fashionable hotel of Jacksonville. Numerous friends visited him before the case was diagnosed as smallpox, and therefore the epidemic started among prominent people. Those at the Buffington House were the first to take the disease, and soon afterward sporadic cases began to develop until, finally, the epidemic became general among both white and colored. It was severe and a good many deaths resulted, while those who recovered were in many cases badly pitted.

Local Conditions in the Early Fifties

It is said that some of the merchants were extremely fond of playing cards, and even during business hours would gather for a quiet game. Should a customer appear, a sentinel placed on watch would report, “Mr. So-and-so, somebody is going in your store”, whereupon the game would be temporarily “called”. Whenever children or servants were the purchasers, the storekeeper usually gave them a small present, such as a sweet cracker or a piece of candy; this was called “coontra”. It has been impossible to trace the derivation of this word, but the custom doubtless originated from the fact that the money divisions in those days were in fractions of a cent, and the small present was given, rather than to consider the fractions in carrying accounts. The silver dollar was the standard, but it was reckoned eight bits, instead of one hundred cents. There were half bits, 6½; bits, 12½; two bits, 25 cents, and so on. If “coontra” was not given to the negroes it was always asked for by them, but the white children were forbidden by their parents to do so, as it was not considered “good manners”.

About a third of the houses had glass windows. Stoves had not yet come into general use. The stores on Bay street had no way to heat them and when the weather was cold, fires were built in front in the street; here the citizens would collect, crack jokes, and discuss the questions of the day. The town maintained a small market house with one stall, open in the early morning. Beef sold at 4 to 8 cents and pork at 8 to 10 cents a pound. Fish were brought in boats to the shore near the market, the arrival being announced by ringing the market bell, when the people would rush down to purchase. Milk as a commodity was scarce. Collards and sweet potatoes were the vegetables usually offered for public sale.