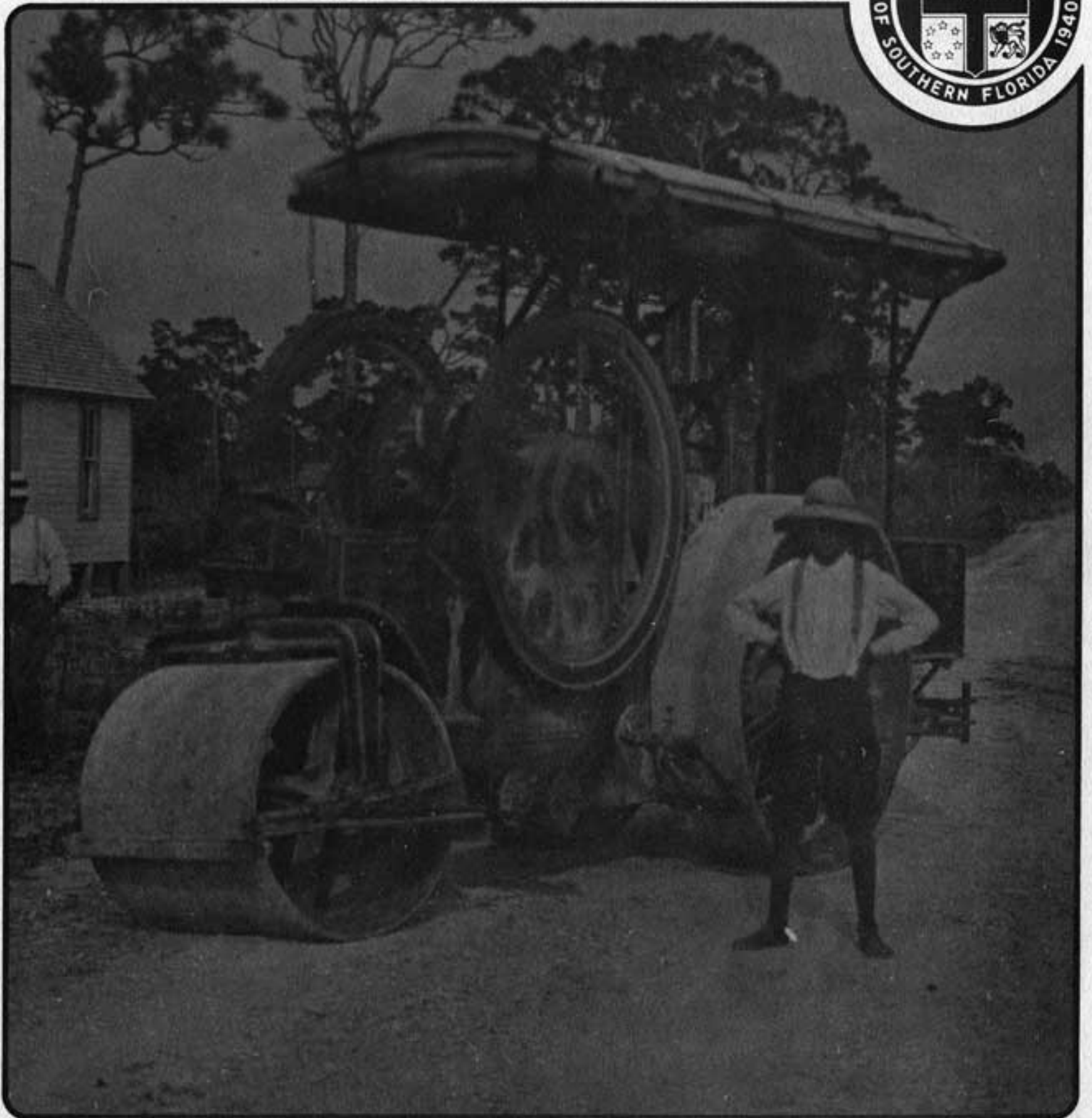


Update



CONTENTS

- 2 President's Message
- 3 Letter to the Editor
From the Editors
First County Road
Thelma Peters
- 5 Sugar Comes to Florida
Ken Sellati
- 6 Miami's Pioneer Radio Stations
Gene Rider
- 8 Hurricane Sunset
Jane Wood Reno
History's No Longer a Mystery
(puzzle answer)
- 9 The Director's Desk
David T. Alexander
- 10 Book Review Section
- 11 History's a Mystery
Crossword Puzzle
Thelma Peters
- 12 Winter Program Series
Dr. Charlton Tebeau
Miss Harris' Alumni
Garlin Wood Lewis

Cover photo:

The snort and clang of this early county steam roadroller terrified horses and enchanted children.
—Photo from collection of Julia Mettair Henshall

UPDATE

UPDATE, Bi-Monthly
Publication of the
Historical Association
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Architect's Rendering of the R. A. Gray Building. Ground was broken for this state library, archives and museum now being built in Tallahassee.
—Photo courtesy of Archives, History and Records Management, Florida Department of State

"Once begun, a task is easy; half the work is done."

Horace

On November 15th I spent a very interesting and informative day in Tallahassee at the Division of Archives, History and Records Management as a new member of the Advisory Council to the Bureau of Historic Sites and Properties. Although this Division of the Department of State was no stranger to HASF, this official visit afforded me a unique opportunity to explore all the facets of this very active and important body.

A few days before, ground was broken for the new multi-million-dollar R.A. Gray State Library, Archives and Museum Building. This new edifice will be located on a two-block parcel of land behind the Florida Supreme Court Building and will be an integral part of the new Capitol Complex. Needless to say, this was a dream come true for everyone interested in Florida's heritage.

At long last the State of Florida will have a central resource center to highlight and preserve our history. Although admittedly overdue, the State of Florida and specifically the office of the Secretary of State, Richard "Dick" Stone, from Miami, is set-

ting an impressive pace with a group of outstanding individuals who seem to be making up for lost time.

As incredible as it seems in a state that has the nation's oldest city, the State of Florida had no official State Archives until 1967! At that time the Archives, History and Records Management was organized with Senator Robert Williams as Director. Two years later, in the new constitution, it was made a division of the Department of State. The Division has several bureaus, all of which are of interest to any one concerned about history and preservation.

The Bureau of Archives and Records Management has essentially two functions: to develop and operate the Florida State Archives and to plan for proper management of current and non-current records, using the most modern computerized techniques.

The Bureau of Historical Museums is planning for the new Museum of Florida History, to be located in the new Gray Building. This bureau is also responsible for a state and local history educational extension service.

The Bureau of Publication publishes the newsletter, *Archives and History News*, a *Historic Sites*

Bulletin and other books, booklets and pamphlets to inform citizens of the activities and research of the division. All are available upon request.

The Bureau of Historic Sites and Properties has the broadest scope and is the bureau that has been the most active on the local level. It has four sections: two dealing with archaeology, one with preservation of artifacts and one with general historic preservation.

The Historic Preservation Section is given the responsibility for conducting historic and archaeological site surveys, for nominating sites to the *National Register of Historic Places*, for developing a comprehensive historic preservation plan, for administering federal grants and state historic marker programs and for acting as a liaison between local groups and organizations.

Mary K. Evans, Historic Sites Specialist, is based in the Coral Gables Regional Office of the Department of State to help supervise preservation projects in the South Florida Region. She has been active in conjunction with Dade Heritage Trust in getting many local properties on the *National Register of Historic Places*. To date, nine buildings have been accepted and four more are in process. Last year Miss Evans directed efforts by Dade Heritage Trust and the Villagers to make a Historic Site Survey of Dade County.

A newly structured Advisory Council to the Bureau of Historic Sites and Properties was created by the Florida Legislature in 1973 to provide professional and technical assistance to the division. This includes recommendation to the Director on Exploration and Salvage Contracts under which companies and individuals which meet certain standards are allowed to search for and recover artifactual materials in state-owned waters.

(continued page 3)

At the November 15th organization meeting, Dr. John Mahon, Professor of History at the University of Florida, was elected Chairman. Other members include: Ney C. Landrum, Director of Recreation and Parks, Department of Natural Resources; Joel Kuperberg, Executive Director of Board of Trustees, Internal Improvement Fund; Judge Clayton Nance, Ft. Lauderdale; Dr. Roger Grange, anthropologist, University of South Florida; Herschel Shepard, architect, Jacksonville; Tony Pizzo, Chairman Hillsborough County Historic Commission; and this writer.

My day in Tallahassee was quite rewarding and I left with the feeling that the prospects for history in the State of Florida are bright. This is true in a large part because of the direction given the Division by Senator Williams who emerges as a true zealot for the cause of history and preservation.

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Like most people I have more to read than I manage to get through, but I feel sure from the response I felt that I shall find time for *Update*.

This is just one more example of the talent, ingenuity, and determination of the Historical Association. I continue to be impressed.

Cordially,
Jane Ryder

Editor's Note: This was a private communication which the editors shamelessly shortstopped and converted to their own use. Letters to the editor on historical topics, particularly any resembling this one, are always welcome.

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Response to our first issue has been gratifying. We have pending a number of articles, some of which are sure to materialize. Among them are a piece on old Florida maps, another on the history of the Key West submarine base, recently closed, and an article on the history of the hurricane warning service, dating back, it is hoped, prior to the days of President McKinley.

We need volunteers now for retyping of articles, some of which come in written by hand, which makes editing and typesetting impossibly difficult. Another area of need is for volunteers to do a small amount of addressing of the issue, once it's off the press. We have no reporters. We could use two or three. Volunteer!

Miami was a hotbed of military activity during the 'forties, the period of World War II. Who feels qualified to research and write an article or a series detailing South Florida's contribution to the war effort? Many noted people, both in and out of uniform, visited the Gold Coast during this perilous period. So did the German submarine fleet, with sinkings for a time an almost daily occurrence in our local waters. What about the flotsam that appeared up and down the Keys and sometimes even in our grocery stores? The possibilities are many.

Forthcoming issues of *Update* will be directed toward specific themes, not necessarily limited to those below and not necessarily in the listed order.

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Aviation the theme — South Florida was host to a number of developments in the history of aviation. Local aviation pioneers, living and deceased, can be featured. Our own archives are bulging with raw material.



THE FIRST COUNTY ROAD From Lantana to Lemon City by Thelma Peters

Dr. Peters, a retired history teacher, is a member of the Board of Directors of HASF. She is mining the treasures found in the county's archives at the courthouse, where, she says, she's almost as well known as the circuit judges.

Build a road for \$24.50 a mile? Dade County did in 1892 when Dade was the state's largest county and the population sparse — about a thousand. With miles of elbow room per person people nonetheless tended to cluster around Dade's two bodies of water, Lake Worth and Biscayne Bay. The Lake had muscle enough in 1889 to legally snatch the county seat away from the Bay, to the chagrin of the Bay people.

Between the rival areas were sixty miles of uninhabited pine-land, swamps, alligators and ten small rivers. Sail the ocean from Lake to Bay? It could be and was done. But the trip was dan-

gerous and with adverse winds might take several days. Walking the beach as the mailman did was safer but made blisters. Besides, freight by pack-a-back? People needed a road.

A road the county commissioners were determined to have. They paid a Lemon City surveyor, E. L. White, \$350 to lay out a road from Juno, the county seat at the upper end of Lake Worth, to Lemon City on upper Biscayne Bay; then in an economy move they cut off the first 26 miles because a boat line already ran the length of the lake.

So the road took off from Lantana, a tiny settlement at the lower end of the lake. It paralleled the coast a mile or so west of the coastal ridge and partly followed an old military trail of Seminole War days.

Low bidder for construction of the road was an enterprising newspaper editor, Guy I. Metcalf, whose *Tropical Sun* was the county's only newspaper. Metcalf organized a work gang and bought grub hoes and axes. "Constructing" a road meant clearing an 8-foot-wide strip of trees, stumps, palmettoes and obtruding rocks. The first wagon to use the road imprinted the ruts.

Bridges were something else.

Fortunately, living in Lemon City was a professional bridge builder, Peter W. Merritt, formerly of Garrard County, Kentucky. He was hired. The largest and deepest of the ten streams got a ferry instead of a bridge. This was New River in embryonic Ft. Lauderdale.

And one stream had a natural bridge, South Florida's most famous early natural landmark — the Arch Creek Natural Bridge. Remarkably, this natural arch of oolitic limestone over a clear and beautiful stream was the proper width for a road, the right elevation and came exactly where needed.

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(continued page 4)



The County Road crossed Arch Creek on the famous natural bridge. Photo about 1900. — Photo in collection of HASF Museum

crossed Little River, Little Arch Creek, and the two branches of Snake Creek.

By the close of 1892 the County Road was open and a Lemon City resident remarked that now you saw a new face almost every day. But what's a road without a public conveyance? So the Biscayne Bay Stage Line was organized, Guy I. Metcalf, manager. The line consisted of two springless wagons covered with canvas and drawn by two mules each. In his *Tropical Sun* Metcalf called the stage line "an epic in transportation facilities" and said the line would "pass through the most romantically wild and beautiful scenery in the world."

The stage required two days to go from Lantana to Lemon City with a logical stopover at the ferry site on New River, a fine hammock owned by the Brickell family. A young bachelor of Melbourne, Frank Stranahan, was employed to operate a

tent hotel near the ferry. Tents were placed in a wide circle around a bonfire which supplied light and discouraged mosquitoes. At first Stranahan ran the whole show himself — general manager, cook, dishwasher, chambermaid and ferryman. For the latter job he received \$15 a month from the County.

There were three round trips a week. The Lemon City stage and the Lantana stage left the same morning travelling toward each other to meet at Stranahan's where the passengers mingled at supper in the tent diningroom. Next morning the stages swapped passengers and each returned to home base. Round trip, \$16; one way, \$10; overnight accommodations, \$2.

Stranahan as ferryman served all who travelled the County Road at a published rate: 60¢ for a vehicle and team, 40¢ for a man on horseback, 25¢ for a pedestrian. Two bells located on the opposite shore indicated to Stranahan the kind of service re-

quired: big bell, barge needed; small bell, rowboat would do.

The first southbound stage left Lantana January 25, 1893, with the enthusiastic Metcalf aboard, accompanied by his father and some northern friends. A good newspaper man, Metcalf wrote and published a story of his trip. Two things particularly impressed him: the abundance of coonties growing in the pine-land south of New River, and the phenomenon of the natural bridge with its beautiful hammock setting. The bridge site became a regular rest stop for the stage.

Metcalf's party arrived in Lemon City in the afternoon of the second day and registered at the two-story frame Lemon City Hotel which had been built in a hurry to accommodate the tourists which the road was expected to bring. The hotel was located just south of present N.E. 61st Street and while not exactly on the bay had a good view of it from the east veranda.

At this time Lemon City had about fifteen buildings including a church, a school, two stores and a post office. Lemon City had somewhat deeper water than Coconut Grove and hence got most of the passenger and freight business of the Key West schooners.

Metcalf said he found the hotel clean and the meals "as good as can be expected." He strolled down to the dock and was impressed with the vast expanse of the bay, at that time uncluttered by islands or causeways.

The next morning he and his party took a sailboat for Coconut Grove, stopping on the way two miles south of Lemon City to visit Peter Merritt, the bridge builder. By this time four of the Merritt family of Kentucky had taken up permanent residence in South Florida. Peter's brother was Z. T. Merritt, soon to become Dade County school superintendent. One sister, Ada, was teaching in Lemon City and was later to teach in Miami — one of Miami's most revered early teach-

ers. The other sister, Margaret, kept house for her brothers and sister.

The opening of the County Road closed a colorful chapter in South Florida history — that of the barefoot mailman. No longer was the mail pouch carried over the shoulder of a stalwart young man walking at the edge of the surf for better footing. The stage line asked for and was awarded the mail contract.

Metcalf wrote glowingly of the stage line but one must remember that this was a vested interest. John Frohock, early Dade sheriff, made his first trip to Miami in 1895 by stage. He called the experience "bone-rattling" and the road "a narrow cowpath."

Another who rode the stage was Mrs. Harlan Trapp who described her experience in a book, *My Pioneer Reminiscences*. Harlan Trapp of Coconut Grove went to Iowa in the summer of 1895, married his childhood sweetheart, and brought her to Coconut Grove to live. The next-to-final segment of their honeymoon journey began in Ft. Lauderdale after a miserable night fighting mosquitoes.

"The next morning we got into a wagon with no springs," she wrote. "There were two slabs across from one side to the other. The driver sat on one and the bride and groom on the other. The mules were as lazy as the worst. We followed the mail route until we reached Lemon City. I had been expecting from its name to come upon a thriving city."

She was disappointed. Lemon City was merely a sleepy bayside village. They descended from the stage and walked to the dock. At the edge of the dock was a store ("really a shack," she said). She went in and was surprised to see so many bolts of bright calico. Who bought the calico, she asked. The Indians, she was told, whereupon she ran out of the store and along the dock and got into the boat for Coconut Grove. She had a horror of coming face to face with an Indian.



The County Road crossing of New River was by ferry. Team and wagon, 60¢. —Photo courtesy of Ft. Lauderdale Historical Society



Two tarpon fishermen pose beside first bridge to span Little River. This bridge was built by Peter Merritt for the County Road. Location near present N.E. 5th Avenue. —Photo from collection of Ethel Freeman West

Even before the railroad reached Miami in 1896 competition had developed for both road and stage. A canal had been built and along it moved a small steam-

er, *Agnes*, which glided where the stage bumped. The canal, only fifty feet wide and five feet deep, was part of an ambitious plan to connect Jacksonville and

Key West by an "inside" route. Today that canal has grown up to be the Intracoastal Waterway.

In 1896 John Sewell, working in Miami for Flagler, found that the local rock when crushed and rolled made a hard and smooth surface — the secret was using water as a bonding agent. Soon there were several miles of glaring white roads in Miami, one of them by 1898 stretching all the way to Lemon City and linking up to the County Road.

Rock roads brought a bicycle boom. County Commissioner George W. Lainhart of West Palm Beach began to rethink the County Road. What it needed was a rock surface. He said he wanted a road so smooth he could get on his bicycle in West Palm Beach and ride right into

Miami. Wishful thinking.

Some years passed and it was not Lainhart's bicycle but the coming of the automobile which precipitated the rocking of the County Road. Then the county opened rockpits near Ojus — signs of these are still visible in Greynolds Park — and, using dynamite and convict labor, got the rock out, transported, spread and rolled.

The County Road had become a funnel for pouring the "tin-can" tourist into the Magic City. And that Magic City had already permanently won back the county seat.

(Editor's note: the Museum needs a photo of the Lemon City Hotel. Who has one?)

SUGAR COMES TO FLORIDA by Ken Sellati

Mr. Sellati is a local high-school teacher. He has contributed numerous articles to local and state publications.

It's called *Saccharum officinalis*, but to the people around Lake Okeechobee it's called sweet money. In the years immediately after the first World War there were frequent sugar shortages both in the United States and in international markets. New lands were sought for the development of sugar cane cultivation, one such area being the Florida Everglades. As early as 1884 the St. Cloud Sugar Plantation had been formed for growing cane, but it was not until 1919 that much progress was made.

In South Florida the first major effort was made by Pennsylvania Sugar Company, which was well established in the sugar trade. This first company attempt at cultivation involved more than 70,000 acres northwest of Miami, but only a few hundred acres were planted in the early years. Research was initiated to study the scientific characteristics of the Everglades, but a killing frost in December, 1920, wiped out the entire crop.

Large pumps were installed upon the advice of the Miami Weather Bureau for flooding fields during frost danger and a second crop was encouraging. An efficient sugar mill was planned and built ten miles northwest of Hialeah on the Miami Canal, but repeated flooding in the summer of the early twenties brought about the closing of the mill in 1925. The company tried truck farming, but by 1931 the only remnant of Pennsylvania Sugar Company in South Florida was the name of the company town, Pennsuko.

Farther north, on Lake Okeechobee's southern shore, experimentation in growing cane had started in 1914.

The Moorhaven Sugar Corporation was formed in 1920, but the problem of excessive water in the glades forced it from one ownership to another. It became the Florida Sugar and Food Product Company, with 900 acres under cultivation in 1923, and the Southern Sugar Company in 1924.

The company appeared headed for great success until the Sugar Act was passed by

Congress in 1937, restricting sugar cultivation in Florida to 9.4% of the domestic market. New varieties and good land management prevailed; Florida became a leading source of sugar, this state producing 32 tons per acre compared to 21 tons in Louisiana.

Setbacks continued to appear, chiefly a 30% cut ordered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture,

but in 1959 Cuban sugar was no longer imported and all government restrictions were removed. Acreage rose from 127,000 to 197,000, producing six million tons and over \$100,000,000 a year.

The bulk of Florida's sugar bowl now is in Palm Beach County, and sugar cane ranks only behind citrus as Florida's leading agricultural product.



Sugar cane planting in South Florida about 1920. —Photo in collection of HASF Museum

