

## CHAPTER I

### 'GLADES LIFE IN THE EARLY DAYS

Scattered references in the writings of travelers, census enumerators, sportsmen, and nature lovers may be found regarding settlers on the borders of the Everglades and the shores of Lake Okeechobee, but there was no real settlement in the 'Glades until the second decade of the twentieth century. Even after that date there are few extant records of the common, every-day happenings of the settlers, because the floods and storms of the 1920's destroyed such as had existed.

W. S. Blatchley and a companion made a leisurely cruise in the early months of 1913 down the Kissimmee waterways from Lake Tohopekaliga to Lake Okeechobee and left one of the few intimate views of the almost forgotten fresh water fishing industry which was then in its heyday. Before reaching the big lake the two vacationists took their craft into Istokpoga Creek and thence into the lake of the same name, where they made the acquaintance of one of the five Brentley brothers, fishermen and fish brokers, who had camps on both Istokpoga<sup>1</sup> and Okeechobee.

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<sup>1</sup> W. S. Blatchley, In Days Agone, 213-215. Blatchley snared an alligator which was killed and the tail was cut into steaks for the bill of fare. "The steak was white, very good but without much taste. We could have called it catfish and not one out of twenty would have known the difference." Ibid., 213.

On entering Okeechobee's shallow waters the naturalists bore to the left along the northern and northeastern shore where they observed a number of houseboats at anchor and fishermen's shacks along the shore off and on for fifteen miles. The crude shelters were built of a framework of poles which was thatched with palmetto leaves.<sup>2</sup>

In early March the two voyagers reached Taylor's Creek which they ascended to Utopia, a settlement consisting of one wooden building. Blatchley commented on the prevalence of the water hyacinth found in the estuary, a pest that had floated down the Kissimmee River and since 1903 had covered the sheltered parts of the lake. From Taylor's Creek the two men secured a tow to the Brentley brothers' fish camp at Pelican Bay on the eastern shore of the lake. The main house, a rough board shack, contained a large sleeping room and a smaller room for messing and stores. At the time of Blatchley's

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<sup>2</sup> W. S. Blatchley, In Days Agone, 229-233. Fearing the effects of a freshening wind the voyagers secured their skiff to a houseboat owned by a Louisiana Creole fisherman-trapper who told Blatchley he had over a hundred otter traps; and his wife chimed in with her feat of bagging forty-two Florida bobcats in one season. The couple had a fish pound with a number of catfish awaiting the fish boat's arrival for which they were paid three cents per pound. When asked what the Creoles did during the September, 1910, storm, the man replied: "My Gawd, mister, them was serious times; me and the old woman clung to a sapling for thirty-two hours, and I prayed for the first time in fawty years." Ibid., 229.

visit sixteen men were employed, eight to run the seines and dress the fish, and the others to run trotlines.<sup>3</sup>

The Brentleys operated several fishing boats and also bought fish from independents around the lake, selling the dressed fish at Ft. Myers and Ft. Lauderdale to wholesale shippers for five cents a pound. These brothers handled a yearly catch worth \$25,000 on which, they told Blatchley,<sup>4</sup> they cleared a net of \$5,000.

The men who work for the Brentleys are a rough lot--derelicts on the sea of life--some of them doubtless refugees; others soldiers of fortune filled with wanderlust. One of them has fought in several revolutions in Central America, another has been a beachcomber along the shores of Alaska. This was in their younger days, when the God of whim led them where he listed. Now that they are middleaged they are content to spend their days catching catfish in the dark waters of Okeechobee.<sup>5</sup>

The travelers accepted a Brentley invitation to go to Ft. Myers by launch, towing their skiff. Leaving the camp on March 8 with 5,920 pounds of dressed fish in the hold of the power boat, they reached the city of palms the following day.

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<sup>3</sup> W. S. Blatchley, In Days Agone, 236-237.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 243-244. A typical operation required four men with a seine 20 feet wide and 450 yards long. One end of the seine was anchored on the shore and the remainder payed straight out into the lake by a launch which then made a wide circle back to the starting point. In September, 1912, twenty-one hauls produced 35,400 pounds of dressed catfish. The Brentleys were taking 100,000 pounds of fish a week in March, 1913.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 242.

Isham Randolph had observed the Okeechobee fishing industry while making his studies for the engineering report on the Everglades and noted that the gross catch ran into six and possibly seven figures annually.<sup>6</sup>

The first permanent settlement in the upper Everglades, aside from squatters and the homesteaders on the lake shore and the lake islands, was that planned by Thomas Elmer Will, located at Okeelanta, at the intersection of the North New River and Bolles Canals five miles south of Lake Okeechobee, on October 24, 1913.<sup>7</sup> On that date Lawrence Will, son of T. E. Will, Samuel R. Copper and three other men planted the first colony in the Everglades. The original Okeelanta had been the product of a firm of real estate promoters who had

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<sup>6</sup> Isham Randolph, "Reclaiming the Everglades of Florida," loc cit., 53. See also Everglades News (Ft. Lauderdale), January 30, 1917 quoting Daily Tropical Sun (Ft. Lauderdale), July 22, 1916; Gertrude M. Winne, "Early Days on Lake Okeechobee," Everglades News (Canal Point), March 7, 1930.

<sup>7</sup> T. E. Will, "Confessions of a Conservationist," unpublished manuscript in Will Collection, probably written in 1927. See also John Newhouse, "Memories of Early Days in the Glades," I, 9, (Through the kindness of Mr. Newhouse the writer was able to use his unpublished Memories); and T. E. Will, "Light on a Dark Subject," Ft. Lauderdale Daily News, April 1, 1931. In 1911, while a salesman for the Everglades Land and Sales Company, Will had sent a group of settlers to Zona, now Davie, a pioneer settlement several miles west of Ft. Lauderdale on the edge of the Everglades. "Some business men of Miami who were interested in the sale of Everglade lands had established an experiment station at a little settlement called Davie. . . ." D. G. Fairchild, The World Was My Garden, 388.

offered a lot in a townsite to each purchaser of one of their ten acre tracts. The townsite was surveyed and staked off in 1913 with streets, public parks, residence, business, shipping, and marketing districts included in the proposed zoning.

Nicely painted stakes with black numbers dotted the townsite for a couple of years afterward, but fires, decay, and squatters raised havoc with the survey, and soon most of the stakes disappeared. <sup>8</sup>

Other settlers followed the first five pioneers, and in 1914 a small settlement existed at the canal crossing; most of the inhabitants were bachelors, but there were some families, and one couple brought a babe in arms. One of the pioneers who joined the Okeelanta group in 1914, John Newhouse (Jon Van Nyhuis), an emigrant from the Netherlands, came to the Everglades by way of South Dakota. <sup>9</sup>

Newhouse remembered that there were two squatters' shanties at the lake entrance to the North New River Canal and that here and there along the south lake shore the buildings of pioneers could be seen. At the little settlement and post-office of Ritta there was a store and hotel. The latter had been built by the Bolles interests to lodge their prospective purchasers when brought up the canal from Ft. Lauderdale to

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<sup>8</sup> John Newhouse, "Memories of Early Days in the Glades," I, 11. Hereinafter cited as "Memories." "There was a development on the Miami Canal, 12 to 15 miles from Miami, called Hope City, which was soon nicknamed 'Hopeless City' on account of its failure." Ibid., 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., I, 3-7. T. E. Will joined the Okeelanta community in December, 1914. Memorandum in Will Collection.

see the Everglades. On Ritta Island the Forbes Hotel provided the only other lodging place in the area.<sup>10</sup>

The summer and fall of 1913 had been very dry and with the long canals opened to the ocean, Okeechobee fell to a level of 17.2 feet above sea level. The glades were dry from six to eight miles along each side of the canals. Near the lake the water was three feet below the soil, which resulted in excellent conditions for cropping.<sup>11</sup> Many farmers moved into the Everglades and a Japanese colony was established at Sand Point, now Clewiston, on the south shore of the lake.<sup>12</sup> Congressman Frank Clark had earlier urged Governor Trammell to call an extraordinary session of the legislature to prohibit landholding in Florida by members of any Oriental ethnic group.<sup>13</sup>

According to Newhouse the real estate propagandists said:

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10 John Newhouse, "Memories," 3. Torrey, Kremer, and Ritta Islands were claimed by homesteaders. "There was a dispute of several years standing whether these islands belonged to the United States . . . or to the State of Florida. About 1916 the homesteaders got their deeds from the U. S. government." *Ibid.*, 7.

11 E.D.D. "Minutes," I, 232-233.

12 G. M. Winne, "Early Days on Lake Okeechobee," *loc. cit.* Frederick L. Williamson, pioneer resident of Clewiston and former vice-president of Southern Sugar Company, told the author that a Japanese couple who were members of this early group ran a hotel in Clewiston in 1925, after having been engaged in truck and poultry farming.

13 *New York Times*, October 15, 1913. Clark was reported to have said that with the Negro problem demanding solution, the citizens of Florida were in no frame of mind to be saddled with another race question.

Take a tent, a bag of beans, and a hoe; clear a few rows in the sawgrass, plant the seeds and you will have an income. . . . That may have provided an income for the land offices, but the settlers found out differently. 14

The difficulties which beset these pioneers were common to any frontier settlement of the nineteenth century with the differences caused by the overflowed lands, but this was the modern year of 1914. All supplies had to be floated sixty miles in small boats and barges from the lower east coast. There was no skilled labor available. Pests included mosquitoes, snakes, and 'gators. Newhouse recalled that he killed at least one snake--moccasin, king, chicken, copper-head, grass, or garter--a day for several weeks. "They were not vicious, when not annoyed and generally would crawl a couple of feet out of the path . . . curiously watching that new creature: man."<sup>15</sup>

The pioneers had no machinery; consequently all clearing of the land was accomplished by hand. The saw grass was cut with a scythe and burned when dry. The roots of the

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14 John Newhouse, "Memories," I, 8.

15 Ibid., I, 14-15. "One settler who owned a tract of land one mile from the canal, secured his lumber, in the early winter of 1915, cut a trail through the sawgrass and weeds, carried every stick of his lumber on his back from the canal bank to his tract, and then built the house himself; and lived in it as a bachelor for the next ten years." Ibid., I, 9-10. Early in 1915 one of the settlers procured a horse but the soil was too soft and the horse mired down. Muck shoes were procured but their use rendered the horse very clumsy; however, the horse came to an untimely end upon falling into the canal one night. Ibid., II, 38.

grass were "belabored" with a hoe to cut the long tough runners, which were then pulled out with a potato hook, left for two weeks to dry, and finally piled and burned. These early planters figured it took one man two months hard labor<sup>16</sup> to clear one acre.

The object of the settlers was to raise truck crops through the winter months and capitalize on the high prices of the early season. The land sales promotion literature had emphasized the Everglades' location below the frost line; nonetheless, Newhouse and his colleagues had been on the muck less than three weeks when on November 26, 1914, a cold snap froze their water pump and even left a crust of ice on a pail of water inside the house.<sup>17</sup> The Okeelanta group experienced a frost about every two weeks, with the last one occurring on April 5, 1915. The untutored growers covered

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<sup>16</sup> John Newhouse, "Memories," I, 15-16. The Everglades land is "free from trees and stumps and almost free from bushes, the item of clearing being of no consideration whatever, simply requiring mowing down the grass and burning it, when the soil is ready to be tilled as soon as the excess water is run off by the drainage canals." Senate Documents, Number 89, 62 Congress, 1 Session, 187. For an excellent article on the trials and tribulations of a successful agriculturist on the redlands in the Cutler area south of Miami about this same time see C. R. Ross, "Homesteading in Florida," Country Life, XVII (February, 1910), 468-474.

<sup>17</sup> John Newhouse, "Memories," I, 17. "A few settlers at the cross canal (Bolles) planted small areas to beans, cabbage, etc., but the freezes of 1914-15 killed most of the crops. . . ." Baldwin, Hawker, and Miller, 1915 Soil Survey, 15.



their plants with muck when the wind blew from the northwest, and even hung lanterns on rakes poked into the muck. "The repeated covering and uncovering did about as much damage as the frost."<sup>18</sup> Several of the farmers burned trash for such protection as a smudge could provide, but on the still nights the smoke rose and the tender plants froze to within a few feet of the fire.

The pioneers found that for a time the plants grew wonderfully on the raw sawgrass muck, but that for unexplained reasons, the plants then wilted and died. The settlers called it the "reclaiming disease."<sup>19</sup> This calamity is now known to be caused by the lack of minor elements in the organic soil. The Irish potato plots did well, in all probability because of the copper bluestone used in various insect sprays; and, curiously enough, after the tubers had been grown for several seasons it was discovered that beans, lettuce, cabbage, corn, and other crops would prosper on these old beds. In the spring of 1915 the settlers pooled their resources in order to purchase a carload of Rose number four potatoes at a bargain price, rather than the tried and true Red Bliss variety, with a sequel of "plenty of vines but precious few potatoes."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> John Newhouse, "Memories," I, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 27. Newhouse relates the unexpected results obtained by one of the pioneers who utilized elderberry stakes for pole beans. When the beans were picked the poles put out a luxurious growth, even those stuck in "upside down."

The dangers of frosts in the winter months caused the Okeelanta group to set out potatoes for the fall and spring markets, and as prices for the hardy cabbage and lettuce were not too good the suggestion of celery was taken up as a community project. Seed at twenty-five dollars a pound was a problem which was overcome, but the plan failed when a blight killed the stalks. The need for an agricultural experiment station was keenly felt as the pioneers knew so little about this virgin soil or its cultivation. "The settlers would try out cures themselves and sometimes experiment in a haphazard way, but often the reason of cause and effect were lost sight of,"<sup>21</sup>

By and large little fertilizer of any sort was used on the muck soils before the discovery of the importance of the use of trace elements in the middle 1920's. P. D. Dyke of Okeelanta reported in 1917 that he had tried six types of fertilizer his first year on the land with no effect and that the second year he cut out all such soil aids with

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<sup>21</sup> John Newhouse, "Memories," IV, 154. As a result of a surprise party given one of the Okeelanta families in 1915, J. F. Waters remarked that such events should happen often. Newhouse wrote that the settlers made good company for each other off in the wilderness. The Okeelanta Growers Association grew out of the idea, prospering for ten years as a division of the Federal Farm Bureau Federation, and was one of the prime movers in the establishment of the Everglades Experiment Station near Belle Glade in 1923. Ibid., I, 28-29, IV, 154-155.

the result of "better crops of everything."<sup>22</sup> James E.

Beardsley, whose family moved to the lake shore near Clewiston in 1914, stated in 1942 that no fertilizers were used around the lake before the early thirties.<sup>23</sup>

W. C. C. Branning, Sr., Palm Beach County census enumerator, gave a glowing report in July, 1916, of a small acreage of corn planted on the lake-side end of the Miami Canal on April 16 which was twelve feet high on July 19. The plot produced enough to make seventy bushels per acre. He wrote that even without fertilizer vegetables on the lakeshore soils yielded four fold over ordinary lands.<sup>24</sup>

The need for the addition of fertilizer to the muck soils of the Everglades was pointed out by an observer who wrote that the crops grown there showed clear evidence of potash hunger and the lack of phosphoric acid.

When these needs were suggested to the real estate men they were at first indignantly denied, and when the matter was further pressed and evidence offered, three different men came back with the same argument, namely: that it was undoubtedly true, but that it would never do to

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<sup>22</sup> Everglades News (Ft. Lauderdale), January 30, 1917, reprint of article from Ft. Lauderdale Sentinel, October 6, 1916.

<sup>23</sup> Hearings Before the Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, House of Representatives, 77 Congress, 2 Session. Hereinafter cited as 1942 Migration Hearings.

<sup>24</sup> Everglades News (Ft. Lauderdale), January 30, 1917, reprint of article from Daily Tropical Sun (Lake Worth, Florida), July 22, 1916.

acknowledge that this soil lacked for anything. In other words, they considered that it would be treason to their business to begin the use of fertilizers, as one of the great claims of the place had been the richness of the soil. 25

David G. Fairchild, writing in 1938 from notes he had made in 1912 on the Davie Experiment Farm, said that "almost everybody except expert soil chemists had an exaggerated idea of the fertility of the Everglades soils."<sup>26</sup>

Attempts to eliminate the manual labor necessary to prepare the Everglades soils for agriculture were made in a number of instances with the use of walking, crawling, and rolling types of tractors. T. R. Copper tried a walking tractor at Okeelanta in the winter of 1913-1914 and another in the fall of the latter year but both were returned to the factory for further modification.<sup>27</sup> A caterpillar tractor fitted with a revolving shaft and cutting knives which pulverized the ground to a depth of eight inches was shipped to Okeelanta from Davie in 1914, and all the pioneers were able

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25 H. F. Bulton, "Some Land Booms in Southern Florida," Rural New Yorker, December 18, 1920 quoted in Roland M. Harper, "Natural Resources of South Florida," Eighteenth Annual Report of the Florida State Geological Survey, 61.

26 D. G. Fairchild, The World Was My Garden, 387.

27 John Newhouse, "Memories," I, 25. Newhouse wrote that a tractor used at Gladescrest, on the intersection of the Hillsboro and Bolles Canals, was too busy to be brought to Okeelanta. Gladescrest, about eight miles from Lake Okeechobee, had a population of 200 in 1914 but the settlement disappeared within a few years. Ibid., 2.

to get several acres prepared for cultivation. The conventional four wheeled tractors were not suitable for the soft muck soil. T. E. Will persuaded S. W. Bollinger, a Pittsburgh manufacturer and Everglades land owner, to construct a five ton caterpillar tractor equipped with a revolving cylinder armed with long teeth to comminute the soil.<sup>28</sup>

The machine was too heavy for the soft earth although it did succeed in breaking up a considerable amount of raw saw grass land.

Under the auspices of the United States Department of Agriculture a soil survey was made in the winter of 1915 of a strip two and a half miles wide on each side of the North New River Canal from Ft. Lauderdale to Lake Okeechobee. This reconnoissance, conducted by Mark Baldwin, H. W. Hawker, and Carl Miller, was realistic and not too complimentary to the area examined. The report noted the amount of work necessary to prepare the muck in order to make it arable, the inadequate facilities for drainage and irrigation, the non-utilization of other large muck and peat regions of the world, the high prices of Everglades lands based on unknown production abilities, and the dangers of frosts to winter vegetable crops. The report closed: "It is such land as this, untried for agriculture and a large proportion of it under

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<sup>28</sup> Tropical Sun (Lake Worth), May 18, 1916; John Newhouse, "Memories," I, 43.

water, that . . . is being sold for \$20 to \$65 an acre." Needless to say the report of the soil survey was quite unpopular and was soon pushed into oblivion. John Newhouse wrote that he was never able to secure a copy, and Lawrence Will of Belle Glade informed the author that all available copies were destroyed in a public fire in Ft. Lauderdale soon after it appeared.

R. E. Rose viewed the soil survey as a part of the campaign of adverse criticism of the Everglades. The state chemist pointed to several chemical tests made from duplicate samples of the South Florida organic soils in which the analyses were concordant but the conclusions drawn were diametrically opposed. Theory and practice did not agree, either.

The non-productiveness of the soil was alleged by the Bureau of Soils (from chemical analyses and classification), while the productiveness of the soil was maintained by the State authorities, (from physical demonstration and by the crops growing on the land at the time of the survey.) 31

Rose directed the attention of his readers to the fact that this was not the first instance that federal soil experts

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29 Baldwin, Hawker, and Miller, 1915 Soil Survey, 40.

30 "It is said--according to rumors--that the soil outside the custard apple and elderberry belts was brown, fibrous peat, which would require 5,000 years to become of value to agriculture. It probably would if left inundated and uncultivated." John Newhouse, "Memories," II, 37.

31 R. E. Rose, "The Swamp and Overflowed Lands of Florida," loc. cit., 134.

had made a wrong guess, and pointed to the condemnation of the soils of the Imperial Valley of California. This land, pronounced worthless in 1902 by the Bureau of Soils in Circular Number Nine, was noted in 1916 as one of the most productive regions of the United States. The climate and soil of the Everglades was believed to be favorable to the introduction of sugar cane on a commercial basis. Newhouse wrote that

The luxurious growth of sugar cane, and the little care and cultivation it required, tempted the Upper Glades residents to plant some of it, even if they did not have a market for it. 32

In 1916, pioneers on Kreamer Island, at Canal Point, and South Bay had thirty acres in sugar cane, and in the war years of 1917, 1918, and 1919 there were 109 cane growers with 433 acres planted in cane. <sup>33</sup> In 1919 one of the Okeelanta settlers planted an acre of cane and talked about nothing but his cane field and the possibilities of making good profits in cane cultivation. This grower got other

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32 John Newhouse, "Memories," III, 117. The Palm Beach County census taker gave credence to the "sugar cane legend" with a narrative of a cane patch planted in 1911 which had produced five crops from the same ratoon. The sixth crop, then maturing, measured favorably with ordinary cane on the best farm lands at two months later in the growing season. Daily Tropical Sun (Ft. Lauderdale), July 22, 1916 as reprinted in Everglades News (Ft. Lauderdale), January 30, 1917.

33 F. D. Stevens, "History of Florida Sugar Operations," 16. Manuscript copy in the possession of F. D. Stevens, Belle Glade, Florida.

members of the community so interested that they bought his whole crop for seed at a cent a foot. John Newhouse must have chuckled when he wrote that this enterprising farmer cleared \$800 on the deal and shortly thereafter left for an unknown destination.<sup>34</sup> Okeelanta had several acres of cane, but no market for it. Crude cane mills were built and the syrup boiled down for home consumption. Some of the cane was sold to the Pennsylvania Sugar Company of Miami for seed, but many of the settlers had to grub the cane roots from their fields.<sup>35</sup>

The mild climate and the heavy growth of grass in the Everglades has intrigued stock fanciers from the earliest days of the drainage project. The soil surveyors of 1915 recorded that it appeared to be the opinion of many of the people interested in the development of this section that the most favorable possibility for its utility would be found in the raising and grazing of live stock.<sup>36</sup> The first stock introduced to Okeelanta was a fine Jersey heifer ferried up the canal in the spring of 1917. The cow was grazed on the native grasses, but gradually weakened and died. Newhouse remembered several similar cases, and it was not until the middle twenties that the State Veterinarians

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34 John Newhouse, "Memories," III, 117.

35 Ibid.

36 Baldwin, Hawker, and Miller, 1915 Soil Survey, 40.



determined that the cause of the unhealthfulness of the Everglades was due to "salt sickness." The veterinarians added copper, iron, and other trace elements to the cattle diet and the disease was checked.<sup>37</sup>

A number of stock raising ventures were begun during the war years of 1917 to 1919 in order to capitalize on the high prices. Bright Brothers had been successful in the cattle and hay ranching business on the margin of the Everglades west of Miami. Using the advantages of the twelve months growing season and the warm climate the Brights made thirteen to twenty tons of hay per acre and were able to pasture their cattle on green grass around the calendar.<sup>38</sup> Judge J. C. Gramling of Miami, J. A. Moore of the South Florida Farms Company, James Bright of Bright Brothers, and a number of other investors established a stock farm at Moore Haven in 1917.<sup>39</sup> In 1918, Bert Cheek and others began operations as the Okeelanta Stock Farms Company with pure bred Duroc Jersey hogs. The enterprise prospered until dissension among the stockholders, longworms in the hogs, and low finances caused a dissolution in 1922.<sup>40</sup>

Prior to the building of the railroads and highways,

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<sup>37</sup> John Newhouse, "Memories," V, 197-201.

<sup>38</sup> Miami Herald, November 29, 1916 as quoted in Everglades News (Ft. Lauderdale), January 30, 1917.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> John Newhouse, "Memories," III, 87-88.

boats were the only means of transportation or communication in the Everglades. Steamboat and motorboat lines had operated in the Kissimmee-Caloosahatchee waterway off and on since the opening of the Hicpochee Canal by the Disston interests.<sup>41</sup> With the opening of the North New River Canal in 1912 and the Palm Beach Canal in 1916, boats from Ft. Lauderdale and West Palm Beach were added to the existing boat lines through the Caloosahatchee to Ft. Myers. Mail boats, carrying freight and passengers as well as mail made regular trips around the lake shore to the east and west coasts.

John Newhouse recalled that the Everglades pioneers were highly elated in the fall of 1914 over the proposal to construct a railroad from West Palm Beach to the three mile Hicpochee Canal.<sup>42</sup> The Palm Beach Everglades Railroad agreed to pay the Trustees of the Improvement Fund \$500 for each mile of a hundred foot right of way along the Palm Beach Canal and to place the road in operation in two years.<sup>43</sup> In

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<sup>41</sup> Floating down the torturous Kissimmee, W. S. Blatchley came to a division into several channels and was "at a loss which one to take when the steamer 'Osceola' . . . came along. By aid of posts set there for the purpose it snubbed itself around the sharp bend." W. S. Blatchley, In Days Agone, 211.

<sup>42</sup> John Newhouse, "Memories," I, 21. "And," said Mr. Butterworth, one of the promoters of Gladescrest, "when that happens we will raise the price of land to ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS." Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> I.I.B. Minutes, XI, 69-78; Florida Times-Union, April 10, 1915.

June of 1915, after a long delay, a great celebration was held in West Palm Beach to drive the "golden spike." Governor Park Trammell led the speechmakers. Newhouse wrote that the beginning was the end, for that night the spike, rails, and ties were pulled up and placed behind the depot, as "The Palm Beach and Everglades Railroad became history."<sup>44</sup>

The construction of a branch line of the Florida East Coast Railway was begun from Maytown, in 1911, south through the interior of the State, tapping the pine wood and cypress country, and reaching Okeechobee City on the big lake in 1915.<sup>45</sup> The Atlantic Coast Line Railroad extended its Haines City-Sebring branch to J. A. Moore's South Florida Farms development of Moore Haven on the lake shore at the Caloosahatchee Canal in 1918.<sup>46</sup> When J. J. O'Brien and A. C. Clewis began their development at Sand Point, renamed Clewiston, they built the Moore Haven and Clewiston railroad, later bought by the Atlantic Coast Line and extended to Lake Harbor at the Miami Canal.<sup>47</sup> Beginning in 1922 the Florida East Coast surveyed and planned to connect Miami and Okeechobee

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44 John Newhouse, "Memories," I, 24.

45 Florida East Coast Railway, A Brief History of the Florida East Coast Railway, 24; Isham Randolph, "Reclaiming the Everglades," loc. cit., 53. The new road was largely patronized at its terminus by the fishing industry. John Newhouse, "Memories," III, 91.

46 W. S. Blatchley, In Days Agone, 265; E.D.D. "Minutes," II, 95; John Newhouse, "Memories," III, 91.

47 John Newhouse, "Memories," IV, 148-150.

with a branch through the Everglades. The extension reached Canal Point in 1924, Belle Glade in 1926, and Lake Harbor in 1928.<sup>48</sup>

Highways and roads were at first merely raised ridges of muck that often burned up in dry weather and had to be traveled in low gear in wet weather. Travel was slow and uncertain, especially in the rainy season, and very dusty in dry weather. One traveler discovered that "If one rides over the roads he becomes so covered with the black dust of the dry muck that he looks like a negro."<sup>49</sup>

The agitation for roads was one of the vital issues of the Everglades pioneers in their attempts to improve their way of life. In 1916 a special road district was created in Palm Beach County to build roads from the east coast into the lake section. T. E. Will led the Okeelanta settlers in a movement which resulted in a special bond election; differences over the route, however, led to a survey along the

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48 John Newhouse, "Memories," IV, 156-157. Several parties, including the Florida East Coast Railway secured options for using the Landerdale or Miami Canal spoil banks for a railroad from the Magic City to the big lake, but all were allowed to lapse. I.I.B. Minutes, XII, 21, 31, XIV, 155, 159, 196-208, XXI, 41; Florida Times-Union, September 21, 1917.

49 W. S. Blatchley, In Days Agone, 266. Trips to the coast required three days, two for travel and one for business. Ferries across the canals took three men to handle the towing and it was often necessary to swim over when some careless, unknowing person tied the ferry up on the opposite side. In addition, travelers might find the ferry sunk and spend hours pumping the vessel out before using. John Newhouse, "Memories," III, 98-99.

lake shore rather than by way of the Bolles Canal. <sup>50</sup> The Trustees of the Improvement Fund encouraged roads in the Everglades by donating sections of land to be sold which was matched by monies raised locally through subscriptions and bonds of road districts. It was in this manner that the state highway from Miami to Ft. Myers, the Tamiami Trail, was constructed along a canal spoil bank in the early 1920's, as well as numerous other roads and highways in the Everglades. <sup>51</sup>

Located fifty-seven miles from Ft. Lauderdale, the residents of Okeelanta evidenced the news hunger common to all pioneers. Felix A. Forbes ran a regular boat to Lauderdale on Monday and Friday, returning on Tuesday and Saturday about five in the afternoon, though the boat was often delayed on account of motor trouble or navigation problems in times of low water. On these days the settlers, according to John Newhouse, would move toward the landing at Bolles and North New River Canals to meet the boat for supplies and mail amid

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<sup>50</sup> Clippings in Will Collection on roads agitation from Palm Beach Post, October 23, 1915; Miami Metropolis, November 30, 1915; Ft. Lauderdale Tropical Sun, January 27, 1916. R. J. Bolles sought better roads when he appeared before the Palm Beach County Commissioners stating that he paid \$100,000 a year in taxes in that county alone. Ft. Lauderdale Sentinel, January 15, 1915.

<sup>51</sup> I. I. B. Minutes, XI, 157, 177, XII, 20-21, 163-164, 196-198, XIV, 18, 91. John Newhouse, "Memories," II, 49. As late as 1921 travel across Florida was by launch from West Palm Beach to Moore Haven and by bus from Moore Haven to Ft. Myers. Charles Torrey Simpson, Out of Doors in Florida, 70-72.

rain, cold, or mosquitoes. The settlers would return on Monday and Friday mornings with mail and cash for their store orders.

J. F. Baker opened a store at Okeelanta in April of 1915 and J. R. Poland fitted out a grocery store boat which made regular trips around the south shore of the lake. Baker expanded his building to include several guest rooms for sightseers and landowners, later adding boat service to Ritta, on the lake near the Miami Canal entrance, and Gladescrest, on the Hillsboro Canal. For some time Baker ran the only store in the vicinity and settlers came from far and wide.

Settlers on the south lake shore on Kreamer and Torry islands, etc., belonged to the regular customers and to see them rowing in, and back

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52 John Newhouse, "Memories," I, 30-31. "Supplies were obtained for the first several years after my arrival on the lake shore in 1914 from Deerfield on the Hillsboro Canal or from Ft. Lauderdale. Boats carried mail from Ft. Lauderdale to the two post offices then established at Okeelanta and at Ritta, twice a week. Produce made the same trip down the canal from farmers who owned docks to the railroad at Ft. Lauderdale, frequently a 24-hour journey. It was a common occurrence for farmers to harvest produce, put it on their dock, expecting arrival of a regular boat, which might have had motor trouble or run aground in the canal, so that the vegetables might have been harvested three or four days before they were actually on the boat and on the way to the railroad. Facilities for packing were nonexistent, each farmer putting up his own individual pack on his own place and generally with the labor from his own family or such white help as might be obtained from fishermen or neighbors." J. E. Beardsley, 1942 Migration Hearings, 12559.

53 John Newhouse, "Memories," I, 31-32; Gertrude M. Winne, "Early Days on Lake Okeechobee," loc. cit.

was nothing unusual, though most of them had motor boats. Many settlers would take off Sunday and bring their family along for the outing. 54

The Palm Beach County School Board built a one room school house at Okeelanta in 1916, and hired a school boat and school boat driver to transport children from the lake shore. In 1917 schools were also established on Torry and Kreamer Islands, and in 1919 a school was built at Ritta  
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through popular subscription.

Taking stock of Okeelanta at the end of its first year, John Newhouse remembered the establishment of the growers association, post office, school, twelve miles of muck roads, and several tractors. Setbacks from frost, disappointments with the new soil, plant diseases, and other pioneer hardships dulled the optimism of many of the settlers and they left as others came in to take their places. The hardier ones stuck it out and Okeelanta "tackled another season, this time varying their crops with hardier ones, as cabbage,  
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lettuce, etc., and with a slightly better result."

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54 John Newhouse, "Memories," I, 33.

55 Ibid., 40. T. E. Will was a member of the Okeelanta school board and served as supervisor by appointment. See Will Collection for letters and other memoranda on teacher appointments, hiring of school boat pilots, and so forth.

56 Ibid., 42. Many of the pioneers planted citrus, avacados, and other fruit trees, but no general shade trees. Five hundred red eucalyptus trees were planted and did well at first, but soon died. No large scale plantings were tried after that. Ibid., 34-35.

A dry season in 1916 witnessed the big lake's fall to unprecedented low levels. Howard Stowe, who had put up a store on Torry Island, became isolated and moved his business to Rabbit Island nearer the mainland where he enjoyed a good trade from the farmers who were homesteading the dry lake bottom. The homesteaders staked off their claims with crude signs, but in the rains of the following year the lake rose and the squatters were forced off and Stowe moved to the Hillsboro Canal, becoming the first merchant of the present Belle Glade.

"Money was scarce amongst the pioneers, and credit impossible to get." The real estate companies had sold the land on easy payments, but the payments had to be met. The small farmers would be induced to purchase more than they could afford, using the remainder of their cash for building materials, tools, seed, food; and with no cash income for

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57 G. M. Winne, "Early Days on Lake Okeechobee," loc. cit.; John Newhouse, "Memories," II, 60-63. Reporting on June 25, 1917 to the I. I. Trustees, Frederick C. Elliott, who had succeeded J. C. Wright as Chief Drainage Engineer, said with regard to the squatters: "I find that the condition with respect to State lands in the district is one of confusion among the residents as to just what the status is more than anything else; many parties have the idea that they are entitled to use State land in whatever manner they choose without cost to themselves just as long as they can hold it. The idea is also prevalent that some sort of valid claim to the land can be established by occupying, clearing or improving the same." I.I.B. Minutes, XII, 64.

58 John Newhouse, "Memories," II, 67.



the first two or three years plus high freight rates a number of the pioneers found their land sales contracts cancelled after lapsing thirty days on a payment. The Okeelanta group sought to take advantage of the Federal Farm Loan Act of 1916 with a local organization and applied to the regional office at Columbia, South Carolina, but without success.<sup>59</sup>

Richard J. Bolles, the guiding hand of the Okeechobee Fruit Lands Company and the Everglades' earliest private developer, passed to his reward in 1917. Whatever else may be written of Bolles it can be said that he was a man of vision who was unafraid of taking a chance, and had he lived twenty years, would have seen his faith bear dividends along the Okeechobee shore. In the summer of 1917, the Bolles Company laid out the community of South Bay at the lake entrance of the Lauderdale Canal. Moore Haven, Okeelanta, Fruitcrest, and Gladescrest had preceded this development, but they were soon followed by Pahokee at Bacom's Point, and Canal Point further north at the lake entrance of the Palm Beach Canal. Connersville on the Palm Beach Canal likewise began in 1917. Belle Glade and Chosen were established on the Hillsboro Canal, near the lake, in 1919; they were followed by Geerworth, Gladeview, and Community Farms nearer West Palm Beach on the same canal when the cross-state

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<sup>59</sup> John Newhouse, "Memories," II, 67.

highway became passable in 1921. The development of Clewiston was also begun in 1921. The establishment of these townsites, with some two thousand inhabitants, in less than ten years<sup>60</sup> was a tribute to the faith in the Everglades project.

The growth of Moore Haven, already touched upon, was typical of the lakeshore villages. Situated on the navigable Caloosahatchee Canal, near the western edge of the Everglades, the settlement was promoted by a real estate company. By 1916 the community boasted a small hotel and a woman mayor,<sup>61</sup> Mrs. Marian O'Brien. A winter visitor described it as a town of shacks,<sup>62</sup> "but thriving as men with a hoe and the grub get to work." W. S. Blatchley believed the village could muster fifteen hundred residents when he visited it in 1918; he found his friend, who lived on the outskirts in a tent with a board floor, "raising cabbages on land which a few years ago was the home of the turtle and the catfish."<sup>63</sup> Blatchley remarked on Moore Haven's lone cypress which had been at the edge of the lakeshore in 1913, but which was now eight miles inland. By 1920 Moore Haven had become an established shipping point and trading center where good service

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60 John Newhouse, "Memories," II, 64.

61 *Ibid.*, III, 91.

62 Nevin Winter, Florida, The Land of Enchantment, 295; C.T. Simpson, Out of Doors in Florida, 169.

63 W. S. Blatchley, In Days Agone, 262. "Zimmerman cannot dispose of his fine crop of cabbage and is trying to buy barrels and make them into kraut." *Ibid.*, 265.

from the railroad and equitable prices of the merchants, according to John Newhouse, attracted a large share of the upper Everglades and lake shore trade.<sup>64</sup>

During these years there was some development east of the lake. In April, 1917, W. J. Conners, a Buffalo, New York, politician, visited the Everglades and purchased a section of land on the Palm Beach Canal about four miles from Lake Okeechobee. He proposed to cultivate the land and erect warehouses and docks, construct roads, and excavate small drainage canals. Conners was quoted as saying Florida folk did not know enough about good land and needed examples of how to make money in agriculture and allied pursuits.<sup>65</sup> Conners' first operations were in the direction of truck crops, but as these did not pan out so well he resorted to dairying. Registered Holstein and Friesian cows were imported and milk was retailed on the east coast at thirty-five cents a quart; lacking adequate refrigeration facilities this project did not prosper, and Conners shifted his interests to highway construction.<sup>66</sup>

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64 John Newhouse, "Memories," III, 92-93.

65 L. G. Biggers, Managing Secretary of the West Palm Beach Board of Trade, to T. E. Will, April 7, 1917, in Will Collection.

66 John Newhouse, "Memories," III, 85. Another experiment on 'Glades soil, begun in 1917 by the Adams and Moore purchase of 10,000 acres at Gladescrest to raise silk fiber plants, failed in 1921 on account of lack of proper water control and transportation troubles. Several of the silk farm residents remained for a number of years, engaged in raising livestock and truck crops. As late as 1940 the old hotel and store buildings remained as sentinels of the former town. Ibid., VII, 77-78.

Recognition of the upper 'Glades pioneers was made in 1918 when Palm Beach County commissioner districts were re-aligned. Previously the five districts had been east-west divisions from north to south. Under the 1918 distribution the east coast retained four districts and all the rest of the county was given to the Everglades portion. As the main work of the commissioner was to supervise roads, considerable pressure had been brought to bear on the County Commission from the voters in the western end of the county. A paved road reached Loxahatchee Farms in 1918, ten miles from West Palm Beach, and a dirt road followed the canal bank to Twenty Mile Bend. A canal and roadbed stretched from the Palm Beach Canal to the Hillsboro Canal as well as a canal and road from Gladescrest to Okeelanta. A road also followed the canal from Belle Glade to Gladescrest. Ferries were used in place of bridges, the last ferry being placed in 1921. John Newhouse remembered that he made a trip from the east coast to South Bay via Okeelanta in a Ford but that "the trip was still cumbersome and required a whole day's time."<sup>67</sup>

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67 John Newhouse, "Memories," III, 100.