mr. Robbins and I were the challengers.

The next winter after I took office, a small black boy disappeared in Gulf Hammock. His father was named William Veal. The child apparently just wandered from his home into the woods and became lost. For eight days and nights a massive search was sustained, there must have been well over a hundred men looking for the little boy. He was not found, until the next year when hunting season opened and Mr. Bug Watkins found the remains. The child was known to have gone west from his home and we had searched from there to the Gulf. Somehow, he had made a circle around to the east side of his home and died there, not far from the house. The weather was cold and the cause of death was no doubt exposure. That was one of the saddest experiences I had as sheriff.

I realize that in the bigger counties the sheriff is mostly an administrator but in a small county like this one, he also tries to settle family squabbles, provide counsel for persons with problems, and he does investigative work. On one particular day, a deputy and I were investigating the burglary of a juke on the east side of the county. This juke had already been burglarized three times before. Each time the thieves would destroy the jukebox, break into the cigarette machines, and haul the merchandise away. The owner was about to go broke.

We got there and found the tracks where a vehicle had backed up to the building for loading. The soil was sandy and had been firmed up by recent rains. We poured the plaster casts. They came out so plain that we could read the make of tire, even the serial number, incredible as that may sound. By this time we had a crowd of onlookers. The jukebox had been hauled away. We tracked the vehicle to a brush area where the jukebox had

been unloaded and burned. Where the vehicle had turned I noticed a broken and missing limb on a small cherry tree. I thought that the missing limb might still be caught in the vehicle's bumper. I cut off the stub of the limb and advised the deputies to look for a vehicle with a cherry laurel switch caught in the bumper. They found one. I compared my stick to the switch and they matched perfectly. The two brothers involved with the vehicle were charged and plead guilty. Their father had a juke in competition with the one they had been burglarizing.

Bill Griffin was working for the Gainesville Sun and had just started covering this area in 1966. It seemed that everytime a car was stolen in this area of Florida, the thief would head straight to Levy County to get himself caught or to ditch the car. One morning about 10:00 we got a statewide alert that three convicts had escaped in Hamilton County. They had gone to Madison County, broken into a residence and stolen a pistol and shotgun. They also had a stolen guard's uniform. Still in Madison County, they set up a dummy road work crew with one of the fugitives wearing the uniform and holding the shotgun. He flagged a car, they tied the driver to a tree, and took off in his car.

All officers in our county were advised of the alert. I told Bill Griffin that before the day was over, these fugitives would land in Levy County, I told Bill that was inevitable. Auburn Etheridge of the Chiefland PD spotted the car that afternoon headed toward Bronson. I advised him to follow at a distance and keep the suspect vehicle under surveillance, to give the rest of us time to reach the area. He did so. In my car was a double barreled shotgun which I had intended to return to a woman. Her husband had gone to prison for shooting someone with the gun. They still owed payments on the gun and she had asked that it be returned. I hurriedly stopped by White's Grocery and bought four buckshot shells. When I approached the Trenton fork heading out from Bronson on US 27-A, Auburn called and said that a state trooper had inadvertently appeared and spooked the fugitives so that they turned into a



Tom Townsend and William E. Yearty (1845-1915) in Otter Creek, about 1910. William E. was the grandfather of John Yearty of Gulf Hammock.

side road and took off doing over a hundred miles an hour.

The fugitives drove to an area behind Stewart Brock's store and ran their car into a ditch near Mr. Geiger's house. Mr. and Mrs. Geiger were sitting on their front porch and saw this. The three men ran into the woods headed toward Gleason's Trailer Park. I had called Trenton to get Sheriff Clyde Williams to seal off that end. We arrived at the ditched car in a matter of minutes. I took the right flank route in our search pattern, Auburn left to warn the trailer park residents. When he had about time enough to get there, the rest of us heard a sudden eruption of gunfire that sounded like a small war. Clyde Williams jumped into the car with me and we tore off over there. When we arrived, I saw the Chiefland PD car and Auburn Etheridge standing there with Mrs. Gleason, no one lying on the ground. I also saw a man holding a pistol running toward a small pond, so I gave chase. I remember wondering about the other two men and the shotgun they had. I was not too worried about the pistol.

The ground became marshy, I stopped the car and ordered the fugitive with the pistol to surrender. He kept running and dodging behind trees. He was at such a distance that I was unable to shoot just at his legs, I had to aim at the whole man. I fired once, he kept going, so I fired again. The second barrel was full-choke. He stopped after the second shot but I was unable to see if he still held the pistol. I was still running toward him and reloading my shotgun at the same time. When he stopped, I stopped and yelled at him to come on out and not make me kill him. He came out holding the pistol up high by the barrel. Sheriff Williams arrived and held a gun on him while I climbed the fence. I asked him if he had been hit, he said he had been. I inspected his back and found a tiny bluish hole there, not the faintest tinge of blood around it, the little hole was completely dry. I told him that he must not be hurt much. He said that his insides were burning up. I found the one buckshot just under the skin of his stomach. It had gone completely through him.

I was somewhat upset that I might have killed him, I thought the injury might be fatal. I asked him where the other two were, he said they were still out in the pine trees. You would think that a man with a potentially mortal wound would not lie, but he did. He did survive, though; the ambulance took him away and the Division of Corrections posted a 24-hour guard over him at the hospital.

Actually, the other two were hidden under the

mobile home all the time. The dog would follow the trail up to the mobile home and then take off along the route of the man I had shot. After dark we began to get calls from people who thought they had sighted the two fugitives. We had several airplanes up, the Highway Patrol had set up roadblocks. Then the dogs discovered a new trail going toward Luther White's beacon light near US-19. The fugitives went west, then south, then east. About 2:00 in the morning, Deputy Walter Beckham and Josh Garner of the Chiefland VFW posse caught them. We could have closed in on them sooner but we were leary of the shotgun we thought they still had. We asked them about the shotgun, they said they had left it under the mobile home where they had been hidden until darkness arrived. They had been lying on top of the mobile home's pipes.

Earlier, when Auburn Etheridge had arrived at the Gleason mobile home, he saw John Dukes (the man I later shot) pointing a pistol at Mrs. Gleason. He was demanding the keys to her car. Etheridge and Dukes then had a furious gunfight with neither getting hit. That was the small war we had heard. Dukes ran, and that was when Clyde Williams and I arrived. The other two were named Stoddard and Steele. Something like that burns into your memory and you never forget it.

When I first took office the desegregation movement was getting underway. There was a lot of apprehension about this. Various conflicts and frictions did develop in neighboring counties but not in Levy County. Both the black people and white people here were understanding and cooperative throughout on that issue. One of the most pleasant memories of my tenure as sheriff is the mature poise and dignity shown then by all of them. Levy County people should go down in history for standing tall when almost every county around them had problems and difficulties. Robert Wallace of Williston was the first black deputy in this county since Reconstruction. I had known him a long time, known him to be a law-abiding citizen of good standing. He made a fine law enforcement officer from the start and is still in the department (1979).

One night during the early sixties an alarm went off indicating a breakin at this microwave relay station on State Road 24 near the Alachua County line. I started out there from Moring's Gulf Service in Bronson. Mr. Gunnell went with me to keep me from going out there alone. While enroute we discovered that neither of us had a gun. We arrived at the scene and detected no indication of

prowlers but that could not be considered as conclusive. A tall fence was around the property and we did not have a key to the gate. Not only that, we were still unarmed. Meanwhile, I had established radio contact with Deputy Dwight Bell who was coming into Bronson from Otter Creek. We waited until he arrived, then Dwight and I prepared to climb the fence. Mr. Gunnell stayed with the car to maintain radio contact with the dispatcher at Bronson. I decided to let Dwight go over the fence first. At that time he weighed about 380 pounds. That was a strong fence. We determined that there were no prowlers on the premises, the alarm system was faulty.

During the late sixties a so-called social activist from California teamed up with a person from Chiefland to form a corporation they called S.O.U.L., the Society Of Universal Love. This was during the hippy years. They recruited a few followers and established a camp on the Suwannee River, Dixie County side. Marine Patrol Officer Dick Moody reported that he had received citizen complaints concerning nude swimming in the area of this hippy camp. He offered to carry me up the river to check out the complaints. The Sheriff's Department had no boats of its own at the time. While I was waiting for further contact with Officer Moody, I got a call from Sheriff Parker of Dixie County. He said some FBI agents and two news media persons were going with him to Hog Island to check out complaints down there concerning some hippies. Since Hog Island is part of Levy County he wanted our department to be involved in the investigation. I contacted Moody, he said we would have to go on the high tide out the East Pass and up a tidal creek into Hog Island. He suggested that all of us meet at the mouth of the East Pass the next day at 1:00 PM.

I met Moody and Conservation Officer Cecil Collins at Fowler's Bluff. We went to the East Pass and waited, the others did not appear. Acting on the assumption that they had gone ahead, we finally proceeded up the creek. At first we passed by the squatters' camp without detecting it, then we did spot it. I suggested that Collins leave Moody and me at the landing while he returned to the East Pass to see if the others had arrived.

I hailed the camp. Two young men and a girl appeared. While I was talking to them we heard a commotion approaching through the swamp. This turned out to be Sheriff Parker and his crew. The tide was too low for them to get in there by boat so they had walked all the way across Hog Island. The squatters objected to the taking of pictures. They

had dug a shallow well and constructed a crude cooking apparatus from rusty tin. They admitted that they were living there without permission of the land owner but said they had written a letter to owner. Two of the men had no identification. They had built a small palmetto leanto, apparently the sleeping quarters for the four men and two women. The leader was named Rhineheimer, I'll never forget that. He was all decked out with a leather band around his head and a chain around his waist. He looked something like Tarzan slightly gone to seed. He was the spokesman, also one of the two without identification. We started to leave and he asked what we were going to do. I said we would get warrants for trespassing and contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

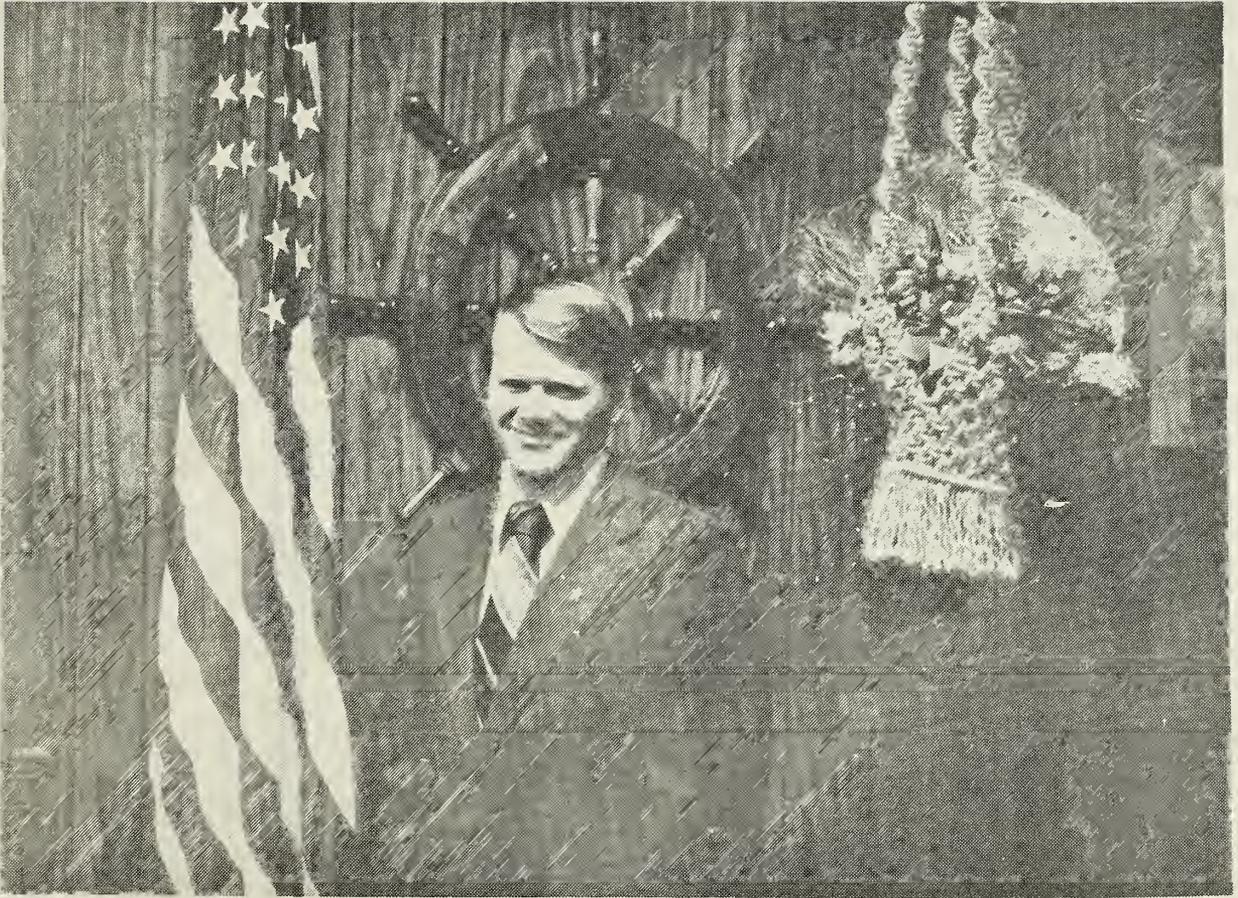
The girl known as Cricket turned out to be the daughter of a prominent executive in a well known Florida corporation. He thought she was attending college, had not heard from her in some time, and did not actually know exactly where she was. Their leader assured us that theirs was strictly a platonic operation, they operated like a family of brothers and sisters. Then he wanted to know if Florida recognized common law marriages. I said not between brothers and sisters. I returned to Bronson and discussed the situation with Judge Wilbur Anderson and Prosecutor Ed Wasson. These young people obviously did not know how to survive out there in the wilderness. They were ignorant of even the basic health procedures and they were being eaten up by insects. We agreed to file the charges I have already mentioned.

On a Wednesday we went back but the tide was too low to get in there so we went over to Suwannee to eat. Meanwhile, the squatters had left Hog Island. While in the restaurant I saw Rhineheimer coming down the canal with his mane blowing in the breeze. A person in the restaurant told us that a local fisherman named Aderholt had rescued the group when their boat was sinking as they were leaving the island with all their dogs, cats, and equipment. They were now at a location in Suwannee. At this point I had to decide whether or not to pursue the matter further. In view of the fact that these people had put the hard sell on in trying to win converts to their lifestyle, plus the idea of a precedent being set for this area becoming a hippy refuge, I decided not to let the matter drop. I called Sheriff Parker, he came over and arrested four of them. The two others had left the area.

I remember that I was soundly criticized at the time for "not letting these people alone". The

Civil Liberties people got into the act. I still believe I did the right thing. At that time the drug scene was getting under way, young persons would disappear and never contact their worried parents for years, and the hardcore promoters of this lifestyle were aggressively seeking new recruits among the ranks of young and vulnerable teenagers. So they were not just doing their own thing and bothering no one else, not at all.

The county sheriff is on the horns of a continuous dilemma, starting on his first day in office. He is to uphold the law, do what is right to the best of his judgement, and at the same time try to maintain his political standing. When he starts concentrating on his politics to the exclusion of everything else, then he will certainly be a failure as a sheriff.



Horace A. Moody, present sheriff of Levy County, 1979.

THE SEVENTIES

By Horace A. Moody

As far as I know, I must have been the youngest sheriff ever to take office in Levy County. That was in January of 1977 and I was 29. I remember some conversations we had in a civics class at Bronson High School back in the early sixties, how we talked about the dreams, the ambitions, and the goals we were setting for ourselves. I took all this seriously and so did some of the others.

Over the years since then I worked in a variety of law enforcement positions with the FBI and the Sheriff's Departments of Volusia, Orange, and Alachua Counties. Along the way I earned a BA degree in criminal justice and public administration from Florida Tech University at Orlando and I am currently working toward a Master's Degree in criminal justice at NOVA University.

Back to that civics class in the early sixties, I had some good teachers. One of them said that if you are going to be a ditch digger, you should equip yourself with a first-class shovel and be a dignified ditch digger. I got the message; it boils down to something called adequate preparation plus a consistent determination. I try to pass this same philosophy on to the young people of today just as I heard it years ago. I followed it and reached the goal I had set for myself, to be the "High Sheriff" of my own home county.

As the population and diversity of Levy County has grown through the years, so has the responsibility of the County's chief law enforcement officer. The emergence of marijuana as the nation's clandestine recreational drug and the isolated characteristics of Florida's rugged Gulf Coast in close proximity to the illicit trade routes from Columbia combined to make law enforcement interesting in 1978. Five major smuggling efforts in Levy County were terminated with arrest and large seizures of marijuana.

The first of these became known as the "Ten Mile Creek Deal." It all started innocently enough when members of the U. S. Coast Guard Station at Yankeetown were called to a boat drifting at the mouth of the Withlacoochee River on the north side of Port Inglis Island. All that was left of a once bustling port of entry on Port Inglis Island is the

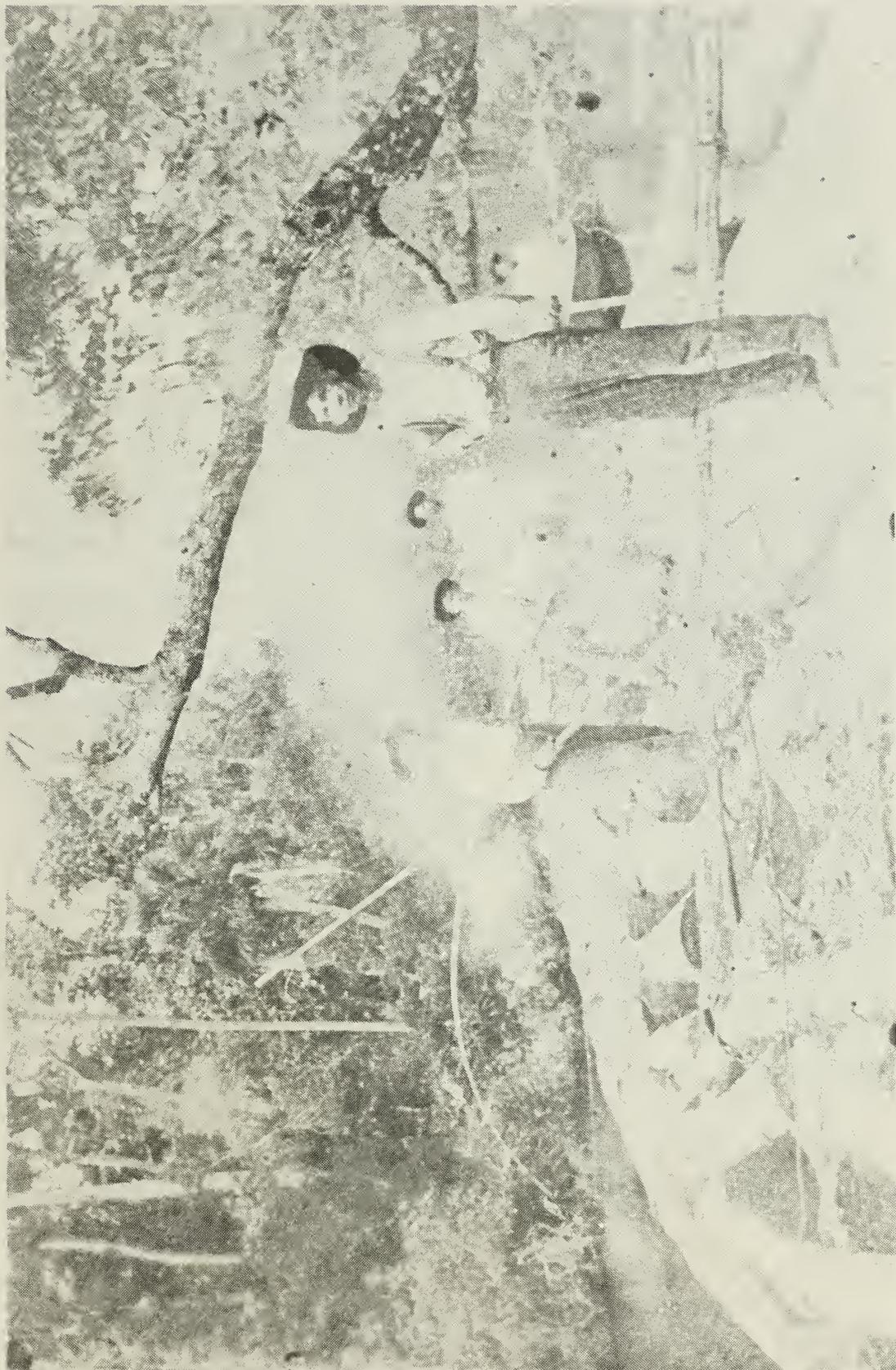
foundation of the old Customs House and a recently added "two-hole" privy. The rest of the island is marshland and sawgrass. When the Coast Guardsmen took the boat, an eighteen foot, open fisherman, under tow and returned to the station, an alert Guardsman noticed residue from marijuana in the bottom of the boat and the Sheriff was notified.

A number of things began to happen simultaneously. It was shortly after noon on February 8, 1978, that deputies arrived at the Coast Guard Station to inspect the boat. Immediately afterwards, information was developed from people fishing on the north bank of the Withlacoochee that a small boat had been rowing in and around the Island. At the same time, a Marine Patrol officer checked a suspicious truck parked under the Florida Barge Canal bridge.

A search party was formed and went ashore on Port Inglis Island. About to be terminated, the search hit pay dirt when an inquisitive officer opened the door to the "two-holer" and found two men shielding themselves from the foul cold rain. While gathering information from the two concerning their presence on the island without a boat, officers found that one of the men worked for a Tampa firm in construction. As this information was relayed back to a make-shift command post, the registration from the suspicious vehicle under the barge canal bridge came in and the two matched.

While officers were waiting under the bridge and the two men were being transported from Port Inglis Island, a young man approached the suspicious truck in another pickup and seeing the patrol units, tried to ease on by as if he had no connection with it. When officers stopped the second truck and routinely inquired about the man's presence, for the third time, the Tampa construction firm's name mysteriously appeared as his employer. A map, marine chart, was seen lying on the seat but couldn't be found in sight when deputies returned from running radio checks on the driver.

A quick search of the vehicle revealed the map



The log raft was prominent in Levy County commerce for many years. This one was on the Waccasassa River in 1907. The man in front was Hunter Smallwood, 26 at that time.

stuffed under the seat and an examination of the map revealed some custom alterations pointing to the dead end of Robinson road in the Gulf Hammock management area and Ten Mile Creek.

All of a sudden, deputies on the scene found themselves with a variety of suspicious circumstances, three people being detained, a strangely marked marine chart showing woods roads, two vehicles, a boat trailer and one adrift boat with enough marijuana residue to maybe roll a slim cigarette.

Darkness began to fall on the night of February 8th and deputies were quietly dispatched to Robinson Road to place the area under surveillance from a strange bunch of law enforcement vehicles. Four-wheel drive pickups, unmarked cars and men eased into the area and found two trucks, stuck up to the axles in the mud at the western end of the logging road. When it appeared that no one was around the two trucks, deputies backed off and hid in the woods, huddling close together for warmth.

The wait wasn't too long. A dim light was seen coming towards the hidden deputies from the direction of the trucks and swamp. When the suspect almost stepped on the hidden officers, he was ordered to stop and was taken into custody. The 23-year-old lad told officers a weird story about back-packing through the Gulf Hammock swamp with two companions he'd met while hitchhiking out of Orlando earlier in the day. While the back-packer was being turned over to other officers, the surveillance crew returned to hiding and soon spotted two lights coming towards them from the direction of U. S. 19/98.

When the crew emerged from hiding and demanded the two men stop, there was a brief moment of hesitation and the two hit the drainage ditch on the side of the road into about four feet of freezing water. Searches until dawn failed to find the two men in the flooded hammocks and attention was turned back to the customized marine chart.

At noon on the second day, deputies searching the banks of Ten Mile Creek spotted a large cache of burlap containers in a palmetto patch and moved in to examine it. Almost four thousand pounds of the illegal weed was found neatly stacked behind a thick palmetto front. The men taken into custody under the barge canal, on Port Inglis Island and "back-packing" through the worst winter night in many Gulf Hammock years, were in the process of conferring with notable criminal defense attorneys regarding their detention when word was received of the "stash" find. Detention was changed to arrest and the Ten Mile Creek deal was officially

underway.

As the investigation progressed in an effort to identify and locate the two "swamp rats" who had bailed out into the flooded woods, it was discovered that one had hired a \$50 taxi ride to Ocala and left the area. Another suspicious looking man was reportedly trying to call a Gainesville taxi from a public phone in Gulf Hammock at midnight, three days after the boat had been found. When deputies asked for identification, a driver's license name was found to match the name of the person owning one of the trucks at the end of Robinson road. Thusly, was the fifth defendant added to the "Ten Mile Creek Deal."

The investigation continued along the lines of developing tie-ins between the five who had addresses ranging from Minnesota to Colorado, Tampa to Dallas, to Orlando and Illinois. One of the first surprises was to find two of the defendants were smuggling veterans and had served Federal prison sentences for importing grass. Another turned up in the FBI files as a drug store burglar from Dallas and two others were identified as first timers in the smuggling business.

The real clincher came when a Gainesville man, whose phone number and address had been found in the personal effects of the Tampa men, was arrested in a smuggling operation in Wakulla County, just south of Tallahassee. The Gainesville man decided he would trade some information for consideration on his north Florida charges and told of his friends involvement in a smuggling deal that had occurred in Levy County. Reluctantly, the friend of the friend began to talk to investigators about people, places and amounts of money involved in putting the "Ten Mile Creek" deal together. The suspicious truck driver trying to ease by the curious officers under the barge canal bridge and one of the occupants of the Port Inglis privy were identified as the planners and head men. The second man on Port Inglis Island was a friend of the boat captain that had made the run from Columbia, South America to Waccasassa Bay with its contraband cargo. The Orlando, Florida, Dallas, Texas, back-packer was representing a St. Cloud group that was to receive part of the load and the Gainesville taxi customer was identified as a transportation specialist that would have moved part of the load into the northeastern United States.

Although five highly regarded defense lawyers entered the case and found some loopholes for some of the clients, the defense team was handicapped in representing one of the leaders and

planners because the best case was directly against him. As is the case in a lot of criminal activities, the lesser involved defendants gave up a good portion of their defense to protect the boss-man and all of those charged ended up paying heavy fines, court cost and facing additional charges in other jurisdictions.

In the final rounds of plea negotiations, the defense team was surprised when State Attorney's representatives played a hole card and demanded the location of the 44' sailboat that had been used to transport the marijuana from Colombia, S.A. It was a tense moment for a short while but ended with the seizure of the vessel in a Daytona Beach marina on information provided by the defendants.

Four other major smuggling cases were worked by the office of the "High Sheriff" during 1978. All of them involved hundreds of man hours and coordination between other local police departments, Sheriff's Departments, state agencies and, especially, three federal agencies, the U. S. Coast Guard, Drug Enforcement Administration and U. S. Customs Patrol service. The common thread that weaved in and out of all of those investigations was the tracking down of paper connections between those low-level people caught at or near the illegal loads and those who financed, planned and protected the high-profit cargo of drugs. From Miami to New York, from Key West to Los Angeles, trails of bank records, telephone toll records, credit cards and other items were tied together.

The major smuggling cases netted over 30 defendants from all levels of the operation, seizure of approximately 65 tons of illegal weed with a wholesale street value of \$39 million dollars, the confiscation of a shrimp boat, a 49' twin diesel party boat, the 44' motor sailer from the Ten Mile Creek Deal, several four-wheel drive trucks, two station wagons and five small shuttle boats. Although the marijuana smugglers certainly managed to get some of their cargo by, it is to be safely assumed that the percentage of weed successfully smuggled past men from the office of the "High Sheriff" was less than the 90% assumed to be a correct figure around the Peninsula State.

While the marijuana smuggling cases were the all-involving cases during recent years, the office of the "High Sheriff" continues to handle the nitty-gritty cases that attract less attention. Murder doesn't stop for the smugglers and the Sheriff's Department responded to several homicide calls during the past years. Most were

those falling into the classical, tragic folder of husband and wife, family or neighbor disputes that evolved into heated moments of passion and gun fire. One murder case, however, was bizzare in the way it was discovered and the acts of those involved after it had taken place.

The investigation got underway after a woman with a history of a number of confinements in mental institutions was booked into the jail on burglary charges. Unable to post bond, her emotional and mental condition began to deteriorate. The lady was a familiar figure to many of the jail staff and it was a normal routine to expect based on prior occasions when she'd been in the jail awaiting bed space at a state mental institution. One deputy, however, paused to speak to the woman and listened as she told of seeing a body in the ground in her dreams. The deputy tried to establish a rapport with the disturbed woman and found that she was claiming to have helped put the body in the ground and told him where the gravesite was. The victim, another woman, according to the inmate, had been killed after a quarrel with another woman. The victim's husband and the second lady's children had been present at the house and after the woman had been shot, dug a hole in the backyard and buried her.

Following the directions of the jailed woman, skeletal remains of a female human being matching the description of the victim were uncovered in a shallow grave on the north side of the Suwannee River. The 18-year-old son of the second woman in the house at the time of the shooting was indicted by a grand jury for first degree murder and returned to Levy County from his Army station in the western United States. Through interviews and evidence found in several places, investigating deputies found that after the initial burial the people involved in the shooting and decision to cover-up the story of what happened, had become frightened that the body would be found in the first grave. The body was dug up and an attempt made to burn it. When the attempt was not successful, the body was re-buried a few feet away and stayed there for several weeks. The conspirators then decided to move the body to a wooded area north of Chiefland when they were evicted from the rural farm house where the shooting occurred.

After moving the body there they were satisfied for a time but became anxious one day when they saw surveyor stakes along the graded road by the third burial site. Afraid that contractors digging home foundations would find the body, they dug

the remains up again and moved them to a burial site where they were eventually recovered by Sheriff's deputies.

The victim's family confirmed her disappearance at about the same time it was estimated that the shooting occurred. However, the victim had been known to disappear for several months at the time and even though it was more than 15 months later, no missing persons report had been filed.

The husband was charged with conspiracy to commit murder, the son pled guilty to murder in the second degree. The victim's friend couldn't be charged with any related crime to the murder because of a quirk in Florida law that disallows immediate family members from being charged with conspiracy or accessory to a crime committed by another family member that they attempt to cover up. She, however, did receive the maximum prison sentence allowed for the burglary she was charged with. The woman whose emotional hallucinations started the trail that led to the several gravesites and the victim's final resting place, received a prison sentence and probation to follow her release.

Another bizzare case took place with an undercover Sheriff's deputy being retained as a "hired gun" to kill the brother and sister-in-law of a recently divorced man. The suspect blamed his divorce on the brother-in-law and sister of his ex-wife and attempted to persuade a private citizen to kill them for him. After tipping the Sheriff's Department off to the scheme, an undercover officer was introduced to the suspect as "John from Miami." The suspect, associated in a way with medicine, struck a deal with "John" to pay for the contract double killing with forged prescriptions for cocaine. After the prescriptions were delivered to "John" and Sheriff's deputies had obtained tape recordings of the conversations between the two, "John" returned to the suspect to collect his cash down-payment to cover expenses. The defendant, however, couldn't come up with the money, although several attempts had been documented by investigating deputies. So, the undercover "hired gun" struck a compromise and accepted a bill of sale for several expensive items of equipment used by the suspect in his profession.

The next day, rather than the sad call from his ex-wife that he expected, the suspect received a visit from sheriff's deputies armed with a warrant charging him with solicitation to commit murder in the first degree. Subsequently, the defendant entered guilty pleas to the charge and additional

charges of attempting to obtain cocaine through fraud.

Figures obtained through a study of the services provided by the "High Sheriff" show that conservatively, eighty percent of a deputy's time is spent in providing services that have little or no relation to enforcing laws. These services range from providing jump-starts to a motorist with a dead battery to helping chase a bat that had wandered down the chimney from a home at three o'clock in the morning. On one occasion, the non-police service involved the "High Sheriff" himself.

An older resident of the county found himself with a deer hound that wouldn't run deer. Instead, as the story was related to the Sheriff, "the good-for-nothing dog don't do nothing but run foxes and I can't eat 'em." In Levy County, of course, it is no problem to find a fox hunter more than anxious to add a good fox hound to his pack and before the day was over, the disappointed owner of the "good-for-nothing" was pleased to be rid of him and the new owner was proudly showing his latest acquisition to his fox hunting buddies. As for the "High Sheriff", it was another day of service and another one-of-a-kind call.

The operation of the "High Sheriff's" office has changed in some ways to meet the needs of changing times. Levy County remains an area where people can come to escape the rat-race of the crowded metropolitan area. It remains the tranquil, peaceful weekend or vacation escape for thousands of people. Relatively speaking, this is a true picture of life in Levy County. However, two main highways and more permanent residents have increased the need for updated law enforcement and services available from the High Sheriff.

Deputies now work particular shifts in specific areas called assignment zones. This means closer response to the major population centers of the county and it means that a deputy now has some time to devote to his family and rest rather than being expected to respond around the clock. Departmentalization, in a modified form, has taken place with the creation of three distinct sections in the High Sheriff's Department. The uniformed officers, strategically assigned to zone areas still provide the backbone of service to the public and are supplemented by the communication-detention section, investigations section and a meaningful crime prevention section.

Modern radio equipment enables a deputy at the end of SR40, the far southwest corner of Levy

County, to communicate with another deputy at the Alachua-Levy County line in the far northeast corner by walkie-talkie.

Major criminal investigations that once required the calling in of state or federal agencies are now handled by deputies of Levy County's own "High Sheriff" of Levy County enjoys an enviable reputation of being the example of how a small law enforcement agency can be good, professional, and serve the people of its jurisdiction with the services they require.

The "High Sheriff" has to move to meet those

needs in an age where people expect the services. He has to move to meet the needs of an ever-changing and complex criminal justice system. The courts demand professional investigations, the people demand courteous officers to answer their calls and the "High Sheriff" continues to be the man all turn to with their expectations. It is demanding and time consuming, but when the job is done, the feeling of accomplishment is worth all the effort required to achieve it.

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