

Aurora of 1859

On September 2, 1859, from midnight to 4 a.m., a fine auroral display was observed by the citizens of Jacksonville. At times it was very bright and red, occupying the northern heavens from northwest around to northeast and east. Streamers would be sent up from different points almost to the zenith, then fade away and flicker up again. At 3 a.m. the whole heavens shone with a brilliant red light, even the south was quite red. The more ignorant people were very much frightened, and many amusing incidents were told of how the negroes began to pray, thinking that the end of the world was at hand.^b

There appears to have been a period of special auroral frequency from 1870 to 1882. More or less pronounced auroral displays were observed in Jacksonville on September 24 and October 14 and 25, 1870; February 4, 1872; June 4, 1877; and on November 17, 1882, there was a well-marked display that attracted general attention.^b

Just Prior to the War

In the years 1850 to 1860, the town, notwithstanding its many setbacks, doubled its population; the census of 1860 gave more than 2,000 inhabitants. During 1860, there was no cessation of business. Travel and the mails increased; likewise the telegraph business. Steamers and other vessels came and departed regularly. But with the mutterings of the coming trouble a nervous tension found its way into every occupation. The public mind drifted into political, rather than into commercial channels. Groups of men would collect on the streets and discuss the grave questions of the day. News of the attack on Fort Sumter at once suspended all business with the North and the mills, with one exception, closed down. Then the mails ceased coming, and the town began gradually to subside into inactivity,^c only soon to be drawn into the whirlpool of war.

Bibliography, Chapter XI

^a"Old Citizen" in Jacksonville Tri-weekly Union, Feb. 1, 1876; ^bRecords of Dr. A. S. Baldwin; ^cReliable data; old newspaper clipping; ^dHistory of Florida, Webb; ^eMrs. Geo. S. Wilson; ^fDr. W. M. Bostwick; ^gAs published in Florida Times-Union.