

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONGRESSIONAL INVESTIGATION OF THE EVERGLADES PROJECT

#### 1. The Calm Before the Storm

After considering the amount of money which would be needed to survey the 'Glades, dig canals, and construct canal locks, as well as to complete the Furst-Clark contract the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund adopted a resolution on March 12, 1911, requesting the legislature to increase the Everglades District drainage tax from five to ten cents an acre.<sup>1</sup> The large landholders of the district, at the suggestion of the Trustee-Commissioners, met in Tallahassee and conferred on the subject on March 29. They found it inadvisable to recommend any change in the tax rate. They agreed, however, that the Florida East Coast Railway would not seek to withdraw any further acreage from the boundaries of the district; and they also admitted that the drainage tax had proven its worth, as shown by the fact that lands in and adjacent to the reclamation operations had trebled in value since 1906.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after the above conference Governor Gilchrist presented his biennial message on the condition of the state

---

1 I.I.B. Minutes, IX, 42.

2 E.D.D. "Minutes," I, 145-147.

to the legislature. He reported that prior to the letting of the contract on July 1, 1910, the Drainage Commissioners had completed 15.84 miles of canals and that since that date the six Furst-Clark dredges had cut 24.06 of the 184 miles in their agreement.<sup>3</sup> Gilchrist recited the details of the settlement between the Trustee-Commissioners and the land companies which resulted in the dismissal of the litigation over the drainage tax. Touching on the problem of drainage for the benefit of the land in the Everglades District which had been sold by the large brokers in small quantities to different individuals, the chief executive stated in definite terms that

The necessity for prompt reclamation of these lands, in order that they may be more quickly prepared for settlement and cultivation, is quite apparent. Under the preceding administration, lands were sold in alternate sections. As laterals will have to be constructed, it is the policy of the present administration to solidify their holdings as much as possible.<sup>4</sup>

As in the case of the 1907 and 1909 legislatures, the 1911 body created, by concurrent resolution, a joint committee to visit the Everglades operations, and to make a report on the work accomplished, in progress, and contemplated by the Trustees. The committee was instructed to ascertain the

---

<sup>3</sup> Journal of the State Senate of Florida of the Session of 1911, 56-57.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 64.

costs of the program, the acreage reclaimed, and to make a summary of lands disposed of together with the conditions of their sale, and of the lands still held by the Trustees.<sup>5</sup>

The committee of two senators and three representatives viewed the canals at the tidewater and lake ends of the incompleated canals and came to the conclusion that no land was adequately drained nor would be until the canals were finished through to the lake and the lake level lowered; some 15,000 acres adjacent to the outlets were, however, partially drained.<sup>6</sup> Observing that the consent obtained from the federal government to the lowering of Okeechobee was predicated on the establishment of locks, the committee called attention to the necessity for control works in the canals at eight to twelve mile intervals to control the waterways for irrigation and navigation.

The committee found that the Trustees had received \$834,730.35 from the sale of Everglades lands from January, 1905, to May, 1911, and that on the latter date the Trustees and Commissioners had \$439,993.95 in cash or negotiable

---

<sup>5</sup> Senate Concurrent Resolution Number 2, Acts and Resolutions Adopted by the Legislature of Florida at its Thirteenth Regular Session Under the Constitution of 1885, 937.

<sup>6</sup> Journal of the State Senate of Florida of the Session of 1911, 1755. They declared that when "the water in the lake is lowered, thereby making an immense reservoir, so that when the rainy season begins, this reservoir will hold the excessive rainfall, and by means of opening the canals the rainfall can be carried to the sea without the lake overflowing its banks," the Everglades will be drained. Ibid., 1755.

instruments on hand with drainage taxes due through the life of the Furst-Clark contract of \$1,578,864, making a total of resources of \$2,018,857.<sup>7</sup>

We are advised that about 35,000 acres of land in the Everglades had been sold in small tracts by promoters at prices as high as eighty (\$80.00) dollars per acre, under an agreement that the promoters would cut a canal at certain places which is supposed to be sufficient to carry off the water and make the land suitable for cultivation. Parties buying the land are fully advised, so far as we can ascertain, of the existing conditions and of the progress of the drainage operations. 8

The committee recommended that the Trustees encourage immigration into Florida and at the same time bring more money to the Improvement Fund by selling Everglades tracts in multiples of five acres to bona fide settlers. Estimating that roughly a million acres remained to the Fund in the drainage district, the legislators believed the lands should bring an average of \$25 an acre on such a plan. The committee also recommended that the Trustees donate the spoil banks along the canals, together with a right-of-way, for the construction of a cross-state highway; they said: "We know of nothing that would develop the Everglades more rapidly, except of course the drainage operations now in progress."<sup>9</sup>

Encountering doubt in the minds of many persons as to

---

<sup>7</sup> Journal of the State Senate of Florida of the Session of 1911, 1759.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1759-1760.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1761.

the drainage project, the committee pointed out that such a question was merely a matter of mathematics to be solved by combining the elements of rainfall, evaporation, and the size of the drainage canals. The group endorsed the enterprise and recommended that it be pushed with all vigor to complete the contracted canals, and suggested that a further canal be dug from Okeechobee to Lake Worth via West Palm Beach if such an outlet would be needed to implement the system.

Your committee is of the opinion that the drainage operation will ultimately be a great success, and is one of the greatest undertakings of the age, and will convert the Everglades--once a watery waste--into one of the garden spots of the world. We believe, however, before it has reached perfection, that individuals will have to spend for farm ditches and lateral canals a sum approximating two dollars per acre. When completed, the farmer need not fear cold, droughts nor floods, and has [sic] the consciousness of knowing that he is tilling as rich a soil as is to be found within the bounds of the South. 10

---

10 Journal of the State Senate of Florida of the Session of 1911, 1763. "We find that the I. I. Board has well in hand [sic] the drainage operations, and under J. O. Wright, Supervising Drainage Engineer, there is a thorough check on all the proceedings, and that everything is well mapped out and planned, and we do not believe a more competent, honest, energetic, and thorough man could be found anywhere, than Mr. Wright. So long as he is in charge of the actual construction, it is our opinion that the interests of the State will be thoroughly protected in every particular. At the same time, no mean advantage will be taken of the contractors." Ibid., 1761. The Board of Commissioners of the Everglades Drainage District adopted a route for the Palm Beach canal on December 22, 1911, and let the contract for its excavation on December 17, 1913. E.D.D. "Minutes," I, 229, 218-227.

In order to comply with the constitutional requirement Attorney General Park Trammell submitted his biennial advisory report to the legislature in 1911. Included among his proposals for action by that body was the passage of a bill providing that the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund establish and maintain two experimental farms in the Everglades, to consist of not more than ten acres each, one on the east coast and one on the west coast. Since the state possessed over a million acres below Okeechobee such stations would be of negligible expense and would add to the worth and development of the area by determining "the diversity of crops for which the soil of the Everglades land is suitable," and for "demonstrating the agricultural value of this land for the production of different crops."<sup>11</sup>

In late December of 1911 the Miami Board of Trade asked the Improvement Trustees to establish an experimental farm on the 'Glades near Miami. The Trustees replied that they would gladly donate land for such a farm but were doubtful of their right to "use funds for an experimental farm, if the funds were available."<sup>12</sup> The Trustees referred the request to the State Experiment Station at Gainesville.

The question of permanent locks and dams in the drainage canals became a veritable nightmare for the Board of

---

<sup>11</sup> Journal of the State Senate of Florida of the Session of 1911, 149.

<sup>12</sup> I.I.B. Minutes, IX, 327.

Commissioners. Land owners on the coastal ends of the canals were eager to see such installations constructed to protect their lands from the overflow of the waters from the upper reaches, while settlers on the latter lands were opposed to them because they feared they would hinder the run-off at their location. J. O. Wright, the chief engineer, objected to the locks because the water in the canals would have to be three feet below the surface of the lowest ground traversed by the canal in order to furnish drainage to lands adjacent to the waterway.<sup>13</sup>

This dilemma was brought to the attention of the Trustees in a communication of November 21, 1911, from A. B. Sanders of Miami who stated that he had bought fifty acres of "drained" land from the I. I. Trustees in 1910. He later sold it but when the prospective tenant arrived "she found the land she had purchased under two feet of water."<sup>14</sup> Sanders asked the Trustees if his unfortunate buyer could buy or lease lands below the temporary locks in order to make a winter crop. "The Trustees while refusing to admit they had sold Mr. A. B. Sanders or any one else land claiming that it had been drained, nevertheless were desirous of

---

<sup>13</sup> I.I.B. Minutes, IX, 225. Wright brought up "another fact to be considered . . . that when this muck land is drained, it will settle so that the canals will not be as deep as they are at the present time. This settlement will be as much as a foot or a foot and one-half in the deep muck soil."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 277.

assisting and will lease certain lands below the locks at three dollars (\$3.00) per acre for the season."<sup>15</sup>

Although drainage activity had been in progress for seven years, Lake Okeechobee was still a wilderness area in 1912. The main entry was through the Hicpochee Canal from the Caloosahatchee to the big lake. Small river steamers plied the Caloosahatchee to Ft. Thompson and the Kissimmee from Tohopekaliga to Ft. Bassinger.<sup>16</sup> W. S. Blatchley, making the Caloosahatchee River trip in 1911, noticed "Orange groves, landing docks, and small settlements" along the river, "but the groves were mostly narrow tracts on the river shore, put out to aid in selling lots to tourists."<sup>17</sup> At La Belle, just below Ft. Thompson, Blatchley found a small village which was the center of "a settlement of five and ten acre tracts which have been sold to northern people at high prices."<sup>18</sup> After entering the lake this tourist found but three houses on the shores of the lake, and the

<sup>15</sup> I.I.B. Minutes, IX, 277.

<sup>16</sup> Harrison Garfield Rhodes and Mary Wolfe Dumont, A Guide to Florida for Tourists, Sportsmen, and Settlers, 210-218. "To go to Lake Okeechobee from Kissimmee is a very interesting excursion. Steamboats and motor boats make the journey with little trouble to the traveler. . . ." Ibid., 216.

<sup>17</sup> W. S. Blatchley, In Days Agone, 94.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 96. "While docked here a large launch filled with northern tourists passed us. They were in charge of a land agent or real estate boomer who was taking them up to sell land in the everglades near the North New River Canal now being dredged between Lake Okeechobee and Fort Lauderdale." Ibid., 97.



only settlement was on Taylor's Creek off the northeastern shore of Lake Okeechobee.

Writing of early days on Lake Okeechobee, Gertrude M. Winne recalled that there were not many people living about Lake Okeechobee in 1912 when the Winnes built a house on Torry Island in the southeastern section of the lake.<sup>19</sup> The nearest female neighbors of the Winnes were members of the V. H. Waggoner family on Kreamer's Island some miles away. Hunting, fishing, and trapping were the occupations of the inhabitants although J. O. Wright found "several men who had squatted around the lake who were cultivating the land" in 1908.<sup>20</sup> Gertrude Winne remembered that Okeechobee's shores were an ideal hiding place from the law and that no questions were asked of people who dropped by; without any law,<sup>21</sup> however, conditions were safe. There were no stores on the lake and all provisions and supplies had to be brought from Ft. Myers, where the trappers and fishers sold their catch. With the opening of the North New River Canal in October, 1912, the distance to "civilization" was cut from

---

19 Everglades News (Canal Point, Florida), March 7, 1930.

20 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 3, 90.

21 A visitor to Kissimmee in 1895 wrote: "The unknown reaches of the Everglades lie just below, and with a half-hour's start a man who knew the country would be safe from pursuit even if it were attempted; and as one man cheerfully confided to me, 'A boat don't leave no trail, stranger.'" Frederic Remington, "Cracker Cowboys of Florida," Harper's Magazine, LXXX (August, 1895), 342.

135 miles to Ft. Myers to 64 miles to Ft. Lauderdale.

Gertrude Winne had noticed several gardens in the Everglades muck along Okeechobee's shore and wrote that she determined to have a good one. The 1911 legislative commission found every kind of garden vegetable being grown successfully in the muck except corn.

On the banks of Lake Okeechobee we saw cabbage growing that were four feet across, and were assured that fertilizer of no kind was used. We were told that they sold a cabbage the week before our visit that weighed twenty-eight pounds, and which was grown on the south side of the Lake without fertilizer. We found alfalfa growing most luxuriantly on the banks of the canal on the south shore of Lake Okeechobee. . . .

On the South New River Canal, some four to five miles out in the "Glades" we found a settlement of some eight or ten families who have been conducting vegetable gardens for the season past, and they were well pleased. They had raised cabbage, tomatoes, beans, Irish potatoes, and all kinds of garden truck profitably. One person there stated he had grown one hundred and twenty-six hampers of beans on a half-acre, and sold them at an average price of three dollars and a quarter per hamper--that the average crop of beans was about three hundred hampers to the acre. They raise about five hundred crates of tomatoes to the acre and have grown as high as eight hundred and fifty crates to the acre, which yielded them from \$1.50 to \$3.50 per crate. 23

---

22 Everglades News (Canal Point, Florida), March 7, 1930. In the early winter of 1913 the steamer Suawnee made weekly trips from Ft. Myers to the lake.

23 Journal of the State Senate of Florida of the Session of 1911, 1762. "We often found along the banks of the canal houses, boat landings, etc., that had been taken possession of by settlers." Ibid., 1762-1763. In 1907 the Florida East Coast Railway moved 1,500,000 crates of tomatoes, 700,000 crates of pineapples, and 150,000 barrels of Irish potatoes,

J. O. Wright, making his first public utterance on the Everglades at Miami in 1908, said that the 'Glades could be drained but that the land would not be permanently settled without the introduction of some staple crop of high commercial value such as sugar cane or rice.<sup>24</sup> Wright knew a cane patch on Rita River, a mile south of Lake Okeechobee, which produced profitable crops of syrup from 1909 to 1912; and another patch five miles out on the South New River Canal which was grown without fertilizer and with little cultivation.<sup>25</sup>

According to a survey made by the State Plant Board in 1919, the first plantings of sugar cane in the Everglades were made in 1908 and 1909 on Rita Island in Lake Okeechobee of two to four acres by F. A. Forbes and A. V. Callahan.<sup>26</sup>

---

the latter from one station. In 1897 the railway had moved a total of 76,000 crates of vegetables. In 1907 the railway grossed \$819,000, in 1908, \$4,000,000; in 1908 it transported 1,000,000 passengers. Edwin Lefevre, "Flagler and Florida," Everybody's, XXII (February, 1910), 176.

<sup>24</sup> J. O. Wright, The Everglades of Florida, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 55. Wright speculated on the prospects of two million acres of 'Glades and adjacent lands adapted for cane, averaging thirty tons per acre at three dollars a ton to produce \$180,000,000 per year. Ibid., 81. At the 1912 Congressional Hearings, Wright said "there are a great many crops that can be grown there, but the conclusion I have reached is that the settlement and salvation of the Everglades is sugar cane." 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 4, 157.

<sup>26</sup> F. D. Stevens, "History of Florida Sugar Operations," 15-16.

David Grandison Fairchild, the eminent plant authority, attempted to interest H. M. Flagler in 1912 in the avocado, mango, and other tropical fruits but "he was strongly of the opinion that there was a great future for sugar cane in the Everglades, and said that a big company was planning to plant a thousand acres."<sup>27</sup>

## 2. Background of the Congressional Investigation

The reclamation of the Everglades provided a wonderful opportunity for the sale of lands of a definitely questionable character which had been bought in wholesale lots from the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of Florida. Covering the capital scene for the New York Sun, a Washington correspondent reported:

These companies . . . have advertised extensively throughout the United States, and it is contended, have collected millions of dollars for lands obtained at 50 cents an acre and sold as high as \$60 an acre. 28

---

27 David Grandison Fairchild, The World Was My Garden, 387.

28 "Draining the Everglades," Literary Digest, XLIV (February 17, 1912), 327. "To turn a land of mystery into a prosaic farming country--to throw the limelight of familiarity into the fastnesses of a much-misunderstood region--to change an almost inaccessible hunting-ground and a hiding-place for Indians and bad men into a productive region--all this is the object of one of the most gigantic schemes of reclamation ever undertaken in the world's history now being carried out . . . in the Everglades of Florida. That it is being used by unscrupulous promoters to cover the sale of worthless lands at fancy prices does not detract from the value of the plan itself."

The chain of events which reached a climax in the Congressional Investigation of the Everglades drainage scheme had its beginnings in the correspondence between C. G. Elliott, Engineer in Charge of Drainage Investigations, United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Experiment Stations, and Governor N. B. Broward. Elliott wrote Broward on February 28, 1905, offering to cooperate

. . . in every way consistent with the means we have at command for determining the practicability and otherwise improving and developing the hidden resources of the wet lands of Florida. 29

As noted in the preceding chapter, the exchange of letters and conferences between state and federal officials resulted in intermittent examinations of the Everglades by James O. Wright and others from 1906 through 1908, and the subsequent preparation of an abstract of Wright's report. 30

Just how the excerpt of the Wright Report was released is unknown. Sometime in February, 1909, Henry Clay Hall, who represented a large Colorado brokerage firm interested in Everglades lands, appeared in the Washington office of the Agriculture Department's drainage investigations seeking information on the South Florida area. 31 Hall was allowed

29 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 25, 1259.

30 *Ibid.*, Number 18, 846-861.

31 C. G. Elliott maintained that the Florida Trustees sought the federal engineers' recommendations in February, 1909, and were furnished the excerpt, a copy of which was also given to Hall. "This was the way the transaction remained in my mind, and I still remember it so, but according to

to read a draft of what Wright had written and a typewritten excerpt was mailed to him by Elliott on February 27, 1909.<sup>32</sup> Another copy of the excerpt was sent to the Florida Trustees on March 6, 1909, by Elliott, both abstracts having been mailed "with the understanding that the information contained therein be not made public until the appearance of the complete report, which is in course of preparation."<sup>33</sup>

Governor Gilchrist wrote Secretary Wilson on March 11, 1909, and asked permission "to use so much of the report as I may deem proper to submit to the legislature," when it should meet in April.<sup>34</sup> Wilson replied March 27:

---

the files my memory is at fault, Mr. Hall having been given the excerpt first, and it was sent to the board a few days later, apparently without a request from them." 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 21, 1039-1041. J. O. Wright maintained that ". . . Henry Clay Hall, of Colorado Springs, came to Washington and asked to see the report I had written, Elliott gave him the report to read and he asked permission to make a copy of it. This privilege was denied him. A day or two later he appeared with an order from Secretary Wilson directing Elliott to give him a copy of that portion dealing with the drainage problem. . . . After this extract of the report had been given to Mr. Hall, I said to Elliott, 'I think this same information . . . should be sent to the trustees of the internal improvement fund.' He objected to doing this, but . . . finally decided it would be the proper thing to do. . . ." Ibid., Number 5, 188. On February 14, 1912, Hall wrote: "Saw Secretary Wilson . . . received typewritten extract signed by Wright, from forthcoming report under cover letter from Elliott, dated February 27, 1909 . . . Henry C. Hall." Ibid., Number 26, 1300.

<sup>32</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 26, 1328.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Number 12, 559.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 560.

Since this report relates to the conditions which prevail in the lands tributary of Lake Okeechobee and proposes a plan for the drainage of the Everglades, I see no reason why it should not be submitted to the legislature as a portion of the forthcoming report which will be published by this department in the near future. I take pleasure in granting you this request, trusting that, as a progress report upon the Everglades, it may be of some use to the State. 35

The release of the abstract of the Wright Report bearing the prestige and approval of the drainage division of the Department of Agriculture set in motion a succession of events from which there was no retreat. The first draft of the report had not been completed when Wright selected the abstract, but without examination or review by any authority it was delivered under Elliott's signature as chief drainage engineer to Hall and the Trustees. <sup>36</sup> Soon after the delivery of the Wright abstract by Governor Gilchrist to the 1909 legislature certain parts were seized upon by the Everglades

---

35 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 12, 560. "The Department of Agriculture entered upon this very responsible work of reclamation of its own initiative, but does not seem to have had a proper conception of the vast interests involved in the project. This work was undertaken without serious consideration, was not prosecuted vigorously or successfully, and was abandoned by the department after an expenditure of \$11,017.34, without having accomplished any definite or satisfactory results." "Expenditures in the Department of Agriculture," House of Representatives Documents, Report Number 1207, 62 Congress, 2 Session, 1-2.

36 House of Representatives Documents, Report Number 1207, 62 Congress, 2 Session, 2. See also 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 10, 409-410, and Number 21, 1039.

land selling promoters to back up their high pressure campaigns with the authority of a federal report.<sup>37</sup>

The delay in the preparation of the final report by Wright was attributed to several causes: other work in the drainage division, speaking tours, and seeming indifference on the part of both Wright and Elliott.<sup>38</sup> Matters were brought to a head in August, 1909, when Harold Wheeler called at the office of the drainage division of the Department of Agriculture. Wheeler stated that he represented persons who had contemplated buying land in the Everglades; that he had been through the area and had made some examinations; and that certain statements in the Wright excerpt "did not appear to him to be justified, and he called to ask some one in the office to explain that report to him."<sup>39</sup>

Elliott, the chief drainage engineer of the department,

---

<sup>37</sup> "Data included in this excerpt was regarded by interested parties as being so favorable to this work of reclamation that it was circulated as advertising matter to stimulate the sale of the Florida Everglade lands by companies who placed these lands on the market before the ditches were dug to drain. Thus with only a cursory examination in the field and no critical review in the office, engineering plans for this vast reclamation work--the largest project in the world, was favorably recommended to the public, bearing the approval of the Department of Agriculture." House of Representatives Documents, Report Number 1207, 62 Congress, 2 Session, 2. See also H. Parker Willis, "Secretary Wilson's Record," loc. cit., 15-16.

<sup>38</sup> J. O. Wright, Why Was Wright's Report on the Everglades Suppressed?, 8-10. For Elliott's story see 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 20, 987-998.

<sup>39</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 9, 341.



and Wright were away on an inspection tour, so Wheeler turned to Arthur E. Morgan, one of the supervising engineers, to answer his questions regarding costs of excavation and the evaporation of rainfall as stated in the abstracted report. Wheeler told Morgan he had made a visit to one of the dredges and had noted that "where the ditch was said to have been dug 10 feet he found that it had filled up immediately behind the dredge, making a ditch only about 5 feet deep. . . ."<sup>40</sup>

Wheeler said no accurate account had been kept of the work, and the records in the Tallahassee offices of the Internal Improvement Fund regarding drainage costs were in such condition that the Board's employees could not give any idea of the cost; and "as a result of that investigation he [Wheeler] did not believe the board itself knew what the work was costing."<sup>41</sup> Using Wright's figures on rainfall and evaporation, Wheeler found that the latter exceeded the former to such an extent that, if true, Lake Okeechobee would soon dry up and there would be no run-off on the Everglades whatsoever.

Meanwhile Wright had completed his full report and presented it to Elliott for approval the previous May. The chief drainage engineer of the federal division made a number of changes in the arrangement and subject matter and presented

---

<sup>40</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 9, 343.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 344.

it to the printer the latter part of June. It was during Elliott's absence in August that galley proof was returned to the office and was almost ready to be sent back to the printer when Wheeler called at the drainage division. <sup>42</sup>

With the impetus given by Wheeler's questions, Morgan examined the Wright plans and assured himself that it was

. . . so completely erroneous and gave evidence of such complete incompetency that its publication would not only be misleading, but that it would be a very serious reflection upon the professional character of the services performed by drainage investigations. <sup>43</sup>

As a result Morgan consulted with Alfred D. Morehouse, acting chief of drainage investigations in the absence of Elliott, and after communicating with the latter, the three engineers held up the proof of the Wright report for further investigation. Upon Elliott's return the Wright manuscript received a thorough going over at the hands of the engineers of the division. The subsequent revision incurred Wright's displeasure and as the summer and fall wore on an increasing

---

<sup>42</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 18, 857. By way of explanation, Elliott wrote: "I made some quite radical changes in the arrangement and in part of the subject matter, but the extract which had previously been made public and which dealt with many of the engineering features of the problem and with the plans for draining the Everglades, I gave no special attention to and it was left without change, for the reason that I was seriously handicapped for time, and also at that time had sufficient confidence in Mr. Wright's ability as an engineer not to question the accuracy and reliability of his work and deductions." Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Number 10, 409. Wheeler reduced his questions regarding the report to writing in letters to both Wright and Moorehouse. Ibid., Number 9, 385-386.

amount of bad blood developed between Elliott and his junior engineer. On January 28, 1910, the revised page proof was presented to the director of experiment stations, in which bureau the drainage division was located, "with the request that it be printed as soon as possible, as its publication had already been deferred too long."<sup>44</sup>

The controversy between Elliott and Wright reached a climax in February, 1910, when Wright accepted the position of chief drainage engineer for the Board of Commissioners of the Everglades Drainage District. According to Elliott, Wright did not intend to resign from the federal agency to take up the Florida work, but instead asked for a furlough which his senior refused to grant, whereupon Wright submit-<sup>45</sup>ted his resignation.

The activity of the state drainage operations and the sales campaigns of the various land companies focused a

---

<sup>44</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 21, 1041. Since the revision of the Wright report was made by several men credit for this work was given under Wright's name as author by adding: "Prepared by engineers of drainage investigations under the direction of C. G. Elliott, Chief of Drainage Investigations." "It is this change in the title which Mr. Wright publicly ascribed to my jealousy of him and my desire to rob him of deserved credit," wrote Elliott. Ibid. When Elliott examined Wright's report in October, 1909, he confirmed his suspicion of the latter's incompetency, but did not recommend his removal from the department. Elliott declared he just "did not assign him any more important work." Ibid., Number 20, 994.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., Number 21, 1042. Wright later wrote: "I accepted the position tendered me because it placed me in charge of the largest drainage project in the United States." Ibid., Number 5, 190.

great deal of attention on the Everglades. Since the United States Department of Agriculture was known to be conducting examinations in that area it was natural that many letters seeking information would be addressed to the federal agency.

During the years 1908 and 1909 the office received increasingly frequent letters of inquiry concerning the Everglades from persons who were contemplating investing in them. Replying to these finally became so arduous a task that . . . one of the office engineers was instructed to compile from the data in the office a concise statement covering the points on which the information was most frequently asked, and prepare a multigraph letter that could be sent in answer to such inquiries. 46

Elliott's office prepared a form letter in January, 1910, which was used to answer the requests for information on the south Florida region. After a brief history and geographical description of the Everglades, the letter discussed other features, including climate, rainfall, soil, land sales, and drainage operations. In part, the circular stated:

The climate of southern Florida seems as healthful as that of other localities having the same latitude. . . . The long and hot summers are usually very irksome to the people from more northern states, but do not seem detrimental to the health. . . .

. . . . .  
The State has sold large tracts in the Glades to companies that are now offering these lands for sale. The State retains the ownership of alternate sections throughout the tracts, but has

---

46 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 21, 1042. For typical letters see, ibid., Number 18, 890-892, Number 20, 1000. According to George P. McCabe, Solicitor of the Department of Agriculture in 1912, the drainage division in Washington had received 1,533 inquiries to February 3, 1912. Ibid., Number 1, 14.

sold several hundred thousand acres for about \$2 per acre, agreeing to expend about \$1.50 per acre toward drainage. . . . A number of miles of canals have been excavated, and it does not seem improbable that as this work progresses the land bordering the canals will be at least partially drained. But undoubtedly much time will yet be required before any considerable areas will be habitable or fitted for cultivation.

For the drainage of the Everglades a very complete system of main ditches and laterals will be required and farm ditches in detail. Also in this soil provision must be made for irrigation or for maintaining the water in the ditches and soil at a fairly uniform depth, not too low, in order that there may always be sufficient moisture for the production of crops, and to prevent the liability of the muck catching fire and burning.

The drainage of the Everglades is entirely feasible from an engineering standpoint, but the value of the land when drained is highly problematical. Some small drained tracts on the edge of the Glades have produced very satisfactory crops of vegetables; usually but not always, large quantities of fertilizers have been used. . . .

. . . . .  
Further than the preparation of . . . a drainage plan, the National Government is doing nothing toward the drainage of the Everglades, and has made no appropriation from which any such works may be constructed. 47

In conclusion, the circular referred the inquirers to the Gainesville, Florida, Agricultural Experiment Station and the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of Florida, adding that further information regarding conditions in southern Florida would be issued later by the Office of Experiment Stations, "with an outline for the main drainage system to

reclaim about 1,800,000 acres of the Everglades lying between Miami and Lake Okeechobee and about the lake."<sup>48</sup>

The delay in the appearance of the complete Wright report had led to an increasing correspondence on the subject, and to meet this demand the form letter was used. The statements on the soil, agricultural value, and amount of ditching necessary were of such cautionary nature that they were objectionable to parties interested in promoting Everglades land sales.<sup>49</sup>

On February 3, 1910, Senator Duncan U. Fletcher received the following telegram from ex-Governor Broward:

Received a telegram /from Harold K. Bryant of Chicago/ "Bulletin coming out of Agricultural Department knocking Everglades." I earnestly ask you to investigate and prevent such action if you can. I understand that Dr. Wiley, Chief Chemist Agricultural Department, is opposed to having his

---

<sup>48</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 5, 216. Solicitor G. P. McCabe stated before the Moss Committee investigating expenditures in the Department of Agriculture in 1912 that Secretary Wilson had signed 265 letters answering questions on the Everglades and had invariably stated that the department had never investigated the companies selling Florida lands nor was there any publication available regarding the Everglades. Ibid., Number 1, 27-28. Arthur E. Morgan, in his testimony before the same committee, said: "I was personally acquainted with many of these letters that came in inquiring about the Everglades, and in very many statements are made, 'This is our everything that we are putting in here.'" Ibid., Number 9, 370.

<sup>49</sup> House of Representatives Documents, Report Number 1207, 62 Congress, 2 Session, 3. It was later determined that "The same interests which made . . . objection to the circular had been guilty of circulating highly extravagant statements in praise of Everglade lands, and falsely attributing the authorship to Secretary Wilson." Ibid.

name used by companies selling Everglade lands. They claim to quote Dr. Wiley to Secretary of Agriculture, 1891, page 170. They think they have a right to print excerpts of report, it being a public document. Am writing. 50

Senator Fletcher called on Secretary Wilson on the morning of February 4, read to him Broward's message, and presented Wilson with a copy of the circular letter. The letter had been produced in a regular manner by Wilson's subordinates in the office of the drainage division and sent out with C. G. Elliott's signature, but Fletcher's copy was the first the Secretary of Agriculture had seen. 51

Fletcher quoted Wilson as saying: "I know nothing about any such circular . . . you must be mistaken; I have never heard of it, and I think it can not be true." 52 Wilson thereupon called in Joseph Arnold, Chief of the Division of Publications and editor of the department, and questioned him at some length about the letter. After some discussion Wilson told Arnold:

This is not part of our business; we are here to furnish scientific data and the results of scientific investigation. We are not here to give opinions or make statements otherwise than that, and I want this stopped right where it is. 53

---

50 House of Representatives Documents, Report Number 1207, 62 Congress, 2 Session, 3.

51 Ibid.

52 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 19, 928. Fletcher stated that H. L. Bowen, an agent of the Everglades Land Company in Washington, gave him the copy of the circular letter, in 1910. Ibid., Number 16, 757-758.

53 Ibid., Number 19, 929. Testifying before the congressional committee on April 3, 1912, Secretary Wilson stated he

Within a few days after Fletcher's visit to the Department of Agriculture, E. C. Howe and T. E. Will, salesmen of the Everglades Land Sales Company, visited the drainage division of the Office of Experiment Stations in the same federal agency and wanted to know who prepared the circular letter. They were indignant at what they termed its misinformation, and sought to have the letter suppressed and a retraction issued. The real estate agents received a cool reception in the drainage division and took their case to Secretary Wilson, who had already suppressed the circular.<sup>54</sup> Congressman Frank Clark, in whose district most of the Everglades lay, took several of his farmer constituents to meet Secretary Wilson in February, 1912. During the conversation Clark asked Wilson why the now ill-famed circular letter had been suppressed. According to Clark, Wilson replied that he had suppressed it at the instance of persons selling Everglade lands, "and he said he thought he had done right, and asked me if I did not

---

ordered the circular suppressed because it was not only unauthorized but was not up to the style of publication which the department would want to send out. 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 26, 1317. See also speech of Fletcher in the United States Senate on February 15, 1912, in which he amplifies the story of the meeting he had with Wilson in 1910. Congressional Record, XLVIII, 2085.

<sup>54</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 13, 597, 624-625; Number 21, 1042-1043.



55  
think so."

About the middle of May, 1910, Clark introduced a resolution on the floor of the House of Representatives which definitely showed his attitude in regard to the position of the United States Department of Agriculture and the Everglades project. Clark proposed that the Secretary of Agriculture furnish the lower house

. . . with any and all information in the possession of his department showing what if anything, the Government of the United States is doing or has done toward directing or supervising the drainage of any lands in the Everglades region of Florida. . . . 56

This resolution was never reported on, but tended to create disquiet in the public mind, according to T. E. Will, and was another part of the campaign which the Florida congressman was waging against the Everglades.<sup>57</sup> The public mind in Will's eye probably represented the "buying public" at this time.

On May 17, T. E. Will and M. L. Bowen paid a visit to

---

55 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 1, 8. Clark remembered he had insisted on seeing a copy of the circular, "which the old man did not show very much disposition to exhibit, but after some considerable insistence he did send and get a copy of it." Wilson was reputed to have said that he "was not running his department for the protection of fools who bought stuff all over the country without seeing it." Ibid., 19. See also the testimony of William R. Hardee and Henry E. Sewell, who substantiated Clark's statements on the interview with Wilson. Ibid., Number 18, 908, 926.

56 Congressional Record, XLV (May 10, 1910), 6317.

57 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 13, 625.

Secretary Wilson in regard to the Wright report, which had been promised to the public some months previously. Will recalled that he had expressed the hope that the delayed publication would soon appear, when Wilson brought his fist down on the table and said, "I told them fellows I would not do a damn thing for them until they quit fighting among themselves."<sup>58</sup>

Under C. G. Elliott's direction a report had been prepared and submitted to Secretary Wilson on May 20, 1910, which would have been sent to the house had the call arrived. On June 14, 1910, some five months after the Wright report on the Everglades had been transmitted in completed form for printing, Elliott was informed by the director of the Division of Publications that "The Secretary had decided not to publish [it]."<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 13, 627. Wilson was referring to the differences of opinion in the Florida congressional delegation, and especially between Senator Fletcher and Representative Clark. When J. O. Wright resigned from the department on February 15, 1910, he called on Secretary Wilson before leaving and asked if the report he had written would be published. Wright said, two years later, that Wilson had told him: "There is a difference of opinion over on the hill about the propriety of publishing this report, and I have ordered it held up. . . . There are things in there the department should not stand for." Ibid., Number 6, 236. Will claimed Clark had criticized the Everglades at the door of the House of Representatives in front of a crowd on February 7, 1910, and had promised to bring the matter up on the floor of the House in a speech. Ibid., Number 16, 748-749.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Number 21, 1041. In his statement to the investigating committee on April 3, 1912, Secretary Wilson said the Wright Report had not been published because "We had not done enough; we had not done what the people of Florida had a right to expect, and that, taken with other surroundings, prevailed upon me to stop the work. It was not what it should have been." Ibid., Number 26, 1311.

Judson C. Welliver, on October 8, 1911, published an article in the Washington Times in which he asked who had suppressed the report on land drainage in Florida.

For more than a year the document has been in type at the Government Printing Office. Engineering authorities say that if it had been published it might have saved thousands of innocent investors from sinking their money in Florida development and drainage propositions.

Millions upon millions of dollars would have been saved, it is declared, if the official document could have been given publicity. 60

Welliver went on to answer his own original question, at least in part, by citing Senator Smoot's resolution of August 7, 1911, ordering the printing of a compilation of assorted papers on the Everglades. Welliver's second article, which appeared in the same paper on October 15, went much further into detail; it was quite evident that the writer had been on the receiving end of somebody's grapevine intelligence system.

Welliver found that a feud had existed in the Department of Agriculture over the J. O. Wright report. The Florida East Coast Railway was accused by the pro-drainage forces of making its presence felt because of the competition of state lands with those of the carrier, and had exerted pressure to have the report suppressed as one means of knocking the Everglades. Welliver brought in the ill-fated course of the

---

60 Judson C. Welliver article from Washington Times, October 8, 1911, quoted in full in 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 18, 879-880.

Florida East Coast Sugar and Drainage Company and laid its failure to the anti-railroad machinations of Jennings and Broward. Attaching Congressman Frank Clark to the Florida East Coast alignment, Welliver declared that he too had sought the suppression of the Wright report. <sup>61</sup>

The article brought out the efforts of Senator Fletcher to get the report published and of this difficulty which he finally solved in the August resolution. Welliver then traced the story of the Elliott-Wright feud, taking Elliott's side to the extent of declaring that Wright had laid down on the job and was practically dismissed when all responsible work was taken away from him. The Times story closed with a resume of Fletcher's attitude and attempts to bring out the long awaited Wright production.

It is expected the long suppressed document will finally appear about the time Congress meets. That it will stir up a new manifestation of trouble between the political and business factions of Florida is confidently expected. <sup>62</sup>

Within a few days after the appearance of the October 15 article, Clark wrote to Secretary Wilson asking for a full explanation of Welliver's accusation that he had aided in the suppression of the engineering report. Clark reminded Wilson of his visit to the secretary's office in February, 1910, and

---

<sup>61</sup> Judson C. Welliver article in Washington Times, October 15, 1912, quoted in full in 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 18, 880-883.

<sup>62</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 18, 883.

the exhortation the Florida legislator had made to get more facts published about the Everglades.<sup>63</sup> Wilson answered Clark on October 24 and agreed with the latter that Clark had never sought to suppress any of the various reports or letters; he added that since the Wright report would soon appear in a senate document the public would be informed.<sup>64</sup> Clark again wrote Wilson on October 26 and cited the fact that Jennings, Fletcher, and Wright had corrected and revised the proofs of the forthcoming document, and urged Wilson to keep a copy of the original Wright report for comparison and publication.<sup>65</sup> The Clark-Wilson correspondence continued

---

<sup>63</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 18, 840-841.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 841.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 842. Clark wrote: "The land sharks who insisted on the suppression of this report and the circular letter are now claiming in the public press that they have always urged the publication of these documents, because the said documents were very favorable to the drainage of the Everglades, but that you suppressed them at the instance of myself and others because a certain railroad company would be financially injured by the consumation of the drainage scheme.

"I am giving you the real facts, Mr. Secretary, so that you may know the real situation. I have never seen the report, but the circular letter, while admitting that the lands could be drained, made the very positive statement that it would cost millions of dollars and require many years, and that after accomplishment the lands would be of doubtful value. This did not suit the big land companies, because if it was going to take years of time, millions of money, and then the lands would be of uncertain value, they could not unload their holdings in small tracts to the American citizen. This was the motive prompting them in appealing to you, and after you suppressed the report and the circular letter they straightaway took from the report the favorable clauses and scattered them in their literature broadcast over the land, thus proclaiming to the world that your department endorsed their scheme in toto and coined millions of money." Ibid., 842.

into January, 1912, when the Florida representative urged the secretary to publish the "real Wright Report" as against the doctored edition in the senate document.<sup>66</sup>

Another party whose toe was stepped on in the Welliver articles was J. O. Wright. The Florida drainage engineer wrote A. C. True, Director of the Office of Experiment Stations and Elliott's immediate superior, on October 27, 1911, in regard to the "scurrilous attack." Wright stated that he had resigned to take charge of the Florida project at a better salary than the bureau chiefs of the agriculture department received, and asked True to see if Elliott would not set the record straight. "I shall surely not rush into print with a denial. . . . I have other means at my disposal, which I think will be much more effective."<sup>67</sup>

The Wright report on the Everglades lay dormant in the files of the department of agriculture for a full year before Senator Fletcher made a determined effort which resulted in the publication of the much sought after account. Broward, Gilchrist, and a veritable host of others had attempted to secure copies of the government engineers' recommendations without success.<sup>68</sup> In June of 1911, Senator

---

<sup>66</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 18, 845, 846, 861, 863-865.

<sup>67</sup> Wright to A. C. True, October 27, 1911, ibid., Number 7, 270-271.

<sup>68</sup> Senate Documents, Number 89, 62 Congress, 1 Session, 17-18.

Fletcher heard the report had been killed, the plates melted up, and the number the paper was to have borne given to another document.

Senator Fletcher, who represented the progressive element that wanted to carry out the drainage project, figured out a plan to force its publication whether the department liked it or not. So he introduced a Senate resolution to have the whole thing published as a Senate document, along with much other matter bearing on the drainage enterprise--the Buckingham Smith report, the Jefferson Davis report, the legislative reports, governors' messages, and the like. 69

On August 7, 1911, Chairman Reed Smoot of the Senate Committee on Printing submitted Senate Resolution 130 to the Senate, which was considered and by unanimous consent agreed to, authorizing the printing as a public document a compilation of acts, reports, and other papers relating to the reclamation of the Everglades. <sup>70</sup> This collection of assorted

---

69 Judson C. Welliver article in the Washington Times, October 15, 1911, quoted in full in 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 18, 882. In a statement before the congressional investigation committee, Senator Fletcher said: "The document was prepared at my instance, and under my direction, purely as a public matter, in the effort and the endeavor to give purely [sic] record, and to state only the absolute truth in connection with that great enterprise." Ibid., Number 7, 282. See also Senator Fletcher's defense of Senate Document 89 on the floor of the upper house, Congressional Record, XLVIII (February 15, 1912), 2084-2086.

70 Congressional Record, XLVII (August 7, 1911), 3669. R. E. Rose wrote that "The Everglades enterprise became the subject of national agitation, and was denounced in the Halls of Congress, resulting in the investigation by the U. S. Senate and the publication of Senate Document No. 89. . . ." R. E. Rose, "The Swamp and Overflowed Lands of Florida," loc. cit., 130.

manuscripts pertaining to the south Florida wet lands became the celebrated Senate Document Number 89 about which the gathering storm broke in the fall of 1911 when it appeared in print and played a major part in the congressional hearings of February and March, 1912.

Senator Fletcher began assembling the materials for the 208 page volume in the early summer of 1911. George H. Carter, clerk of the Joint Committee of Congress on Printing, asserted that the material was prepared and arranged by T. E. Will. The former educator and editor managed to secure, without the Department of Agriculture's authorization, a copy of the notorious Wright Report for the printing committee.<sup>71</sup> The document did not, however, contain a copy of the controversial Elliott circular of January, 1910.

At the hearings in Washington in the late winter of 1912

---

<sup>71</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 19, 943-956, 958, 964-965, Number 21, 1029. When Will was on the stand in March, 1912, before the House Committee investigating the Everglades he was asked if he had had any connection with Senate Document 89. He asked Chairman Ralph W. Moss if the chair desired him to answer the question. William H. Ellis, representing the Florida Internal Improvement Fund Trustees at the hearings, objected to the question and the objection was sustained by Moss. Ibid., Number 16, 760. In an article published by Will in the Ft. Lauderdale (Florida) Call on June 12, 1926, Will wrote that he had conceived and compiled Senate Document 89 in 1911. The Moss Committee did not press Will to ascertain where he procured the page proof of the suppressed Wright Report and Will's memory failed him as to the name of the man in the government printing office who supplied the material. 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 13, 634-635.



this document continued to bob up on the questioning of the various witnesses. Testimony brought out the facts that the proofs were read and corrected in the late summer of 1911 in Jacksonville, Florida, by Senator Fletcher, ex-Governor Jennings, and chief engineer James O. Wright of the Florida drainage commissioners.<sup>72</sup> Congressman Frank Clark wrote in October that Jennings and others "who are largely interested in the Everglades land companies have largely gone over these proofs, presumably to see that they are all right before they are finally published."<sup>73</sup>

On February 20, 1912, during one of the hearings before the Moss Committee, Henry E. Davis, attorney for the investigators, was asked by William H. Ellis, attorney for the Florida Trustees, if the former intended to attack Senate Document 89. Davis replied that it was his purpose to point out the interests which its preparation served.<sup>74</sup> At the same hearing Chairman Moss read a large display from an Everglades Land Sales Company into the record. It reads as

---

<sup>72</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 1, 10, Number 5, 221, Number 18, 841.

<sup>73</sup> Clark to Secretary Wilson, October 20, 1911, 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 18, 841. Jennings was interested in more than a political manner with the Everglades project. He had received 27,000 acres as a gift from Richard J. Bolles. Ibid., Number 7, 261. Jennings was closely associated with Bolles in the Everglades Reclaimed Land Company and associated firms. Ibid., Number 26, 1325.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Number 7, 261.

follows:

United States Senate Document No. 89, regarding Everglades, now ready. Every person interested in the glades should send for this publication, compiled at the request of the Miami Board of Trade, submitted by Florida's distinguished Senator, Duncan U. Fletcher. 75

Moss questioned J. O. Wright as to the reputation of the document in Florida as an indorsement of the Everglades project. Wright answered, "Yes, I think I could say it is an indorsement of the project."<sup>76</sup> When Representative E. R. Bathrick asked Will if the Everglades Land Sales Company had used the document as a means of selling land, the latter<sup>77</sup> replied, "I think so. They have used it."

Senate Document Number 89 was a very popular collection. The first edition, appearing in the fall of 1911, was soon exhausted for on February 1, 1912, Senator Nathan P. Bryan, the junior senator from Florida introduced a resolution providing for the printing of 4,800 additional copies of the document, 2,000 for the senate and 2,800 for the superintendent of documents to be sold to the public.<sup>78</sup> Smoot,

---

75 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 7, 300. Fletcher attempted to rebut the evidence read by Moss by stating that the document was not prepared "at the instance of any one board of trade or individual. . . . I thought the public interest would be subserved by a collection, compilation, and publication of public records. . . . I sought to do this for the public good and in the public interest. . . ." Ibid., Number 8, 334-335.

76 Ibid., Number 7, 299.

77 Ibid., Number 16, 766.

78 Congressional Record, XLVIII (February 1, 1912), 1615. "The promoters and the boomers have thus been furnished

of the printing committee, reported the resolution favorably and after consideration it was adopted by unanimous consent on February 15, 1912.<sup>79</sup>

### 3. The Battle Lines Are Drawn: Investigation

. . . I now proclaim that it will develop as a matter of fact that the Department of Agriculture itself, through its officials, in the latter part of the year 1911, gathered itself together and girded up its loins to meet this inquiry. 80

This statement made by Henry E. Davis, counsel for the Moss Committee, was borne out in the Clark-Wilson correspondence and also in the Welliver newspaper articles discussed above. The devious trails of the Wright Report, Elliott circular letter, and Clark correspondence from 1909 through 1911 had Secretary James Wilson in such a dizzy whirl that in November, 1911, he summoned Charles G. Elliott to his office and told him to prepare a full account of the events covered in the Everglades experiences of the United States Department of Agriculture.<sup>81</sup> Elliott's statement was prepared and

---

with a fresh supply of ammunition, which they can use at will for the purpose of misleading investors." H. P. Willis, "Secretary Wilson's Record," loc. cit., 16.

<sup>79</sup> Congressional Record, XLVIII (February 15, 1912), 2084. It was after the adoption of this resolution that Senator Fletcher made his defense of the document. Ibid., 2084-2086.

<sup>80</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 7, 275.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., Number 21, 1036. ". . . I want you to prepare me a complete statement, giving me all the ins and outs. I don't want you to keep back anything," Wilson told Elliott. Ibid.

passed to the secretary on November 21, 1911. In his resume Elliott did not pull any punches but let the blows fall where they might with especial emphasis on the part played by the land agents in the suppression of the circular letter and the inaccuracies of the Wright report.<sup>82</sup>

On November 29, 1911, Representative Clark called Secretary Wilson and requested a complete history of the department's activities in the Everglades. Wilson sent a copy of Elliott's long statement to Clark, who apparently released the letter to the press, for it appeared verbatim in the Jacksonville (Florida) Metropolis on December 15, 1911.<sup>83</sup>

The candid statements made by Elliott in regard to James O. Wright remained intact throughout and came to the attention of the chief engineer of the Everglades operations soon after the Florida paper published the letter. James O. Wright later declared:

My friends in Tallahassee, and the trustees of the internal improvement fund of the State of Florida, by whom I am employed came to me and said, "Mr. Wright, you can't ignore this any longer. It is up to you to make an explanation of this matter. It is injuring your work and it is injuring the State."<sup>84</sup>

In an attempt to defend himself from what he felt was

---

<sup>82</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 18, 857-860, Number 21, 1039-1042.

<sup>83</sup> Wilson to Clark, letter of November 29, 1911, 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 18, 846; J. O. Wright, Why Was Wright's Report on the Everglades Suppressed?, 1.

<sup>84</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 7, 272.

the "abuse" of Elliott, Wright wrote and published an eight page account of why his report had never been revealed. Wright laid the full responsibility for the non-appearance of his manuscript at Elliott's feet, stating that Elliott had declined the original job of the Everglades surveys in July, 1906, and had been hostile to the project ever since that time.<sup>85</sup>

It will be recalled that Wright had written the director of the office of experiment stations of the agriculture department, shortly after the publication of the Welliver articles, in October, 1911, asking that official to request Elliott to deny the statements about Wright's incompetency and separation from government service.<sup>86</sup> On January 20, 1912, while attending to private business in Washington, Wright called on the chief of the division of accounts and disbursements in the department of agriculture and revealed several financial irregularities which had occurred in making up a deficit in the division of irrigation and drainage in

---

85 J. O. Wright, Why Was Wright's Report Suppressed?, 1-8. This statement was published in the Jacksonville (Florida) Metropolis on December 15, 1911, and also reproduced in the 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 5, 186-192. Wright stated that he had never been subject to any outside influences during his Florida surveys for the agriculture department or while he was composing the report. "I have no land in Florida and have not any interest in any land company doing business in the State." Ibid., Number 5, 191.

86 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 7, 273.

87  
 1909. The irregularities involved illegal shifting of funds within the division under Elliott's supervision and illegal borrowing to cover certain deficits. As a result Elliott was dismissed from the department and Wright had used the means which he felt "to be more effective than a printed denial," even though he had made a public defense. 88

Throughout the fall of 1911 and early winter of 1912 references were made to the probability that the House of Representatives' Committee Investigating Expenditures in the Department of Agriculture, under the Chairmanship of Representative Ralph W. Moss of Indiana, would look into the Everglades project. Interest in Washington centered on the stories behind the suppression of the Wright engineering report, the Elliott circular letter, and the appearance of the so-called Wright-Elliott report in Senate Document Number 89 on December 1, 1911.

---

87 House of Representatives Documents, Report Number 1207, 62 Congress, 2 Session, 9-11; 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 7, 273. "Mr. Davis. You discovered the alleged irregularities about these matters in the summer of 1909, and you remained in the service of the Government six months thereafter?

"Mr. Wright. Yes.

"Mr. Davis. And during that time, although an official of the Government having cognizance of the alleged irregularities, you did not attempt to tell about it or deem it your duty as an official to impart that knowledge to anybody?

"Mr. Wright. No, sir. I wasn't reporting a superior officer." Ibid., Number 7, 273.

88 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 1, 11, Number 31, 1453.

89 Welliver article in Washington Times, October 8, 1911, quoted in 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 18, 880, Number 18, 903.

Charges that the State of Florida loaned its name and credit to one of the biggest land swindles in history; that the Department of Agriculture has, by suppression of information about the Everglades, aided and abetted, and that 500,000 persons in all parts of the country have been victims--these and other exceedingly regrettable allegations are to be looked into just as soon as possible by the House Committee on Expenditures in the Department of Agriculture. 90

A meeting of the House Committee on Expenditures in the Department of Agriculture was called on February 3, 1912, to give Congressmen Frank Clark of Florida and E. R. Bathrick of Ohio an opportunity to appear before the group and make such statements as they desired regarding the Everglades of Florida and such requests as they cared "To present to this committee in regard to any action which this committee might take in reference thereto."<sup>91</sup>

Representative Bathrick declared that the purpose of the proposed investigation was "not to learn all about Florida" but to learn why information secured by the Department of Agriculture on the assumption of purveying facts to answer inquiries was withheld, "or whether it was really suppressed."<sup>92</sup> Tracing the general outline of the reasons

---

<sup>90</sup> Washington Times, December 8, 1911, quoted in 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 19, 953.

<sup>91</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 1, 3.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. Bathrick's presumption that the purpose of the investigation was not to learn all about Florida was putting the case somewhat mildly as the committee met in 43 hearings from February 3 to August 9, 1912, and collected 1759 pages of testimony and exhibits on the Everglades. There was hardly a subject about the peninsular state that was not mentioned.

for the origin of the federal surveys and their ensuing progress, Bathrick sought to encourage the committee to inquire into the complaint of whether the circular letters and abstracts issued by the agricultural department were unfair to those buying or selling Everglades lands, and the reasons why the full report had been held back.

On February 6, 1912, Representative Frank Clark appeared before the Moss Committee and gave his reasons for seeking an investigation of federal participation in the Everglades project.<sup>93</sup> Clark traced the detailed events of the federal engineers' examinations, the Wright excerpt, the Elliott circular, and speculative tendencies of the contemporary boom in South Florida. He requested the Moss committee to proceed with an investigation of the Everglades to find out why the Elliott circular letter was suppressed, at whose instance the suppression took place, and why the Wright Report had been delayed for three years.

Now, I do not hesitate to say, gentlemen, that a number of syndicates have gotten into this Everglades proposition for the sole purpose of exploiting

---

<sup>93</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 1, 8-9. Herman B. Walker, a purchaser of an Everglades tract from the company represented by T. E. Will, wrote to Will from his farm near Ft. Lauderdale that Clark and Bathrick were "crazy in their stand" on the Everglades being worthless, but that the two congressmen might well be correct on the political and speculative issues involved. Walker to Will, January 18, 1912, Will Collection.



it, injuring the fair name of the State of Florida, and swindling innumerable people all over this country. . . . If The Department of Agriculture has made itself subservient to the will of a few land sharks who have been exploiting that property to their own benefit and to the detriment of those people and to the great injury of the State of Florida, I think the country ought to know about it.

I am not opposed--I do not want to be understood as opposing the drainage of the Everglades of Florida as a project of internal improvement. The engineers say it is feasible; that it can be done. They say that land is of very vast value. Of those things I know absolutely nothing, but I do object most seriously to a few land sharks getting large holdings in that property and making representations to the people of the United States and to foreign lands that are absolutely untrue, statements that I know are false, and I do object to a great department of this Government being put in the attitude of, if not participating, at least acquiescing in that fraud. 94

Clark added that if the United States Department of Agriculture had not acquiesced in the statements of the land promoters then the department should have an opportunity to defend itself against such charges. It could be established, however, that the department had given an excerpt of the Wright Report to a representative of a land concern in Colorado and to representatives of the State of Florida.

These land companies took that excerpt and they culled from it those things they thought might militate against their schemes. The favorable ones, disconnected from the others and unexplained and which put it in an altogether different light, they spread broadcast over the country in these lurid advertisements in the Sunday papers and the magazines. Now, I contend that the department right then should have come to the front and said,

"Here is this whole report; we want the public to see all of it, and not these disconnected and disjointed extracts which these people are using for their own purposes." 95

Clark's statement before the Moss Committee drew the fire of the agricultural department; its press release declared the Floridian's testimony was "prejudiced, one sided and untrue." <sup>96</sup> On February 8, Clark replied to the attack, saying that he knew, when he went before the Moss Committee, the assault upon him would be sharp.

I have no interest in any land company in the State of Florida or anywhere else. I have not a foot of Florida land for sale in any part of the State. The only interest that I have is in protecting the people of this country from being ensnared by the lurid, truthless, false statements of these land sharks. . . .

These men have brought discredit upon our State. Millions of dollars have gone into their coffers for land 8, 10, and 12 feet under water, lands that ought to have been sold by the quart instead of by the acre; and I wanted to know what connection the Department of Agriculture has with these land boomers and land sharks. 97

---

95 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 1, 12.

96 Washington Herald, February 8, 1912, quoted in speech by Frank Clark, Congressional Record, XLVIII (February 8, 1912), 1840. One commentator wrote Clark had shattered 40,000 dreams of paradise on the installment plan when he made it "plain to 40,000 people that all their savings had been thrown away." George T. Odell, "Paradise on the Installment Plan," loc. cit., 16.

97 Congressional Record, XLVIII (February 8, 1912), 1840-1847. Although Clark claimed he was not connected with or interested in any land company he admitted under questioning before the Moss Committee that he had sought to obtain brokerage fees for selling lands along the St. Johns River in Florida after he had sponsored and secured passage of a federal

George P. McCabe, Solicitor of the Department of Agriculture and its representative throughout the Everglades Hearings, followed Clark as a witness before the committee. McCabe presented a statement showing the work and attitude of that agency toward the South Florida project.<sup>98</sup> He said Clark had been afforded every opportunity to see every paper, letter, or report in the files of the department, and that Secretary Wilson had offered personally to conduct him through an investigation within the agency, but that Clark had failed to visit Wilson. The solicitor then proceeded to outline the entire history of the relations between his department and the State of Florida on the Everglades project from the correspondence initiated in 1904, by Charles G. Elliott, and closed by Secretary Wilson in 1910 with the decision not to print the Wright Report.<sup>99</sup>

The Moss Committee summoned a large number of witnesses to its hearings to determine if

. . . public funds had been expended in the examination and survey of the Everglades and

---

appropriation in a River and Harbors Act to improve the channel and consequent drainage of adjacent lands of that waterway. For example, Clark had written V. W. Helm of the Everglades Land Sales Company, one of the major companies he attacked in his speeches and testimony, relative to a 32,000 acre tract near Osceola, Florida. 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 18, 877, 883-884.

<sup>98</sup> 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 1, 14-46.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

[if] certain reports prepared by the engineers as a result of this expenditure of public funds had been refused publication; or, having been published, their circulation had been suppressed. 100

It will be recalled that Wright had been employed as chief drainage engineer by the Board of Commissioners of the Everglades Drainage District in February, 1910, presumably on the basis of the plan set forth in the excerpt of his Report sent to the Florida Trustees in 1909. Wright became the first witness to testify before the committee and made a good defense of his Report. 101

In rebutting Wright's testimony the agricultural department was fortunate in presenting Arthur E. Morgan, a special drainage engineer of the experiment stations. Morgan pointed out in no uncertain terms that Wright had been completely incorrect in the important factors of estimating rainfall, run-off, and evaporation; that he had

---

100 House of Representatives Documents, Report Number 1207, 62 Congress, 2 Session, 1. "The admission before [The] committee by the department that certain appointments in the Drainage Division had been irregularly made and that certain moneys had been unlawfully disbursed seemed to warrant an exhaustive inquiry into the organization, methods, and operation of this division of the Office of Experiment Stations. Charges that certain employees of the Department of Agriculture became, or sought to become, financially interested in drainage schemes which were under examination by the Division of Drainage also came to the notice of your Committee. Accordingly, witnesses were examined under oath, and this testimony has been printed for the information of the House." Ibid.

101 1912 Everglades Hearings, Numbers 3-8, 14, 32.

minimized the necessity of cross canals, laterals, and farm ditches; that he had planned to use the same system for drainage and irrigation, though relying on gravity for water flow; that he had made absurdly low estimates of costs of excavation of rock and soil; and finally that the canals planned by Wright would carry only fifty-five per cent of  
 102  
 the amount claimed.

Morgan stated that he had suggested to Elliott, when the Wright Report was being revised in the department, that it might be desirable not to publish any report at all with

---

102 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 9, 338-391, 10, 410-418, 11, 466-467. Morgan believed that "the Florida Everglades are possible of reclamation through a slow development of a system of agriculture adapted to that country." Ibid., Number 9, 391. Drainage and irrigation, Morgan testified in 1912, if ever worked out, would be accomplished by "supplying water by pumping or perhaps using the same pumps for drainage at some times and for irrigation at other times, in addition to the ditches." Ibid., Number 9, 376. Morgan told the committee an adequate engineering plan would cost \$100,000 and take several years to work out, and that reclamation of the Everglades in ten acre tracts would cost \$15 to \$30 an acre. Ibid., Number 9, 347, 365. He pointed out the hyacinth nuisance in the canals and cited experiences in Louisiana where continual maintenance of the canals was necessary due to their very low gradient. Ibid., Number 9, 367. Wright's Report was suppressed, Morgan stated, because of its inaccuracies. Ibid., Number 9, 391. The problem of subsidence and shrinkage had been evaded, Morgan felt, for similar lands in Minnesota had shrunk from six inches to four feet a year. "As a matter of history, the drainage works in the fens of England and Holland have had to be in many cases reconstructed, with the ditches all deepened and the entire work readjusted to make up for this matter of shrinkage in turf soils." Ibid., Number 9, 375.

such meager data.

He replied that the difficulty about that was the excerpts had all been made public and were being used in the advertising literature of the land companies, and under those conditions it was the duty of this office to present the data they had, with the proper safeguards, so that it could not be used improperly. 103

Other witnesses who testified before the committee included C. G. Elliott, Secretary Wilson, Senator Fletcher, and Congressman Clark. Early in March, 1912, Governor Albert W. Gilchrist made the trip to Washington and "lost no time in making known his desire to be heard by the committee . . . in the matter of the charges made against the proposition to reclaim the Everglades of his State."<sup>104</sup> Gilchrist, in an interview, made it known that he was at a loss to understand or account for the attacks made upon the Everglades by Representative Clark, since, from what he had been told, Clark had never even seen the area. The Florida governor associated Clark's name with that of Henry M. Flagler, and renewed the

---

103 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 9, 365. ". . . a report which had been made by the department away back in 1891 on the results of some sugar experiments carried on in Florida . . . had been and was being used to advertise Glade lands by these commercial companies despite the protests of the department officers who had been responsible for that report in 1891." McCabe statement, ibid., Number 1, 28. Morgan wrote to Secretary Wilson on January 29, 1912, "I am well aware of the strong influence that has been brought to bear against Mr. Elliott by Florida real-estate promoters to prevent him from making public the facts of the situation." Ibid., Number 10, 410.

104 Washington Post, March 5, 1912, as quoted in Congressional Record, XLVIII (March 5, 1912), 2834.

allegation of a political affinity between the two men.

The newspaper account of Gilchrist's interview led Clark to answer the governor in the House. Clark repeated the charges he had made several times previously in regard to the exploitation of the peninsular state by land sharks. Referring to the association of his name with Flagler's, Clark denied that the former Standard Oil Company executive exerted any influence over him.

Not that I disclaim association and acquaintance with Mr. Flagler. I am not a groundling. . . . But this little pin-headed governor [laughter] thought it would hurt me politically in my district to associate me with Mr. Flagler. 106

Governor Gilchrist sent William H. Ellis, counsel for the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund, to the Moss Committee hearings after the third session. Ellis was to check on the adverse criticisms with which newspapers were said to lead the public to believe emanated from the various witnesses.  
107

---

105 Washington Post, March 5, 1912, as quoted in Congressional Record, XLVIII (March 5, 1912), 2834.

106 Ibid., 2835. Gilchrist had asked T. E. Will to prove that Clark was opposed to Everglades drainage specifically, as "It is vital to this proposition to show the true animus of Clark." 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 16, 749. Later in the same hearing Will was asked if it were not true that vegetables froze in the truck gardens at Ft. Lauderdale in February, 1912. Gilchrist objected and said: "If this attacking of the Everglades system down there has anything to do with the \$11,000 spent by this Agricultural Department, I would like the committee to tell me." Ibid., Number 16, 767.

107 Ibid., Number 4, 129. On March 13, 1912, a member of the Moss Committee drew the statement from Ellis that he was counsel for R. J. Bolles in several cases then pending in Missouri, and that "When Mr. R. J. Bolles offered me some of his business, legal business, I was then the retained

The majority report of the Committee on Expenditures in the Department of Agriculture on the Florida Everglades Drainage Project found that

The vacillating course of the department in its treatment of this important project was, in the opinion of your Committee, in part due to a difference of opinion among Members of Congress and the State authorities of Florida; irreconcilable differences in the opinions and conclusions among the engineers in the Division of Drainage was another contributing cause. The evidence before your committee warrants the conclusion that the entire treatment of the project was most unfortunate and subjected the Department of Agriculture to much suspicion and criticism. 108

The conclusions reached by the Moss Committee were phrased in gentler terms than those found in a magazine article on Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson's record in the Everglades case. The author of the article, after considering the facts, decided that Wilson had transmitted to the Florida Board of Drainage Commissioners

. . . an incomplete, partial and hasty report by an engineer who was considered incompetent by his superiors, and whose investigations had been carried on in close communication with the local politicians who were furthering the work of the

---

counsel of the trustees of the internal fund of the State of Florida. Before I accepted that employment I had a conference with the trustees of the internal improvement fund of the State of Florida and asked if they saw any reason why I should not represent him. They said, 'Why none in the world;' and it was with their full knowledge and consent that I took his employment, accepted his legal work." Ibid., Number 20, 1020.

108 House of Representatives Documents, Report Number 1207, 62 Congress, 2 Session, 3.



land interests. He allowed this incomplete document to be published in a form which was immediately used by promoting interests to further their schemes. Although he was soon informed by more competent men that the document was unreliable and misleading, he issued no retraction, but permitted it to continue in circulation. When a statement calling attention to the discouraging features of the Everglades speculation was prepared in the department, Secretary Wilson ordered it suppressed. He then discharged as scapegoats, on a technical charge, subordinates who had been under attack by the land boomers because of their unwillingness to join in the exploitation of the public. 109

---

109 H. Parker Willis, "Secretary Wilson's Record," Collier's XLIX (March 23, 1912), 16. Willis' inferences to "close communication" between the federal investigator and local politicians was borne out in part by Wright's testimony of the personal meetings he had had with Broward in Tallahassee and Ft. Lauderdale. 1912 Everglades Hearings, Number 3, 74-75, 77. Broward had also furnished J. O. Wright and his wife a small cruiser with a crew of two to "inspect" the Florida east coast during a fortnight's excursion. Ibid., Number 3, 86-87.